



Bridge International Academies

Response to:

“Schooling the Poor Profitably: the innovations and deprivations of Bridge International Academies in Uganda”

October 2016

Executive Summary

Bridge International Academies is the world's leading education innovation organisation focused on providing affordable, high-quality nursery and primary education for every child. To do so it partners with communities, donors, and governments across the developing world. We have been operating in Uganda since 2015, and now have 63 schools in all four regions of the country. We currently have over 12,000 pupils, employ 770 staff, and have invested over 10bn UGX (\$3.3m) in the Ugandan economy.

This response corrects the misinformation contained in the Education International (EI) report, *Schooling the Poor Profitably*, on the operations of Bridge International Academies in Uganda. It also provides a critique of the integrity and quality of the research methods used by the researchers. We hope this gives the general public a more informed position on Bridge's mission and on-going work in Uganda.

- Bridge operates according to Ugandan law. We have detailed records of our official interactions with all the pertinent government agencies necessary to operate a private school.
- Bridge salaries are competitive. Our teachers earn more than 70% of teachers in other similar schools and unlike most low-cost private schools are paid in a timely manner each month.
- Bridge staff have formal employment contracts along with all the statutory benefits that stem from them. These include: job security, social security contributions, paid maternity and paternity leave, and paid time off. Teachers also have additional benefits including daily meals, a full scholarship for a family member, and continued opportunities for professional development.
- Over 50% of our primary teachers are Grade III certified. These teachers have passed our own demanding numeracy and literacy proficiency tests. Teachers also undergo further specialised training before entering Bridge classrooms. We have frequent recruitment drives to enable us to hire more government trained teachers that meet the rigorous standards needed to lead a classroom.
- Our buildings are safe and conducive to learning. They have been approved by the relevant Local District Government Planning Committee and endorsed by a registered Ugandan architect. We have Occupation Permits approving the use of our structures as schools.
- The parents of over 12,000 Bridge pupils have determined for themselves that Bridge is affordable. The cost of sending one pupil to Bridge is only 5% of the household monthly income. This is based on our market research from 11,272 households countrywide which puts the average nominal income at 450,000 UGX (\$131) and our average fee at 21,185 UGX (\$6.2).
- The average Bridge parent lives on \$1.42 per day, below the international poverty line of \$1.90.
- The Bridge Academic model provides innovative solutions to the most pressing educational problems in Uganda: (1) tech-based monitoring prevents teacher absenteeism, (2) detailed teacher guides and training fill content and pedagogical knowledge gaps, (3) and the 4,500 books provided to each school and included in the termly fee make sure our pupils always have access to learning materials.
- The research methods and practices employed in the EI study are inadequate, as evidenced by the lack of comparative data from other schools, observational data from Bridge classrooms, as well as the incorrect use of citations and references throughout the document.
- The principal investigator of the report did not receive approval from the research ethics board at his university, or any local research ethic committees, violating the rights of participants and the integrity of the research for the sake of the interests of his funder.
- The principal investigator committed numerous other ethical violations including no evidence of verbal or signed consent, not informing research subjects of the conflict of interest at the crux of this study, and not revealing his identity.

Bridge, Families, and Countries:

An immediate solution to a personal and national crisis

Bridge International Academies is the world's leading education innovation organisation focused exclusively on ensuring that every child can attend a high-performing nursery and primary school. Bridge believes that all children possess amazing potential, but not all have the chance to reach it. The current status quo in basic education across much of the world results in a lack of opportunity for children that we do not find acceptable, and that we are committed to changing. Bridge is a partner to parents, communities, donors, and countries. We prove that it is possible to provide high-quality education even on a limited budget, and in doing so solve an urgent crisis for parents today. For many, public schools may not be available or may not yet be performing as needed. Bridge also works with donors and governments to create high-performing public schools for all. A great education is priceless but does not need to be prohibitively expensive for governments or parents to provide.

Our greatest reward is in knowing that in working with parents and governments, we can be part of the solution to ensuring that every child achieves his or her potential, and that poverty is lessened as economic opportunity increases for a better-educated generation of youth.

“Bridge has been a great blessing to our community,” says Mrs Gertrude Kizza from the Nsumbi area of Nansana, the grandmother of two Bridge children and the Local Chairman 1 (LC1) of the Nsumbi community. “Prior to Bridge opening in Nsumbi, our children either had to travel a long distance to get to school or pay high fees for the local private schools. As a result, many children did not go to school. Since Bridge opened in February of this year, I have seen great changes in my grandchildren, who are now leaders in English and confidence.”

“My child has greatly improved in a way that, when the child was in the former school she did not know English not even how to write well but today I appreciate Bridge services because now my child speaks good English and has good handwriting.” Bogere Faima, Bridge parent in Wanyange Lake in Jinja.

Lydia Nantume, a UPE teacher in Wakiso enrolled her two children at Bridge. “I want the very best for my children,” she says. “At Bridge, my children come home every day and tell me what they have learnt. That was not the case in their previous schools.” Lydia praises the way Bridge teaches the Ugandan curriculum including the nightly homework. She also praises the clean and good sanitation at the school. If there is a problem, Lydia knows that she can call customer care – “They are superb” she says. “They really care for our children”. She adds that she cannot believe how much she gets for such a reasonable fee.

It is not only parents commending our work in Uganda. On a recent radio show hosted by Akaabozi FM, the Member of Parliament for Butembe County, Kyankwanzi district, Hon. Kamusiime Pentagon Innocent commended Bridge for its innovations. “I have heard all the innovative solutions Bridge is talking about and how they have managed to solve the challenges of education and this is exactly what we need, what the government needs,” he said.

Bridge has been recognized globally for its proven improved learning opportunities for children, and for its overall technology and pedagogy innovations in the service of education in the developing world.

- IFC Inclusive Business Case Study, 2016
- Brookings Institute Millions Learning Case Study, 2016
- WISE Education Award, 2015
- Economist Award for Social and Economic Innovation, 2015
- OPIC Development Impact Award, 2015
- Fast Company World's 10 Most Innovating Companies in Education, 2015
- OECD DAC Prize for Taking Innovation to Scale – Finalist, 2015
- World Economic Forum 15 Women Changing the World in 2015 (Shannon May)
- Girl Effect Accelerator, Nike Foundation and Unreasonable Group, 2015
- World Economic Forum Social Entrepreneurs of the Year, 2014 (Jay Kimmelman and Shannon May)
- INC 25 Most Audacious Companies, 2014

The Status Quo in Uganda

Bridge understands that while there are many strengths within the Ugandan education system, there are also some existing challenges. Some of these challenges are persistent issues that cause real damage to the future chances of learners in this country. The latest Uwezo report, 'Are Our Children Learning? Five Stories on the State of Education in Uganda in 2015 and Beyond,' ([Uwezo, 2015](#)) highlighted 3 key challenges that are hampering the quality of education in primary schools in Uganda. Uwezo assessed thousands of children across all parts of Uganda to inform their assessments.

The first challenge is insufficient knowledge on the part of teachers, particularly in the areas of pedagogy and curriculum content. The second damaging problem is the very high rate of teacher absenteeism. During unannounced visits to the schools surveyed, 24% were absent from the school entirely, and 53% were not present in the classroom. Lastly, pupil textbooks were lacking in 90% of the Primary 4 classes observed ([Uwezo, 2015](#)).

More recently, direct evidence of a need for radical change in teacher preparation, including the reconsideration of how teachers become "qualified" to teach, was released in a report by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB). In the UNEB report on the achievement of primary school pupils and teachers in numeracy and literacy in English, UNEB brought to light worryingly low competency rates among primary school teachers. Only 21.8% of newly trained teachers were proficient in numeracy at a Primary 6 level. And only 38.8% of the newly trained teachers reached the desired minimum proficiency level in literacy (also at a Primary 6 level). Primary 6 is the second to last year of Primary in Uganda and meant for pupils aged 11 years old.

Despite a steady increase in primary school enrolments, the passing rate for the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE), the high stakes end of school exam for Primary Education in Uganda, have declined in recent years. The pass rate in last year's exam dropped from 88.2% in 2014 to 86.2% in 2015. Additionally, a 2014 UNICEF report on out of school children in Uganda reports that "Uganda has a very low primary survival rate of 33%, survival rate being the number of children starting together in primary 1, progressing through the cycle with their peers still being together when finishing the primary cycle in primary 7." ([UNICEF, 2014](#)). There is then, clear need to radically address the continued challenges in the basic education sector in Uganda to ensure future generations of Ugandans are given the foundation required to contribute to the country's development.

Bridge in Uganda

Bridge launched in Uganda in 2015. We opened our first 7 schools across rural Eastern Uganda as our pilot, with 3 grades of ECD, from Baby Class (3 year olds) to Top (5 year olds), and Primary 1 to Primary 5. We added Primary 6 in 2016 and Primary 7 is being added in 2017. In Uganda, Primary school ends after Primary 7, and at the end of Primary 7 a national examination is sat by all children in the country at Uganda national syllabus schools. All children enrolled at Bridge will sit the PLE at the end of Primary 7.

In 2016 we have opened 56 academies, bringing the total to 63. We now have schools in all four regions of the country. We currently have over 12,000 pupils studying in our schools. That is an average of 190 per academy or an average of 24 per class.

We currently employ 770 staff in Uganda, making us the 21st largest private employer in the country. We pay over 40m (12,100 USD) in PAYE taxes and 37m (11,200 USD) in social security (NSSF) contributions every month, and have already invested over 10bn UGX (3.3m USD) in the Ugandan economy.

Since our arrival in Uganda, we have worked hand in hand with the Local District Government officials, to ensure they are kept aware and are supportive of our work. We work with both political and administrative leaders to engage our communities and respond to their needs. From inception, we also engaged with the relevant investment authorities to ensure we are fully compliant with all relevant laws.

Setting the Story Straight:

Responding to the Education International Report

On the 5th October 2016, Education International launched a report titled "Schooling the Poor Profitably: the innovations and deprivations of Bridge International Academies in Uganda". While claiming to be an academic research paper, the paper was both widely inaccurate and biased. The report demonstrated a variety of factual mistakes and a broad misunderstanding about the mission and motives of Bridge. The validity of the report as academic research is equally suspect when you note the motivations of the funder and the total absence of research ethics demonstrated by the authors.

Below we address and respond to both the factual inaccuracies, as well as the unethical nature of the research and the report, with the hope of giving readers and the wider education community a more informed position on Bridge's mission and on-going work in Uganda.

Qualified Teachers

The majority of our primary school teachers (over 50%) are Grade III government trained teachers, yet the report claims that 80-90% of our teachers are untrained (p. 19). Bridge is always recruiting more trained teachers to increase this ratio to meet government expectations, asking all candidates to undergo a rigorous diagnostic evaluation that ensures individuals with Grade III certification are not lacking in basic literacy and numeracy comprehension. After a recent national recruiting campaign that started in July 2016, we have received over 150 applications from Grade III government trained teachers. This demonstrates that Bridge is seen as a desired employer for teachers, recognized within Uganda for its teacher support and professional development track record.

Critically, the EI report leaves out the results of a recent publication by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) which revealed that only 21.8% and 38.8% of newly graduating government trained teachers were proficient in numeracy and literacy, respectively, when tested at a Primary 6 (11 year old) level ([UNEB, 2015](#)). This is the main reason why all of our teachers, including our government-trained teachers, must pass a thorough screening and interview process which tests for proficiency in oral and written literacy and numeracy. In addition, all of our teachers go through an intensive, residential training before they enter a Bridge classroom, regardless of their training background. Had the researchers contacted the company for information on our hiring and training practices, or spent any time in an active Bridge classroom during term-time, they could not have claimed we employ “unqualified” teachers (p. 18), and would have an accurate statistic of those with current Grade III certifications.

Teacher Benefits and Compensation

The report claims teacher salaries are “remarkably low” (p. 20), when a simple survey of similar affordable or low-cost private schools would have revealed that Bridge salaries are competitive. The authors mislead the reader by comparing the salaries of Bridge teachers to the salaries of public school teachers (p. 19).

According to our own research, Bridge teachers earn more than 70% of teachers (N=783 teachers) in similar private schools in the same neighbourhoods. Furthermore, our teachers are paid in a timely manner every month, a practice that is unfortunately not in place in similar schools.

The report also claims that Bridge teachers are not paid for community outreach, stating Bridge is trying to secure “free labour” (p. 20), yet teachers are paid their full salary and meal allowance for all work done between school terms. In fact, Bridge pays teachers for all 104 days (3.5 months) of school holidays in the academic calendar, which is the case in only 43% of other private schools in similar neighbourhoods in Uganda (N=626 teachers).

Further, the report claims a “lack of employee benefits” (p. 20), however, Bridge teachers and Academy Managers receive all the statutory benefits that come from having a formal employment contract, including National Social Security Fund (NSSF) contributions (provided by only 50% of private schools in Uganda), paid leave, maternity and paternity leave, etc. This employment contract, which many private schools do not provide, gives our teachers job security, which the report claims our teachers lack (p. 20). In addition to the benefits of having a formal contract, our staff receive daily meals (breakfast and lunch), staff clothing, pre-service and in-service training and coaching, a full scholarship for a child or family member, as well as opportunities for substantial career growth within Bridge. Due to these competitive and in many cases market-leading employment benefits within the communities in which we operate, we receive far more applications for vacancies than we have open positions.

Bridge does not refer to our teachers as ‘learning facilitators’ (p. 19). We call them what they are – teachers.

It is important to mention that our Academy staff members were especially open with Curtis Riep when he visited the Academies because they were led to believe they were speaking to a colleague. They freely discussed work-related grievances as one usually does with co-workers. Bridge encourages openness and self-reflection in our efforts to always improve the service we provide. Teachers are encouraged to speak openly about their wishes, and we always try to accommodate their requests when our budget and

operational capacity allow for it. It is also important to note that our teachers voluntarily choose to work with Bridge, and can resign if an opportunity more suited to their current needs and interests arises.

School Licensing

The report makes the false claim that “...Bridge has continued to conduct operations while lacking the legal and educational licensing and monitoring requirements, ultimately infringing on Uganda’s sovereignty” (p. 8). If the authors had any intention of presenting an objective case study, they could have reached out to Bridge or to Local District Governments to verify this claim. What they would have found are countless records of our official interactions with all the pertinent government agencies necessary to operate a private school according to Ugandan law. This includes: introductory letters to Local District Government officials, positive Education Inspection Reports from District Inspectors of Schools, positive Health Inspection Reports from District Health Inspectors, approved blueprints for our school structures from District Planning Committees (made up of the District Engineer, Physical Planner, Health Inspector and Chief Administrative Officer), Occupation Permits for the completed structures and National Environmental certifications. Some examples are appended to this report.

Safe & Approved Structures

Our buildings are simple and cost-effective, and are designed to be safe and conducive to learning. All our building plans in Uganda are endorsed by a Ugandan architect registered with the Uganda Society of Architects. Furthermore, the blueprints are approved by the relevant Local District Government Planning Committee. These committees are made up of local government officials, including the Physical Planner, District Engineer, District Health Inspector and then either the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) or Town Clerk. In addition, we have Occupation Permits for each Academy that allow us to use the structures as a school.

Bridge is Affordable

The authors of the report claim that Bridge is “not affordable for households with an average income” (p. 24). However, it ignores the fact we have over 12,000 paying pupils in attendance in our schools. Our parents have agency to make informed decisions about how to spend their hard-earned income. If a parent willingly decides to purchase a product or service, it is safe to assume that person has deemed it affordable for what they are looking to achieve.

Setting aside the impropriety of a foreigner determining what is or is not affordable for the average Ugandan family, the financial estimations provided in the report are incorrect at best, and purposefully deceptive at worst. The report cites the Uganda Bureau of Statistics report from 2014 (absent from the list of references), claiming that the average household income for the Eastern region is 1.872 UGX million (548.6 USD). However, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics report for 2014 does not even contain data on average income ([Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014](#)). The authors then state that the average household in Uganda consists of 6.1 persons, but does not provide a reference for this number. The 2009/10 Population and Housing Census reveals that the average household size in Uganda is 5 persons ([Population and Housing Census, 2009/10](#)).

Based on this information and accurate information about our school fees, it is easy to demonstrate that Bridge is affordable for the average Ugandan family. The average fee at Bridge is 84,740 UGX (24.8 USD) per term or 21,185 UGX (6.2 USD) per month. The real average income for Uganda from the most recently available official source is 227,000 UGX (66.5 USD) per month ([UNHS, 2012/13](#)). This would mean the cost of sending a child to a Bridge school is less than 10% of the average Ugandan household income without meals, and just 14% with meals. The reality, then, is drastically different from the false numbers presented by the authors (15-19% of household income without meals, and 23-27% with meals) (p. 24).

The UNHS data set is also 4 years old, so it is reasonable to assume real incomes have increased since. Our own analysis from 11,272 households countrywide puts nominal incomes at 450,000 UGX (131 USD) which would mean **the cost per pupil would be only 5% of household income per month**. With an average Bridge household made up of 2.5 children and 2.2 adults, these families **live on \$1.42 a day per person**. That is below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day ([World Bank, 2015](#)). Bridge is, therefore both affordable and serving low-income families.

It is important to note that meals (which include both breakfast and lunch, not just lunch as the report alludes) are provided as an optional service to parents. Alternatively, they can send their children with food from home.

	Nursery		Primary 1, 2, 3		Primary 4,5	
	El Report	Actual	El report	Actual	El Report	Actual
Admission fee	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Annual fees (3 terms per year)	250,500	226,200	286,200	258,900	315,900	285,400
Compulsory uniform fees (expected to be 15% of total I revenue)	26,000 (girls) / 24,000 (boys)	21,400 (girls) / 20,200 (boys)	37,000 (girls) / 40,000 (boys)	29,100 (girls) / 31,900 (boys)	37,000 (girls) / 40,000 (boys)	31,100 (girls) / 34,200 (boys)
Optional feeding (breakfast & lunch)	150,000	135,000	150,000	135,000	150,000	135,000
Total fees paid annually (including uniform & one-off admission fees) 13	435,500 / 129 USD	392,000 / 114.7 USD	484,700 / 143 USD	434,300 / 127.1 USD	514,400 / 152 USD	463,000 / 135.5 USD
(including lunch costs)						
(excluding lunch costs)	285,500 / 84 USD	257,000 / 75.2 USD	334,700 / 99 USD	299,300 / 87.6 USD	364,000 / 108 USD	328,000 / 96 USD
Recurring total fees paid annually (excluding one-off costs & lunch costs)	250,500 / 73.3 USD	226,200 / 66.2 USD	286,200 / 83.7 USD	258,900 / 75.7 USD	315,900 / 92.4 USD	285,400 / 83.5 USD
recurring USD per month	6.1 USD	5.5 USD	6.9 USD	6.3 USD	7.7 USD	6.9 USD

The table above show the average fees across our schools in Uganda. Our fees adapt to the variation in income between different communities. We have over 10 different fee structures nationwide that we select from based on an affordability index, making sure that our fees are affordable for parents in that area. The table demonstrates that after one-off costs of admission and uniforms, our fees per month are on average \$6.20, which is within what our parents can afford.

Furthermore, the EI report makes no mention of the 500 full scholarships provided by Bridge in partnership with United We Reach for the neediest pupils in our communities. This ensures that even within communities

where Bridge’s services have been requested, children with no or minimal financial support can still attend the leading school in their community. Bridge works with local leaders in these communities to help identify families most in need.

It is also important to note that Bridge has not claimed to be able to serve every neighbourhood in Uganda. To criticize Bridge for not serving every community puts an unfair burden on one group within a diverse education ecosystem. Some populations are too small to support a Bridge school even when the existing options are not meeting the parents and local governments’ needs – unless there is a government or donor partnership to support the school. Some communities have the majority of the population living far below \$1 per person, putting even Bridge’s low fees beyond the ability of enough parents to pay. Again, in these communities where the need is greatest, we seek to work with donors and governments to ensure that publicly-financed, truly free education is available to all children. Indeed, we support public-private partnerships and a diverse education ecosystem to ensure that public systems can benefit from the latest research on learning services and school management that is available.

We have never been advocates of private, parent-financed education simply to “make” parents pay. Bridge is committed to ensuring every child learns and achieves his or her full potential. Bridge is responding to the world’s education crisis with effective and affordable solutions, working with parents, donors, and governments to create high-performing schools. If one day every child in the world has the option of going to a publicly financed, high-performing school, no one will be celebrating louder than the people who work at Bridge.

School Fees & The Proliferation of Mobile Money

Bridge uses mobile money to receive school fees payments because it is fast, safe, and convenient for our parents. The wide use and popularity of these services in Uganda, and more broadly in East Africa, is a testament to that fact. Independent research shows that mobile money services have the “potential to help those families who struggle with the cost of education by providing them with better tools that can help them save, plan and make education payments without losing productive time or selling assets prematurely” (CGAP, 2016).

The authors of the EI report state that Bridge parents spend additional 7,500 UGX (2.2 USD) to 15,000 UGX (4.4 USD) annually in mobile money charges due to the number of fee instalments (15 to 30 per year) (p. 24). This is false.

The average payment size from our parents through mobile money is 38,000 UGX (\$11.11). With an average termly fee of 84,740 UGX (24.8 USD), this would require 2.2 payments per term, or seven payments per year, on average. This would be a total transaction cost of 3,500 UGX (1 USD) and not the 7,500 to 15,000 (2.20 to 4.40 USD) the report quotes.

	EI Report	Actual
Annual Mobile Money Transaction fee	7,500 to 15,000 / USD 2.20 to 4.40	3,400 / 1 USD

The report does also not explain that the number of instalments our average parent can make is actually a reflection of the flexibility and convenience of our billing policy. Parents can pay in one payment, or a dozen – as fits their needs. The fees for transactions are not set by Bridge, but by the mobile money company. Whenever possible, Bridge uses its volume of transactions to negotiate lower fees for parents. In Kenya, where we serve some 80,000 families, we have negotiated a transaction fee of 1%. This is a sign of how we use our purchasing power to drive down costs for our families while providing great service.

The report also fails to note that Bridge does have a banking partner too - so if parents choose, they can make direct deposits at a bank branch without any transaction fee applied. However, only a small number of our parents do so, citing mobile money as more convenient and affordable. It should also be noted that a parent would spend an equivalent of 15,000 UGX (4.4 USD) to 30,000 UGX (8.8 USD) in bank charges in other schools to make the same number of instalments, since bank deposits in Uganda are not free. Our parents recognize the cost on their time and wallet in using traditional banking services, as do we - which is why we have developed convenient solutions that meet our parents' needs and protect the school from theft.

Choosing Bridge over Public Schools

It is important to point out that nothing prevents our families from sending their children to public schools and spending their hard-earned money in any way they see fit. Parents are making a conscious choice to invest in a high-quality option for their children. It is affordable to them, proven simply by their choice to enrol.

The authors unfoundedly report a dropout rate of 10-60% in Bridge schools stating that “fee-paying forms of commercialised learning for the poor involve a distinct and obvious structural inequality” (p. 25). The flexibility of our billing policy, the quality of our education, and the affordability of our fees means our term on term drop-out rates are significantly below the market average.

The question this report is not asking, however, is why parents turn to private schools in the first place. More importantly, in times of financial hardship, why do parents choose to have their children drop out of school altogether instead of moving their children to a nearby public school? Our research shows that 88% parents in Uganda (N=11270) prefer private schools because of the common problems associated with public schools, including high rates of teacher absenteeism, insufficient learning materials, and lack of teacher knowledge (Uwezo, 2014). It is misplaced to accuse Bridge of causing a structural inequality that has unfortunately existed in the education sector in Uganda for decades. Bridge provides an urgent amelioration to this structural inequality crisis and a demonstration effect showing that it is possible to have great schools, even on a budget as limited as Uganda's. We look forward to working closely with the Ministry to find ways of improving both private and public schools in Uganda.

The Bridge Academic Model

Section 5 of the report presents a skewed view of the Bridge Academic Model. EI and the authors of this report have clear ideological objections to Bridge's teaching methods. However, we believe that the value of a Bridge education should be judged by our learning outcomes (which are not discussed in the report). In lieu of empty ideological discussions, EI should join our efforts to leverage the best resources, data, methods, and people worldwide to ensure every child in Uganda has access to high-quality nursery and primary education.

Yet, while it is most important to judge all teacher and learner materials by their effect on learning, regardless of the location of the R&D work, it is false to state that Bridge develops all of its materials outside of Uganda (p. 26). The report falsely cites the Bridge website as stating that the curriculum is solely developed in Boston and Nairobi (p. 26). Had the researchers first come to our central offices in Uganda, they would have met with the in-country Academic team that helps ensure the curriculum taught at our schools is compliant with the guidelines from the National Curriculum Development Centre and appropriate for the cultural context. Moreover, we could have shared with them the work that our R&D team does in-person in Uganda, even if their residence is in Cambridge, MA.

The report also ignores many non-Bridge studies that show enormous academic gains associated with lesson guides. In Kenya, the government is working with USAID to implement the Kenya Primary Math and Reading Initiative (PRIMR) across the whole nation. This programme is heavily scripted and relies on continuous assessments and data to drive instruction. The results in gold-standard evaluation show giant academic gains.

In the US, Success For All is a scripted literacy curriculum that (measured in a randomized trial) was able to cut the black-white student achievement gap in half. Of all interventions entered in President Obama's 2010 "Race To The Top" competition, Success For All was the highest rated, winning \$50 million for expansion.

Another scripted instruction programme in the US called Direct Instruction followed 10,000 children from 120 communities in a longitudinal study, one of the largest ever in the USA. The program studied many interventions. Which one "had an unequivocally higher average effect on scores than any other model?" Direct Instruction.

The report also ignores two other big advantages for teachers:

1. It protects teachers' time. If teachers are not staying up late to create lessons for the next day, they are freer to help struggling pupils, communicate with parents, grade papers, or improve their own subject knowledge.
2. It gives administrators and teachers the ability to use data. When 500+ teachers use the same curriculum, a data team can quickly isolate which lessons work well and which do not, give that information to the curriculum team, and adjust quickly.

There is also no mention of Bridge International Academies' track record of success in countries where pupils have sat for their primary exit examinations. Bridge pupils in Kenya had a 35% higher chance of passing the primary exit exam than the national average. They also had a 65% higher chance of being accepted to national secondary schools. Further information on the successes of our teaching methods can be found on our [website](#).

The section of the report that criticizes our academic approach also makes no mention of the 4,500 textbooks provided annually to each school (283,500 across Uganda), all of which are included in the termly fee. Comparatively, over 90% of the classes observed in UPE schools lacked any textbooks at all ([Uwezo, 2014](#)). The report also does not provide any information on the 40+ hours of instruction that pupils receive every week, or the 95%+ teacher attendance rate, compared to the UPE absenteeism rate of 53% ([Uwezo, 2014](#)).

Discussion around Bridge’s academic approach in the EI report is purely theoretical. Authors admit they went to academies during the school break. And though they try to disguise this as a methodological advantage, in reality, this means that the researchers never saw the academic model they were critiquing in action, reducing their conclusions to hearsay or ideological prejudice.

The report claims that “Bridge assumes it does not require professionally-trained or certified teachers”, and that our training program is “basically about teaching using computer technology” (p. 29). These conclusions show a very limited understanding of our training and teaching methods. Had the authors of the report engaged with the Ugandan training team, they would have learned that apart from learning how to use Bridge technology in the classroom, teachers learn and practice the most effective teaching and classroom management methods, as well as class-specific and subject-specific skills.

Moreover, the allegations that teaching with the support of teaching guides and a Teacher Computer leads to what the authors dub “techagogy” (p. 27), is a theoretical argument completely unfounded in scientific observation. The guides in the Teacher Computer are meant to provide the necessary content and step-by-step instructions so that teachers can focus on pupil engagement and understanding. Had the researchers spent any significant time in our classrooms, they would have been able to see this for themselves.

The authors also incorrectly claim that “this method of curriculum is proven to be problematic given the limitations imposed by pre-programmed scripts that inadequately respond to the diverse needs, requirements, and realities of learners in various contexts and situations” (p. 29). First, there is no citation of “proof” that preparing teachers with lessons is “problematic;” to the contrary, as cited above, there is extensive research and published studies of the benefits of learning with various forms of teacher guides or scripted lessons.

The authors make the common mistake of equating written-down, prepared lessons with rote teaching. Nothing could be farther from the truth. One of the core reasons Bridge uses detailed lesson plans to support teachers is to create lessons that are dynamic, and include scheduled time for independent work, small group instruction, and peer tutoring. As part of the teacher guides prepared for each teacher, Bridge Uganda has a number of tailor-made programs that teach each individual learners according to their ability level in literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, as directed by the guide, pupils spend the majority of their time in a Bridge classroom working independently, during which time teachers address the needs of each learner one-on-one.

Finally, the researchers misguidedly state that teaching at Bridge disables “creativity and innovativeness in the classroom”, when in fact, a Bridge classroom is significantly more interactive than the rote learning seen in the average Ugandan classroom. Bridge pupils do not just copy notes from the board, instead, most of their time is spent as active participants in their own learning. They do this through writing and reading texts and stories, playing games, and participating in maths races. Talking time is almost evenly split between pupils and teachers, and pupils are encouraged to work independently and in groups. Unfortunately, the poor research methods of this study mean that the researchers have no observation data on our classrooms, and no observation data on the classrooms of other private or public schools against which to compare them. Nor were respected pedagogy researchers or practitioners in the field consulted as to why stronger teacher support through prepared lessons has been shown to work in multiple contexts and countries to close stark achievement gaps.

Noticeably, the EI report does not offer any specific solution to the undeniable teaching and learning crisis in Uganda, where 4 out of 5 newly certified government teachers are not competent at the 6th grade level of mathematics, and 3 out of 5 are not literate at the 6th grade level (yet, they may be teaching this level). Like many other respected leaders in the education field, like USAID and RTI, Bridge is working to find solutions to improve teaching practice, and thereby, children’s futures. We cannot imagine that what EI wants is for the status quo to continue, where the majority of teachers teach class content they themselves cannot perform. We welcome a productive dialogue with all stakeholders in the education ecosystem on how to better support teachers for performance – but we do not believe doing nothing is a defensible option.

The authors also claim that the curriculum used by Bridge is not accredited by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) in Uganda (p. 30). There are two issues with this statement. First, the NCDC is in charge of creating and publishing the syllabus for every subject and every class, but approving the curriculum taught at each private school is not one of their faculties. Second, if the authors were familiar with the National Curriculum they would be able to see that our textbooks and lessons are following the national standards.

In every community in which we work, Bridge is open to collaboration and co-operation. One example is the bi-annual mock PLE examinations we conduct for a variety of other private and government schools in our communities in Eastern Uganda. After the exams, we provide detailed reports to participating schools in order to help head teachers and teachers see how their pupils are faring, and where to focus their efforts leading up to the PLE. Sitting the PLE is itself a testament of following the Ugandan syllabus, as no school would intentionally enrol its pupils to sit an exam that is on a different curriculum than the one used in the school.

Education International:

Research Integrity

During the course of the field research and in the report, the authors never disclose the major conflict of interest involving the mandate of the organization funding the study and the subject of the study itself. During its 7th World Congress, held during July 2015, EI adopted a resolution against the privatisation of education. As one of the world’s largest providers of affordable education to parents, donors, and governments, Bridge International Academies has been directly targeted by Education International on social media, print media, conferences, and radio ads. Like this report, these attacks have been without fact, and without ever seeking dialogue with Bridge.

Failure to declare this conflict of interest to research participants and readers is the least serious breach of research ethics committed by the authors. The principal author claims that his research “involved full-disclosure and informed consent” (p. 34), without explicitly stating how informed consent was obtained. But the Bridge staff members interviewed by the researcher reported that they were not explicitly told the purpose of the research project, the funders of the research (EI), and were not explicitly asked for verbal or written consent. Had Bridge teachers, Academy Managers, and parents known that the study was being funded by an entity that is actively trying to close down their schools, they might not have been as willing to participate in this study.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS), which are the ethical research guidelines governing the universities of the two authors, stipulates that “evidence of consent shall be contained either in a signed consent form or in documentation by the researcher...”. Further, the

TCPS states that “the consent process should be based on mutual understanding of the project goals and objectives between the participants and the researcher.” (TCPS, 2010).

Still, Bridge staff reported that the principal researcher, Curtis Riep, went to academies unannounced, and led them to believe he was a Bridge staff member. The aforementioned act not only violates basic research ethics, but is also illegal. One concerned Academy Manager took a picture of Mr. Curtis Riep and sent it to his supervisor to corroborate his identity, which is how Bridge’s central team was alerted to the researcher’s presence in our academies, and whose identity was still unknown.

This leads to the next breach of research ethics: at no point before embarking on this research did the authors notify Bridge of their project, a standard ethical research practice. If they had done so, Bridge’s open door policy would have prevented them from resorting to illegal and unethical means in their efforts to acquire information on our operations. The fact that the researchers did not approach the company is further evidence of their duplicitous aims.

More importantly, Bridge found no record of authorization from a local Institutional Review Board (IRB), or the ethics review board of the University of Alberta. Failure to receive approval from a human research ethics review board shows that the researchers willingly and knowingly put their own interests - and the interests of their funders - before the rights and the safety of their so-called “research participants”.

Research Quality

Aside from the serious breaches of ethical research conduct, the paper is riddled with incorrect references, factual inaccuracies, and research blunders. Though the missteps are too many to name here, we provide some examples.

The authors do not properly cite the interviews with the Senior Officials in the Ministry of Education and Sports, the District Education Officer, and the District Inspector of Schools they claim to have interviewed (p. 7). APA style calls for parenthetically citing the interviewee’s name, the type of communication (e.g. in-person interview), and the date of the interview (APA). However, Riep and Machacek provide no indication of the source, location, or date in which the supposed communication took place. This casts doubt on the validity of the information presented, particularly since the bulk of the allegations in the report are based on these interviews.

The methodology section fails to validate the data collection process. The researchers visited an extremely small sample of schools (not even 13%), and talked to an even smaller sample of Academy Staff (barely 11% of Academy Managers, and less than 4% of Teachers). Additionally, the researchers did not conduct research in other low-cost private schools or even public schools to compare their findings.

The researchers also note that many schools were visited during the holidays (though they do not specify how many in their already small sample), yet they claim they carried out observations of in-class instruction. However, these observations are never referenced in the report. Instead, in their critique of Bridge teaching methods, the authors digress into an abstract theoretical discussion based on education policy from the turn of the 20th century, and quote from an unrelated OECD report (p. 30). It is also worth noting that Bridge does not officially provide remedial lessons during the school break, which means that any lessons the authors observed were not structured by Bridge, and were an ad hoc and commendable effort on the part of teachers

to help individual pupils who were behind on schoolwork. This shows their dedication to their craft, to the children, and to Bridge -- not a lack of motivation or satisfaction amongst teachers, as the report alleges.

The researchers also claim to have interviewed 6 Bridge parents and yet the report only includes a single quote from all these interviews that supposedly took place. This again calls into question the objectivity of this research since the authors do not provide a full account of what Bridge parents think about the services we are providing.

Additionally, page 26 of the paper incorrectly quotes 7 lines of information on the Bridge website. The reference cited by the authors - 'BIA, 2016b' in the list of references - is a link to the investor page on the Bridge Website, a web page which contains nothing more than the logos of Bridge investors.

Finally, figure 3 in the report, a picture of one of Bridge's structures in Uganda, claims to be showing a 6-classroom structure, however, the image is only showing 2 classrooms. This is further evidence of the authors' intentions of misrepresenting our schools.

Bridge's Future in Uganda

Bridge remains open. Our 500 teachers and 12,000 pupils continue to come to school every day as they prepare for their end of year exams before the end of term in December this year. In the time Bridge has been in Uganda, we have opened 63 schools, and are educating over 12,000 Ugandan children and providing jobs for close to 800 people. Our future plans are to in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports, ensure that every child in every corner of Uganda has access to a high-performing school, with great teachers. We want to be wherever under-served communities demand affordable high-quality education, in particularly hard to reach areas such as Karamoja and West Nile. To achieve this Bridge is eager to partner further with the Ministry of Education and Sports and other stakeholders.

We want to ensure that Uganda achieves its education goals over the next decade and beyond. Bridge remains committed to serving the people and Government of Uganda and is grateful for the hard work of all the Ugandans who are leading a movement of change, to ensure that a status quo that is failing the children of Uganda does not remain.

Appendix:
Sample Registration Documents

Date

APPROVAL OF BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY SITE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRIVATE NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL

As DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER Of IGANGA District / Municipality, I hereby write to approve the Bridge International Academies to build, manage and maintain a private nursery and primary school at the following location:

IONOI PARISH
BUYANGA SUB-COUNTY
BUGWERE COUNTY
IGANGA DISTRICT

I hereby express that the site above is suitable for the establishment of a nursery and primary private school. Its establishment does not contravene the Education Development Plan in force and the founders of the intended school have adequate resources to establish the school.

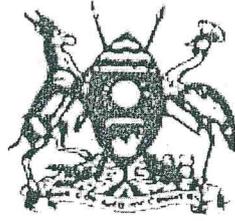
As long as the founders adhere to the guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) I have no objection to the establishment of the school, and will tender my support in the licensing and registration process.

Signed

TIIGAWALANA G. Name
D.E.S Title
IGANGA District / Municipality
0772869448 Telephone Contact
georgetigawalana@gmail.com E-mail Contact

DISTRICT INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
IGANGA Official Stamp or Seal
DATE 30/12/2014 Date

On Behalf of Bridge International Academies:
Andrew White
Expansion Director - Uganda
Andrew.white@bridgeinternationalacademies.com
0789 725 990 / 0754 725 990



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

**APPLICATION FOR LICENCE TO OPERATE A NEW PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOL
(UNDER PART VII SECTION 31-45 OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2008)**

(TO BE COMPLETED IN QUADRUPLICATE)

TO: Permanent Secretary.

Thru: District Education Officer.

Thru: District Inspector of schools

SECTION ONE:

TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT

1. Declaration of nature of ownership:
Self
-

Please find the following documents attached:

- a) Duly signed copies of partnership-deed, Article of Association
- b) Personal CVs, showing records of employment
- c) Letters from three referees, one of which should be from the current or last employer and one of which should be from LC III
- d) Three passport size photographs for each of the proprietor(s)
- e) District Health Inspector report
- f) Copy of School rules
- g) List of members of the School Management Committee

Note:

- i. In case of a joint venture, if one of the partners dies or changes his mind, then the Ministry of Education & Sports should be notified
- ii. The applicant should be supported by recognized local authority at Divisional zonal and Sub-county levels confirming the appropriateness of the school in area.

SECTION TWO

A. To be endorsed by the district/Municipal Health Inspector

I recommend / I do not recommend licencing/registration of BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY SCHOOL, BUYANGA Stc.

Remarks: Meets minimum basic requirements.

Full Name: KITAKUFE GEORGE SUDA.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 06/July/2015

Rubber Stamp

DISTRICT HEALTH INSPECTOR
IGANGA

B. To be endorsed by the District/Municipal Inspector of Schools

I recommend / I do not recommend licensing/registration of BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY. Has the required facilities

Remarks:

Full Name: Nigamwanga George

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 6/7/2015

Rubber Stamp

DISTRICT INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
IGANGA
DATE: 6/7/2015

C. To be endorsed by the District/municipal Education Officer

I recommend / I do not recommend licensing/registration of BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY. The school has the basic infrastructure in place.

Remarks:

Full Name: Kasadha Bace

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 6/7/2015.

Rubber Stamp

DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER
IGANGA DISTRICT

D. Assistant Commissioner Directorate of Education Standards Regional Office

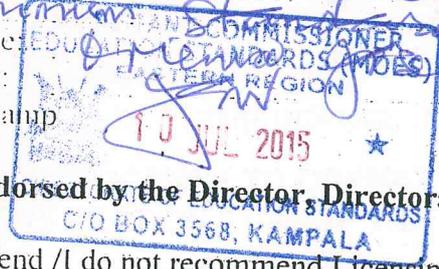
I recommend do not recommend licensing/registration of Bridge International Academy

Remarks: meets most basic requirements and minimum standards

Full Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: 10.7.2015

Rubber stamp _____



E. To be endorsed by the Director, Directorate of Education Standards

I recommend /I do not recommend Licensing/registration of _____

Remarks: _____

Full Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Rubber stamp _____

F. To be endorsed by the permanent secretary

Attention: Commissioner (Secondary Education, Primary Education, Teacher Education; Special Needs Education; Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) *delete what is not applicable*

I approve /I do not approve licensing/registration of _____

Remarks: _____

If approved: (i) Registration Name: _____

(ii) Registration Certificate No. _____

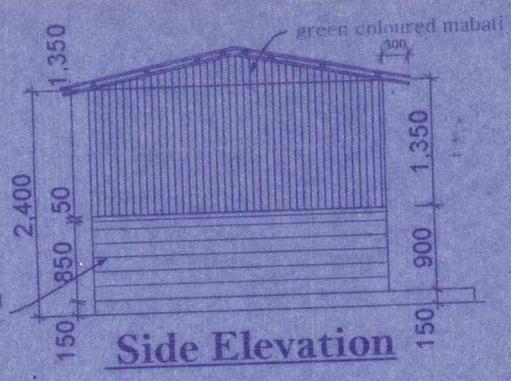
(iii) Classification: _____

Full Name: _____

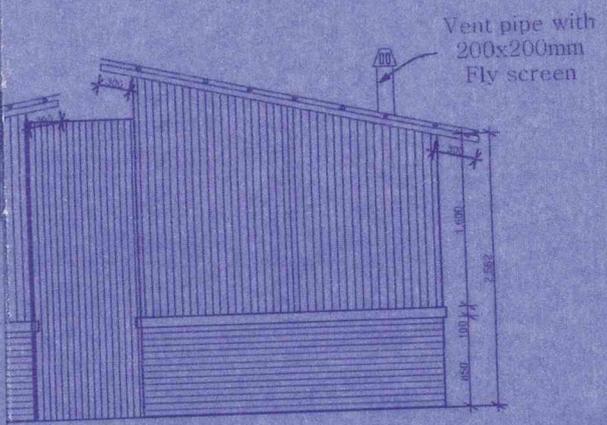
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Rubber Stamp _____

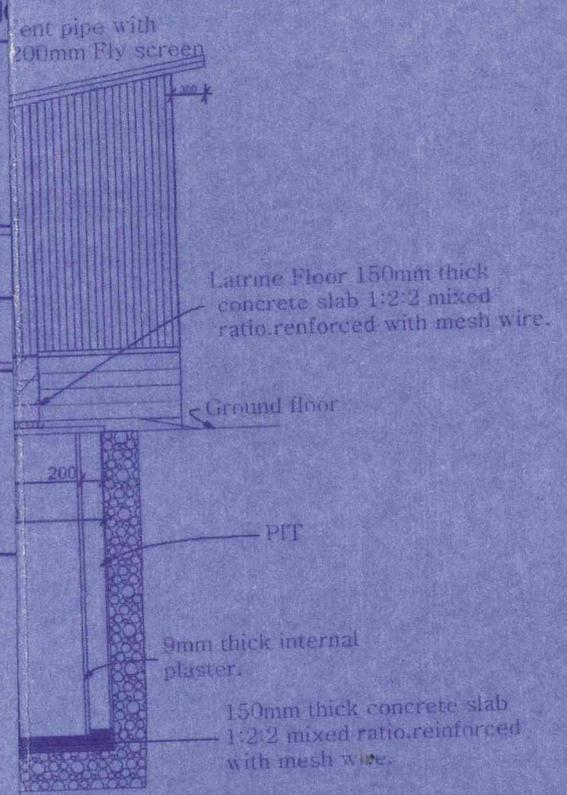
Elevation



Side Elevation



SIDE ELEVATION



TYPICAL SECTION

20/12/14
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Project:

PROPOSED CLASSROOMS ON
Idudi Parish, Buyanga Sub-
County, Bugwere County, Iganga
District

Client :

Maka Matia,

Designed by :

Brian.O.

Drawn by :

fred M.

Checked by :

Architects
signature:



Date:

DEC, 2014

Academy Name:

IDUDI

Academy Code:

L16125

200 x 600mm strip footing
1:3:6 conc. ratio.

200 x 600mm strip
1:3:6 conc. ratio.

LOCAT

~~PHYSICAL PLANNER~~
PHYSICAL PLANNER
IGANGA DISTRICT LOCAL GOV'T.
DATE: 29/12/14

0.1m
SUBJECT PROPERTY



IGANGA DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Iganga District Local Government:



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

/ Idudi
Office of the
District Health Officer,
P.O. Box 358,
Iganga.
Tel. Mob. 0701-675738

Date: 28th January, 2015.

RE: Permit of Occupation.

Under approved building plan No. L 16125 Approved on 29th/December/2014 to Bridge International Academy / Idudi, the owner of an Institution situated in Idudi parish, Buyanga Sub County, Bugweri County, Iganga District and intended to be occupied as a school.

This is to certify that the said building(s) is as far as can be ascertained in every respect in accordance with the Building Rules and requirements for the time being in force in the area of the said local Authority.

Dated this 28th day of January 2015.

Signed

[Signature]
DISTRICT HEALTH INSPECTOR
IGANGA
District Health Inspector / Iganga.

C.C The District Health Officer / Iganga.

*Original submitted to
legal on 5/2/2015
[Signature]
5/2/15*

length

7877000

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
(Additional Information Sheet)

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIES

In addition to implementing the mitigation measures identified in the Project Brief, this Certificate of Approval is granted on condition that the Developer, M/S BRIDGE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIES shall comply with approval conditions stated below:

ADMINISTRATIVE CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

1. This Certificate is issued in accordance with the requirements under Environment Impact Assessment Regulations, 1998.
2. Issuance of this Certificate of Approval is based on the content of/information contained in the Project Brief as submitted by the Developer and the Developer, shall be held responsible for any omissions, falsified information or any other anomalies that are contrary to the provisions under the relevant laws governing the proposed project.
3. This Certificate of Approval is VALID for a period of 5 Years- the period which covers both the construction and operational phases of the project.
4. The Project must commence within the First 24 MONTHS (from the date of approval) of the validity period, failure of which this Certificate may be varied, cancelled or otherwise dealt with by this Authority.
5. The Executive Director should be NOTIFIED of any transfer of ownership, variation/alteration of the project design or components, or surrender of this Certificate of Approval.

Dated at KAMPALA on 26TH MAY, 2016 20



Signed



Executive Director (NEMA)