

From Education to Occupation: Equipping Students for a Thriving Future through Experiential Learning

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As education systems in Africa grapple with preparing students for the realities of a labor market marked by unique challenges, innovative teaching methods have a critical part to play. Every year around [10-12 million young people enter the workforce in Africa](#). However, they're met with a daunting reality – only three million formal jobs are available. According to the International Labour Office, this leaves [nearly 95% of the continent's youth](#) to find employment in the informal sector.

Many secondary school graduates leave education without the practical skills to secure employment or start a business. Our student-centered pedagogy, known as Skills Lab, has been pivotal in closing the gap. For over a decade, the approach has been a key component of the [Educate! Experience](#), an employment-focused course that has impacted over 200,000 youth in Uganda.

Secondary students like Maxwell have found that Skills Lab prepares them more effectively for the world of work. As a budding entrepreneur, he dreams of creating and selling quality bags. Through Skills Lab, he's learned how to set and achieve goals as the approach encourages learners to apply their knowledge to address community challenges." I've learned to be a job creator. I know how to make a business model and business plan," he says with determination.



“I've learned to be a job creator. I know how to make a business model and business plan. I can move on to the future and also earn some money during my school break.” - **Maxwell, Secondary Student**

What is the Skills Lab approach?

Skills Lab is not your typical classroom experience. It's a dynamic pedagogy that immerses students in real-life scenarios, fostering interactive activities, group collaboration, and creative problem-solving within a supportive learning environment. Here, soft skills like communication and critical thinking are seamlessly woven together with the hard skills of business planning, budgeting, saving, and market research.



With Skills Lab students play an active role in their own learning journey

How does Skills Lab prepare students for today's economy?

Skills Lab breaks down the learning process into three stages: Build, Practice, and Present.

Build

The educator sets the stage for the lesson, building on the students' existing knowledge to introduce new concepts. This approach promotes active engagement and provides a clear learning objective. For instance, in a lesson on generating business opportunities and creating new products, the teacher will ask for examples of businesses that youth use themselves.

Practice

Overall, the Skills Lab approach aims to reduce “teacher talk time” and increase “student talk time.” Working in groups, students take on practical tasks that require critical thinking as they answer difficult questions. Group work fosters the development of soft skills such as teamwork, communication and active listening.

Here, the different groups might be asked to consider how their product will solve a community need. They might discuss their production and sales goals, and what strategies they'll use to secure a competitive advantage and retain customers.

This stage promotes equal participation among all students, including girls and boys. In line with Educate!'s [gender-transformative approach](#), this creates an inclusive classroom environment which accommodates different learning styles and challenges gender norms.

Present

Students showcase the outcomes of group work, enhancing their confidence, public speaking and leadership abilities. Feedback from peers and educators facilitates reflection on their efforts as well as continuous learning.

Below, you can explore an example of a lesson plan following Skills Lab's three-stage experiential learning approach.

Skills Lab Lesson Example

Topic: LEADERSHIP

Duration: 70 minutes

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the concept of leadership and its importance.
- Identify and reflect on their unique leadership qualities.
- Discuss and share their leadership qualities with peers.
- Generate practical ideas for applying their leadership skills in their businesses or endeavors.

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard or screen for displaying leadership qualities,
- Writing materials for students.

Teacher Preparation:

- Prepare the list of leadership qualities.
- Ensure the classroom or meeting space is set up for group discussions and partner activities.



Build

Activity 1: Build (15 minutes)

- To introduce today's lesson, share a quote by Martin Luther King: "A genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus but rather a moulder of consensus." Ask 3-4 scholars to explain how this quote relates to being an Educate! Scholar.
- Explain that leadership is driven by a strong sense of purpose and the ability to inspire and unite others in pursuit of a common goal, even if it initially challenges prevailing beliefs or norms. Emphasize that leadership in social entrepreneurship will involve taking action to solve community problems.
- Ask as many scholars as possible to share their viewpoints on whether leaders are born or made? Allow debate then summarize with some local examples that leaders are MADE not BORN. We all have unique qualities that can make us into leaders!
- Emphasize that even if you are not the best at leading, you can work on improving your skills by applying different leadership qualities. Read out loud the following leadership qualities and tell learners to note them down: courageous, visionary, positive, proactive, cooperative, confident, well organized, public speaking, creative, trustworthy. Accountable, eye 4 details, connected, loyal, net working skills, humble, people person, convincing, & time keeper.



Practice

Activity 2: Practice (25 minutes)

- Divide the class into small groups. In the groups, ask scholars to identify each member's top 3 leadership qualities.
- Encourage scholars to discuss this with their group members and share examples of how they have already used these qualities to lead others. Scholars will support and encourage each other to see what they can do to strengthen their skills.
- The Mentor should walk around and supports the groups; ensuring individuals think of unique strengths and guide scholars



Present

Activity 3: Present (20 minutes)

- Randomly select at least 2 individuals (boy & girl) from each group to present their personal income generation and saving plans to the whole class.
- Appreciate those who have shared their plans and encourage the whole class to put their income generation and saving plans into practice.
- Conclude the class with this quote from Warren Buffet - "Do not save what is left after spending but spend what is left after saving."

Action Step:

- Task scholars to put their income generation and saving plans into practice.



What is the impact of Skills Lab?

Evaluations of Educate!'s model tell a hopeful story. According to a [randomized controlled trial](#) conducted in Uganda, graduates of the Educate! Experience [earn nearly DOUBLE the income of peers and are 64% more likely to start a business](#) by the end of secondary school.

Ronald Busulwa, headteacher at Maxwell's school, underscores the impact of hands-on teaching, not only on students but also on the wider community. He notes, "I've seen children apply their learning

to benefit their community. They have made very nice products created from resources that some people consider waste, contributing positively to the environment. It's truly impressive."



Ronald Busulwa, headteacher at Maxwell's school, receiving a sales pitch from his students

What is the future of skills-based learning across Africa?

Looking ahead, integrating approaches like Skills Lab into [national education systems](#) – along with initiatives that support [out-of-school youth](#) – presents an opportunity to amplify positive outcomes and improve youth prospects on a larger scale. Educate!'s long-term vision is that by partnering with governments and local communities, we can develop solutions that have a measurable impact on millions of young people across Africa.

By 2025, our goal is to grow our annual reach by 4x, supporting over 400,000 new youth. To this end, Educate!'s efforts with Skills Lab are already expanding across the region through collaboration with governments, education actors, policymakers and funders. For the last eight years, the organization has been [collaborating with Rwanda's Ministry of Education](#) to integrate skills-based learning into the country's education system. In Tanzania, Educate! has [partnered with the government](#) to co-design a new secondary subject, making learning more aligned to the labor market.

This shift towards student-centered learning and practical, hands-on experiences has the potential to equip young Africans with crucial skills for a promising future, empowering them to become catalysts for change. Skills-based learning will not only impact individual students, but also contribute to global economic growth. A workforce equipped with the right skills is more likely to innovate, start businesses, and drive towards a brighter future.