



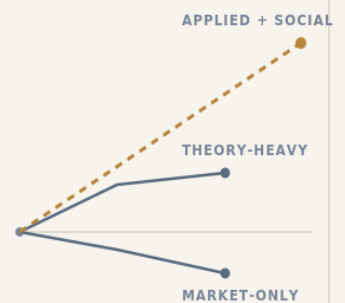
NATIONAL LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY

Investing in Somalia's Future Through Leadership Training and Learning

ON EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY

Old institutions. New EdTech. Same missing piece.

Why theory-heavy universities and market-driven platforms both fail to educate a full person.



APPLIED LEARNING • SOCIAL GOOD • DIGITAL EDUCATION

Op-Ed: Neither Theory nor the Market—What Somalia's Current Education Must Get Right.

Somalia is building its institutions at precisely the moment the rest of the world is discovering that its own models of education are failing in opposite directions. That timing is an advantage, if we are honest about both failures before we repeat either of them.

For decades, the dominant critique of education across much of the developing world, Somalia included, has been that it is too theoretical. Institutions produce graduates who can recite frameworks and pass examinations but struggle to apply that knowledge under real conditions: a ministry negotiation, a community dispute, a live policy rollout. This critique is valid, and it is one of the founding premises behind



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institutions like the National Leadership Academy — leadership development built to be local, practical, and impactful, closing the gap between academic credentials and the competencies public service demands.

A Second Failure, Moving Fast

But a second failure is spreading just as quickly: individualized, market-driven EdTech platforms that treat education as a personal upgrade cycle — a skill updated weekly to stay competitive, stripped of context, community, or civic purpose. These platforms are commercial products, often backed by venture capital that profits from treating learners as customers rather than members of a society being educated together. Critics put it bluntly: such platforms risk optimizing people to be economic units for production and competition, offering little else: no shared values, no civic grounding, etc. In Somalia, this model is also structurally exclusionary before it is anything else. Platforms built for individual, always-online learners simply do not reach the populations who most need capacity-building. Yet these platforms are growing exponentially, and traditional institutions are losing ground to that growth.

The Same Gap, From Two Directions

Here is what matters most for institution-builders: theory-heavy universities and market-driven EdTech are failing learners in opposite directions but missing the same thing. One produces people who can recite frameworks but cannot apply them. The other produces people who can optimize a marketable skill but were never taught why that skill should serve anything beyond their own economic output. Neither produces a leader who can think independently, serve their community with integrity, and still perform in a competitive economy. That combination (applied, rigorous, and socially grounded) is the actual target. Most institutions, old and new, are aiming at only half of it.



What This Means

This is not abstract. It is the design question at the center of Somalia's human capacity development moment. With roughly three-quarters of the population under thirty, and a generation of institutions being built at the same time, Somalia has a rare opportunity most countries do not: to design leadership education correctly from the outset, rather than retrofit it after decades of choosing one failure mode over the other. That means resisting two temptations at once: over-correcting toward theory by mistaking credentials and lecture hours for preparation, and over-correcting toward the market by treating leadership trainings, digital education, and skill dynamic skills development as consumable modules detached from the ethical and civic obligations that leadership in the public interest requires.

There is no easy formula for this balance, and I would be skeptical of anyone who claims otherwise. But the answer is not choosing a side between “traditional” and “disruptive.” It is building something that takes the discipline of one and the relevance of the other, without losing sight of who leadership education is ultimately for — not just the individual learner, and not just the labor market, but the society both are meant to serve. That is the standard worth holding Somalia's emerging institutions to, and the standard worth holding ourselves to as we build.

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