

# DEVELOPMENT OF GAINFUL SELF-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AMONGST TERTIARY EDUCATION GRADUATES: PERCEPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES AT ANKOLE WESTERN UNIVERSITY IN UGANDA

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## INTRODUCTION

Uganda's economy has grown significantly over the past three decades and may continue to do so in future (World Bank 2014). However, employment creation has not kept pace with economic growth, which in the last three decades averaged 2.7 per cent (%) per annum with little or no increase in the rate of employment (Magelah and Ntambirweki-Karugonjo 2014). One can argue that universities should play a key role in addressing the unemployment rate in Uganda. It is worth noting that 87 943 public and private sector jobs were advertised between 2009 and 2013 (UBOS 2014, 24), while Uganda produces roughly 500 000 tertiary education graduates per year. On average, about 18 000 jobs are created annually (Babyetsiza 2016:13).

The fact that the picture painted above is becoming even grimmer is concerning. Nganga (World Bank 2017) has warned that the East African region risks missing its long-term economic growth targets due to a widening disconnect between the skills demanded by the labour market and what is offered by graduates of higher education institutions. The region is drifting into a crisis with regard to unemployment of tertiary education graduates as the mismatch in skills widens:

Clearly the education system is creating a mass of young people who do not have the skills required for employment or self-employment. This failure is not only exacerbating the unemployment problem, the region is also failing to leverage the demographic dividend of a young and active labour force (Nganga 2017).

As a result, many tertiary education graduates in Uganda are finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs that match their training and educational profile (Sebudde 2013). This has been aggravated by the growing number of students as Uganda's population swells at an annual growth rate of 3.7% (the third highest in the world) which has resulted in an increase in tertiary education institutions. In 1987, Uganda only had

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Makerere University, but there are now 38 universities and other accredited degree-awarding institutions, as well as 113 public and private tertiary education institutions. Tertiary education in Uganda consists of universities and institutions for Business, Technical and Vocational Education Training (BTJET). Notwithstanding the fact that the job market is not growing, universities and graduates alike have kept focussing on wage employment. This has resulted in a mismatch between the skills gained from tertiary education institutions and the demands of the labour market, since the Ugandan economy is predominantly informal (Chigunta 2002; Haile 2003; ILO 2012; and Kellow 2010). This makes graduates chase after elusive jobs, until it dawns on them that self-employment presents open labour market opportunities as an alternative livelihood.

According to Sebudde (2013), there are more than two million self-employed youths in Uganda engaged in the informal sector, who may not be considered to be living in poverty. Nonetheless, they produce too little to really be regarded as prosperous. Another 11 million workers (73%) find themselves working in agriculture. As many are regarded as unproductive, most do not exceed the level of small household farming (Sebudde 2013). This supports the contentious notions in the academic debate on the significance of self-employment in least developed countries (LDCs), on whether self-employment is a choice or a necessity (Pietrobelli, Rabellotti and Aquilina 2004). On the one hand, there is an opinion that although self-employment requires an industrious approach and specific talents, it is not regarded as a meticulous activity in developing countries. On the other hand, there is an alternative view that self-employment is involuntary and only a transitory employment option that provides just enough money to survive as individuals prepare for and seek hired employment. As the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) indicates, transformational entrepreneurs can create new products and business models and provide dignified employment (UNCTAD 2018). Success can improve the quality of life, bolster fiscal sustainability, and contribute to wealth accumulation and distribution. Although UNCTAD indicates that entrepreneurship is concerned with the extent of self-employment (ownership, management or establishment of new businesses), self-employment in LDCs is driven more by lack of employment alternatives and dominated by necessity-driven entrepreneurs, rather than attractive business conditions – therefore, opportunity-seeking entrepreneurs (UNCTAD 2018). This underlies the distinction between entrepreneurship by necessity and entrepreneurship by choice.

Besides the mismatch between the demands of the labour market and what tertiary education institutions offer students and graduates, unemployment is exacerbated by complexities and shifts in the nature of the labour market, as well as rapidly changing technologies. The transition from being a graduate to competing in the labour market in Uganda is challenging which is, as this study indicates, influenced by the wrong perceptions among students, academicians and parents; who consider education a clear path to gainful employment and a decent living. Zeelen (2015) recommends lifelong learning as a way to self-realisation as well as the need to shift the focus to vocational training for self-employment and employability. On one hand, lifelong

learning provides skills to address the challenges of the continuously changing labour market and the socio-economic and technological complexities that go with it. On the other hand, vocational training equips students and graduates with knowledge ingrained with practical skills that enhance human, social and psychological capital. These areas are essential to developing the desired entrepreneurial mind-set among tertiary-level students for gainful self-employment.

The recent winds of change towards training for self-employment are contributing much to labour market opportunities for tertiary education graduates and alleviating unemployment. The results of tertiary graduates' tracer studies vary: in 2006, the Makerere Institute of Social Research found that 9% of graduates were self-employed (MISR 2006), Ssembatya and Ngobi (2015) found that 10% of the graduates chose self-employment, while a study by the Uganda National Council for Higher Education found that 19.4% graduates are self-employed (NCHE 2013). The above results indicate that gainful self-employment is an alternative for tertiary graduates.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the challenges for gainful self-employment among tertiary graduates in Uganda, and the ways in which institutions can develop teaching and guidance programmes to enhance such opportunities for graduates. It focusses specifically on understanding the perceptions, expectations and experiences of students, academic staff and management at Ankole Western University (AWU), as well as on the challenges they face in their transition to gainful self-employment. This study might therefore support the development of new ways to prepare students for the realities of the labour market that is growing slower than the output of graduates; and establish elements for the development of a model to improve the transition to gainful self-employment.

## **GAINFUL SELF-EMPLOYMENT**

It is generally understood that an individual is gainfully self-employed if he or she is conducting his/her own business as his/her main source of income; the earnings come directly from the turnover of the business; and the activity is organized, developed and carried out in expectation of rewarding profit (Revenue Benefits 2015). According to Startienė, Remeikienė and Dumčiuvienė (2010), gainful self-employment is perceived as having the potential to provide attractive earnings compared to salaried/hired employment, and can provide one with a decent standard of living, a satisfactory level of self-realisation as well as an equitable life enjoyment.

Definitions of self-employment are wide ranging. According to Stam (as cited in Startienė, Remeikienė, & Dumčiuvienė 2010), self-employment is an instance where individuals, rather than being hired workers, choose to work for themselves. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), consider self-employment as work wherein wages depend directly on the gains from goods produced or services provided, where the self-employed person personally makes decisions that influence the business.

Conceptualisation of gainful self-employment for tertiary educated graduates requires highlighting its specific requirements, which include: education; working with or without paid workers; initiator providing his/her own capital; being prepared for success and failure; economic gain as the main driver; considerations on business acquisition or start-up; business sustainability; independence; and whether or not the individual is an entrepreneur. Good entrepreneurial skills, however, will boost the chances of success (Grieco 2007; Pedersini and Colette 2009).

## **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are a number of theories which give insight into the upskilling of students and graduates for self-employment. Many of the previous studies on this topic focussed on independent theories. This study has used an array of theories to underpin gainful self-employment among tertiary graduates in Uganda. These are: Chaos Theory of Careers; New Venture Planning (NVP) Mentoring Model in Entrepreneurship Education; Psychological Capital Theory; Social Capital Theory; Personal Initiative Theory; and the Unified Self-Employment Transition Theory.

Pryor and Bright's (2011) Chaos Theory of Careers emphasises continuous, uncertain and non-linear change, the complexity of influences, and emergent fragmented patterns in careers. The theory gives good insight into understanding how to guide students in addressing the modern labour market shifts and complexities. It has three defining characteristics: chaotic systems that are mathematically deterministic, sensitive to initial conditions, and they appear to be random and disorderly but they actually have a sense of order and pattern. It helps us to recognise and benefit from the unpredictable influences on our careers. The theory sheds light on the complexity of labour market perceptions and, experiences and expectations of educational institution stakeholders. It can be used to counsel students, lecturers, educational institution managers, and policymakers. However, unlike the New Venture Planning (NVP) Mentoring Model in Entrepreneurship Education, the theory does not delve into the mode of training, teaching and coaching that would address the increasing rates of graduate unemployment.

Kubberoed and Hagen's (2015) NVP mentoring model on entrepreneurship education is premised on experiential action learning paradigms to challenge learners to initiate and apply knowledge as well as to strategise and act, rather than just passively acquiring knowledge or observing, describing and analysing. The NVP model simulates the actual experience of developing a new venture by creating an educational setting where "real life" entrepreneurial learning is more likely to happen. It is experiential action learning that is student-centred. The student is actively in charge while the lecturer often plays a proactive role as facilitator; ensuring the optimal supported learning environment. Coaching and mentoring in NVP are regarded as essential ingredients of the entrepreneurial learning process which contribute to increased learning outcomes. NVP supports Uganda's National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) indication that

entrepreneurship should be taught in all tertiary education institutions. The aim is to instil entrepreneurial skills in students in order to increase self-employment levels in the country. However, self-employed graduates have tended to be reluctant to become entrepreneurs. They treat self-employment as a “survival strategy,” instead of a generator of ideas or a way towards self-realisation, satisfaction and possibility for higher earnings and independent decision-making. Against the backdrop of this weakness, socio-psychological theories have also been used to understand the route to gainful self-employment for tertiary education graduates.

Psychological Capital Theory explains the need to amass an entrepreneurial mind-set (Luthans and Youssef 2007). By riding on self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience, entrepreneurial students/graduates will be guaranteed to become gainfully self-employed. Social Capital Theory explains the crucial role that networking and trust play in self-employment initiatives for students and graduates (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; and Putnam 1993). Networks such as student entrepreneurship clubs and societies are essential. Social Capital Theory provides useful insights into feeling a sense of belonging. In this light, networks bring benefits of connectedness—revealed through students’ efforts to find business resources through cohesion among their communities, family members and acquaintances. However, Psychological Capital and Social Capital theories do not explain student/graduate innovativeness, while Personal Initiative (PI) theory does (Frese, Kring, Soose and Zempel 1996).

Under the umbrella of Personal Initiative (PI) theory self-starting, pro-activeness, and persistence are paramount for gainful self-employment. We see students exhibiting these facets of PI by spotting business opportunities, designing business models, and starting and sustainably running businesses. However, PI alone does not fully explain the path to gainful self-employment as does the Unified Self-Employment Transition Theory (USETT).

PI theory, reinforced by USETT, best explains the path of students towards gainful self-employment. USETT assumes a set of personal, organisational and external potential qualities and support which ensures a successful transition to self-employment (Olien 1997). These facets of USETT will support the establishment of businesses as well as their growth, expansion and sustainability.

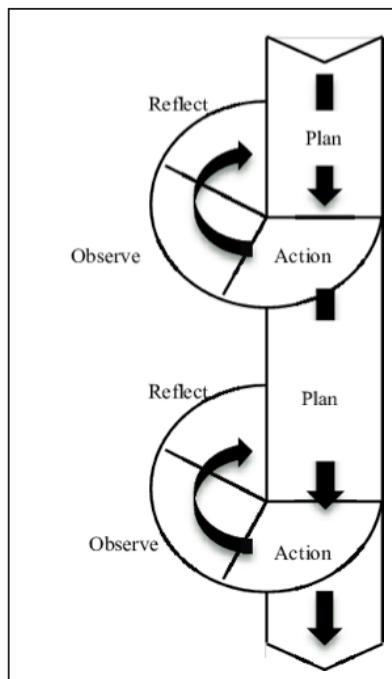
## **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

There are various approaches to action-oriented research designs. These include, among others, participatory action research (PAR), collaborative inquiry, action learning, appreciative inquiry, and exemplary action research (Boog 2003; Boog, Preece, Slagter and Zeelen 2008; Coenen and Khonraad 2003; Greenwood and Levin 1998; Reason and Bradbury 2001). This exploratory study was based on the general characteristics of action research derived from the collaborative learning and participatory approaches. The two approaches are presented as partly comparable approaches of action research;

differing only in terms of emphasis on certain aspects. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the collaborative inquiry approach is that it is focussed on human experience as well as being more oriented towards interventions (Angucia, Zeelen and De Jong 2010) – in this case, addressing graduate unemployment rates. The participatory approach was used to generate knowledge from the very parties affected by graduate unemployment in order to identify perspectives for improving and implementing gainful self-employment among tertiary education graduates.

The study has attempted to understand the labour market perceptions and expectations of AWU students, lecturers and graduates as well as the challenges they face in the transition to gainful self-employment. The data scope of this action research project was three-fold: ethno-methodological and phenomenological; building trust by way of creating partnerships with participants and jointly exploring the labour market realities for university graduates; and planting a seed of social justice that ensures social transformation. In order to cause the said social justice, Stephen Kemmis' cyclical model of four steps (i.e. plan, act, observe, and reflect) that is typical of action research, has been sought, see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Simple Action Research Model**



(Adopted from Maclsaac 1995)

### **Data Collection Process and Analysis**

According to Boog (2003), action research is participatory and practice-oriented. It empowers and finds solutions to social problems. Action research is a reciprocal learning process as the researcher and the researched are partners. This reciprocal learning process requires all partners to be open, truthful and satisfied with the communication of facts; which is called reciprocal adequacy. This is achieved through building trust with the participants in the first place.

Audio data was captured from five focus group discussions (FGD) sessions, namely: student social entrepreneurs in a sitting with some residents of the areas; students; lecturers; faculty deans; and AWU Management; as well as an interview of a Sheema District Commercial Officer.

The thematic process of data collection and analysis occurred in a predictable manner: guiding questions were developed; a debriefing of/which each group of participants was held; FGDs and interviews were carried out; and data captured with audio recordings was summarised. At the end of each FGD or interview, participants were asked to verify the summarised discussions; the audio recordings were transcribed into text (Microsoft (MS) Word documents), and data was analysed. Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2006) contend that like most types of research, with FGD, the amount of analysis required varies according to the purpose of the research, the complexity of the research design, and the extent to which conclusions can be reached easily based on analyses. The most common analyses of focus group results involve a transcript of the discussion and a summary of the conclusions that can be drawn. As such, in this study the audio recordings were transcribed into text, captured in an MS Word document, and then organised and analysed using Google Sheets and MS Excel.

The data collected satisfies the essential criteria of state-of-the-art qualitative methods (focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews). As with other types of data, the nature of the analysis of focus group and interview data was determined by the research questions and the purpose for which the data are collected (the study objectives). As for specific analysis techniques, of the most widely used methods for FGD and interview data, this study deployed thematic analysis and content analysis, starting with an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the participants, presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Summary of the demographics of the participants**

<b>Demographic variable</b>	<b>Variable structures</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>%</b>
Age (year)	Youths (30 years or younger)	14	67%
	Adults	7	33%
Sex	Male	10	48%
	Female	11	52%
Level of education	Less than O-level or its equivalent	3	14%
	O-level or its equivalent	2	10%
	A-level or its equivalent	6	29%
	Bachelor's degree	3	14%
	Master's degree	5	24%
	PhD	2	10%
Employment status	Not employed	7	32%
	Engaged in self-employment	6	29%
	Paid employment (salaried employment?)	2	10%
	Dual – self-employed and paid employed	6	29%
Area-based origin of participant	Within Sheema district	14	67%
	Outside Sheema district	7	33%



Demographic variable	Variable structures	Number of participants	%
Occupation/Job title	Peasant – farmer	3	14%
	Student	8	38%
	Teacher (Sec. School)	1	5%
	Lecturer	4	19%
	Dean	2	10%
	AWU Management	2	10%
	State actors	1	5%

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the FGD and interviews conducted focussed on the way in which tertiary education students and graduates make sense of self-employment as well as their consciousness, thoughts, and experience.

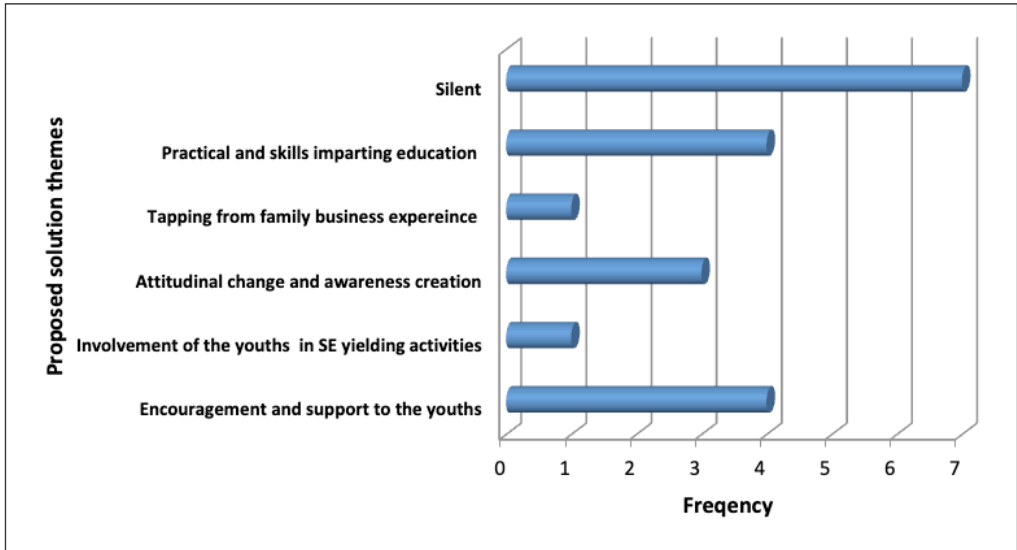
This study touches on a number of “hot” topics, including that of youth unemployment, and in particular, tertiary graduate unemployment. Youth unemployment is not only a big challenge for the Ugandan government; it is also a global phenomenon that has eluded employment scholars and policymakers alike. In this study, the proportion of youths among the participants was 67% (see Table 1 above).

While youth self-employment is a well-trodden area, this research addresses interesting and novel issues; in particular, gainful self-employment among tertiary education graduates. 59% of participants said that they were self-employed.

In the analysis and deductions, the number of emotion-laden words used during a FGD when referring to a particular issue were counted.

Participant perceptions were more enthusiastic towards self-employment in cases where encouragement and support to youths were present; when youths were involvement in self-employment activities; when focus was placed on creating attitudinal change and awareness; when they could tap into family business experiences; and if they participated in educational programmes that imparted practical skills (see Figure 2 below).

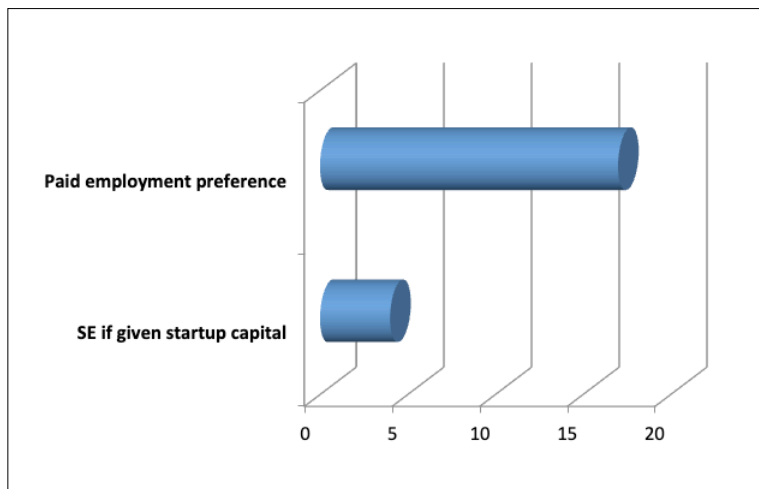
**Figure 2: Perception of AWU students and alumni towards self-employment**



According to a report by UNCTAD (2018), the weakness of dynamic self-employment has important implications in the LDCs (where Uganda belongs). The perceptions of self-employment among participants in this study are important considerations for policy formulation by educational institutions and their regulatory bodies. According to UNCTAD, entrepreneurship policy in the LDCs is often assembled as an alternative to address youth unemployment and a remedy for structural inequalities (UNCTAD 2018). This alludes to that the fact that this type of policy is often an imperfect way of fostering high-impact and dynamic self-employment, which requires a distinct and strategic approach and deliberate long-term nurturing that entail coordinated and coherent action and smart policies across a range of relevant policy areas. These participants' views regarding the perception of AWU students towards self-employment, in Figure 2, in part constitute the distinct and strategic approach.

However, a pertinent issue highlighted by this study is that the participants preferred paid jobs over self-employment (Figure 3 below), which is in line with UNCTAD's observations and a point to be noted by tertiary institutions as well as policymakers.

**Figure 3: Preference between paid employment and self-employment**



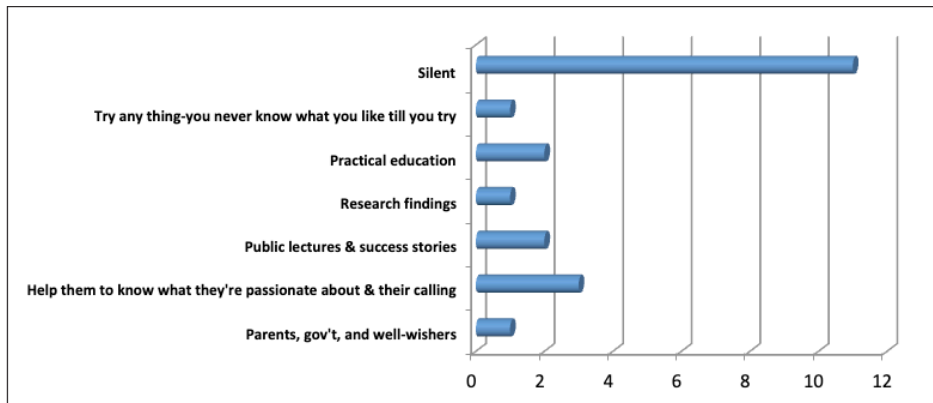
Self-employment is seen as a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon that has been conceptualised as Behavioural and Occupational (UNCTAD 2018). Behavioural definitions of self-employment define the undertaker as a coordinator of production and an agent of change through innovation. Occupational entrepreneurship is the result of an individual's choice between a paid job and self-employment (Lucas 1978; Murphy, Schleifer and Vishny 1991) and the choice to become an entrepreneur is viewed as the result of an evaluation of the returns generated by self-employment (profits plus non-pecuniary benefits), relative to the wages and other benefits available through salaried employment. This distinction therefore refers to opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, rather than necessity-driven entrepreneurs.

However, much of the self-employment among tertiary education graduates in Uganda is necessity-driven and the result of disheartening youth unemployment. The participants' shared views (in Figure 3 above) about preference between self-employment and formal employment are influenced by the necessity of self-employment rather than by choice.

It goes without saying that these survivalist self-employment-by-necessity views of participants are typically less innovative, operate mostly in low productivity and low value added activities, and produce traditional goods and services with minimal new technologies. Limited potential is shown in comparison with what is required for being enthusiastic about self-employment. Their business initiatives, although important to their survival as self-employed individuals, do not generate significant wider benefits. However, survivalist self-employed persons may become opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and have a more positive impact, even if such instances are rare (UNCTAD 2018).

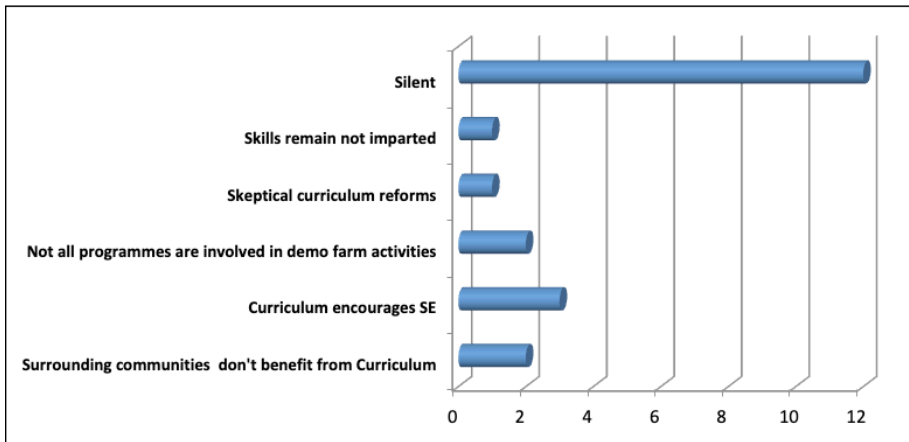
The study sought advice from the participants regarding ways in which students and graduates could stimulate passion for self-employment. These views are reflected in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Participants' perceptions on how to encourage passion for self-employment**



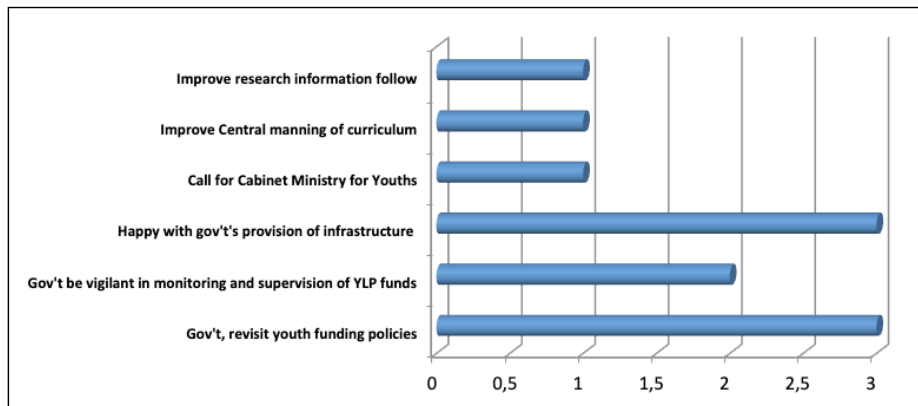
According to UNCTAD (2018), most definitions of self-employment share some basics, in particular: innovation, opportunity seizing and opportunity creation, risk-taking, judgment in decision-making and the development of business organisations. The views of participants regarding the advice to students to encourage passion for self-employment (in Figure 4) concurs with the UNCTAD (2018) conclusions and support teaching based on practical illustrations. This necessitates an examination of the involvement of entrepreneurial start-ups in the courses/programmes in the university's curriculum. Figure 5 below shows how participants rated the entrepreneurial-start-up value of the curriculum of AWU courses/programmes.

**Figure 5: Participants' views on entrepreneurship in AWU's curriculum**



The participants' views on AWU's curriculum attaining the desired effect (in Figure 5) leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to AWU's curriculum meeting the challenge of instilling a self-employment mindset and skills among its students and graduates. This prompts examination of the government's contribution, among the stakeholder support system, in the development of self-employment (provided in Figure 6 below).

**Figure 6: Stakeholder support system: Government promotion of entrepreneurship**



The views in figure 6 were deduced from the research data collected. The participants contended that government has hardly helped young graduates. This view relates to the laws, policies and procedures linked to accessing Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) funds, a government financial portal where the youth can get funding for

start-ups. They also indicated that the YLP is marred with flaws and that procedures are not enabling. The youth have hardly managed to get government support and government's endeavour to support self-employment amongst graduates has not been successful. Their hopes of benefiting from the YLP were slashed as beneficiaries are required to form groups. Since the youths have different interests, this leads to failure and subsequent a denial of financial assistance. One participant said:

They have introduced it [YLP] but the policies are very difficult. If you are to get that money, you should form a group of 10 people or above and it is difficult to know the heart of every person. For me I am the Vice Chairperson of my Sub-County, but it has been hard for me to get YLP funds, and the challenge has been to get those 10 people, because after getting them, everyone wants to part away with his/her own share. People are not trustworthy ... it is difficult for us and we don't know what we can do...

Another government short-coming relates to a lack of close monitoring and supervision of the projects of YLP beneficiaries – a recipe for failure. According to the participants, the YLP is flawed by bribes and corruption, in the form of kickbacks that beneficiaries have to pay in order to qualify for YLP funding.

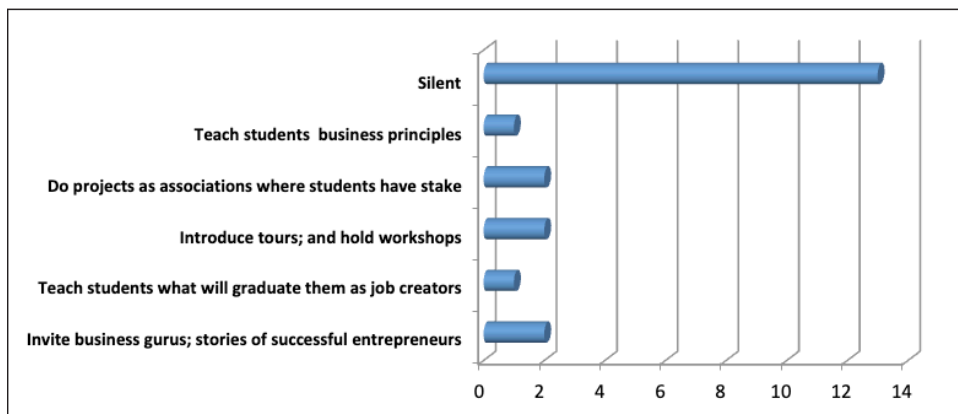
Another participant attributed government's weakness in cultivating and nurturing self-employment to a lack of public information. One participant contended that all developmental information should be made public and asked where the public can access information from the National Research Bureaus, such as the National Agriculture Research Organization (NARO), and if there is a specific portal on which government disseminates information. Other problems cited were impressions that public offices were held by persons that are not experts in the specific field. A participant expressed discontent with government, stating that in his view the *"Ugandan government has not even contributed 1% ... to the youth in general"*, while another remarked that when State created a Ministry for Karamoja Affairs (responsible for coordinating government programs in the Karamoja sub-region) it should have rather created a Ministry for Youth as youth unemployment is a greater challenge to the government than Karamoja's backwardness.

Some participants, however, acknowledged the efforts made by the Ugandan government to support self-employment. They appreciated government's acknowledgement that youth unemployment is a great challenge and the establishment of the YLP (as government availed financial assistance for business start-up by the youth in every district). However, they also noted that poor policies and the ill-motives of the YLP managers have made support ineffective. Other participants were grateful to the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) for providing seeds to farmers at no cost to enable youths to become self-employed in agriculture. Appreciation was also expressed to government for supporting tertiary education institutions, specifically technical institutes that provide practical skills training that will contribute to self-employment.

Participants indicated that dual investments occur in education by both the private sector and government. Private institutions were created with the government providing guidelines to syllabuses and examinations. So, government is involved with planning and implementation and has therefore become a partner by providing policy as well as opportunities. As government sponsors some students at tertiary education institutions and provide loan schemes for a number of courses and programmes, it supports self-employment. One participant was of the view that government is doing its best insofar as developing self-employment is concerned, and that the “ball” for the development of [gainful] self-employment skills amongst graduates is in the “courts” of the educational institutions’ approaches to training.

The participants’ views on the [gainful] self-employment training approach, curriculum, and policy of AWU are reflected in Figure 7 below.

**Figure 7: Participants’ views on the training model for gainful self-employment**



The participants’ views, in Figure 7, concur with the ingredients of a training model for gainful self-employment as highlighted in a United Nations’ report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (1985). This report recommends that training be integrated with production, so as to develop both technical and social skills and reap the rewards of efficiency. In addition to setting up youth in production units of their own with subsequent assistance from industry, parts of the training model for universities and other tertiary education institutions referred to above are also essential (FAO, UNESCO and ILO, 1985). For his part, Prasad (1988) says that strategies favouring the promotion of gainful self-employment requires entrepreneurial orientation among beneficiaries in addition to the need to possess skills in modern technology and managerial capabilities.

The relationship between gainful self-employment and its predictors (Cognitive patterns, Entrepreneurship mentoring, Psychological Capital, Social Capital, and Personal Initiative) has become evident through causal connections depicted in the various matrices of the variables and themes, as well as descriptive graphical representations – even more than they would in the quasi-experimental tradition, which seems to operate with simple efficient causes producing stimulus and response (Eikeland 2008:34).

In terms of content for developing gainful self-employment among students and graduates, the participants indicated that students must be encouraged to start up and take advantage of YLP financing; students need to partner with the business community through networking; AWU needs to make skilling programmes available to all students and make the curriculum practical; and lastly, support the creation of a positive work culture among students. The government and its partners that have vested interests in combating graduate unemployment are calling on the youth to re-equip themselves with vocational skills even after the completion of university in order to survive in the modern labour market with its shifts and complexities.

The results of this study support the notion to replace the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE), with a Uganda Vocational/Technical Certificate of Education (UVTCE). Such a move is supported by the views of numerous participants, who call for university studies to also focus on a vocational approach. This view was also expressed by the Sheema District Commercial Officer who stated that “the problem is education system... just give you the qualification but not the skill. It awards a Bachelor’s Degree in the Social Sciences, but with such a degree you can only look for a job”. He continued:

Someone who has gone to a technical institute, may have learned brick-laying, which can earn him a living because everyone builds. An example is the engineers in the district who started at technical institutes which gave them skills unlike engineers from universities who finish with merely theoretical knowledge. Someone at technical institutions completes a certificate at technical institutions, works, then does a diploma and continues working or completes a degree. Starting with a skill, such a person ends up with a qualification and a job.

The opinion expressed by the District Commercial Officer points to the huge gap in Uganda’s education system. The UACE level is achieved at a point in time when students are maturing and joining the workforce; however, the classroom is still purely academic, with little imparting of life skills. As stated, the call to vocationalise university studies amount to scrapping the UACE and replacing it with a UVTCE – this should be part of the agenda of the Ministry of Education.



Another main finding is that other than the students of the faculty of Science and Information Technology (IT), in other faculties (Management, Humanities and Education), studies are theoretical or devoid of practical experience. Following this, the study recommends that every student from the other faculties participates in at least one of the projects pitched by students from the faculties of Science and Information Technology (IT), and the group should work together to ensure that their project is replicated in the community or commercialised for gainful self-employment. This will serve as the major ingredient for AWU to develop a model of enhancing its graduates' transition to gainful self-employment.

Past studies on self-employment have stressed the sociological and psychological characteristics of the self-employed and investigated their role in providing jobs for the unemployed, with most papers analysing the relationship between the rates of unemployment and self-employment. These studies deployed micro- and macro-level analyses (such as Evans and Leighton 1989; Blanchflower and Meyer 1992; and Banchflower 2000) – among others. In reviewing evidence relating to unemployment rates and the start-up of new firms, it seems that an important requirement is proper guiding and skills for creating new enterprises.

According to Laing (2011) the reasons as to why people may choose self-employment include the desire to sell their skills and/or expertise; the need to prove an idea; relishing the challenge; generating a second income stream; reacting to an ill-informed first career decision; peer or family pressure; and a feeling that there are no other options. Of much importance in the case of this study is the feeling that there are no other options which often stems from the disheartening phenomenon of graduate unemployment and from an ill-informed first career decision – by studying for salaried or hired employment. However, the other reasons listed by Laing are also of relevance. Participants noted that self-employment implied independence in making business decisions and indicated that with the disheartening problem of graduate unemployment, self-employment is simply the way to go.

Kubberoed and Hagen's (2015) NVP mentoring model in entrepreneurship education sheds light on the views expressed in the FGDs and during interviews. Calls for coaching and mentoring, as in "problem definition" and "proposed solution" are regarded as essential ingredients of the entrepreneurial learning process and will contribute to improved outcomes. This study is an effort to make some practical rather than theoretical suggestions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevant theoretical aspects relating to the value of gainful self-employment were highlighted through the Chaos Theory of Careers, the NVP Mentoring Model in Entrepreneurship Education, Psychological Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, Personal initiative Theory, and the Unified Self-Employment Transition Theory. The connection between theory and practice was evident in the analysis that formed part of this study.

By and large, participants' enthusiasm for self-employment were divided between positive and negative, however they preferred fixed job offers and employment to self-employment, which could be interpreted as the "writing on the wall" for the development of self-employment programmes by universities and other tertiary educational institutions as well as government. The participants are of the view that they would become more enthusiastic about self-employment if there was more encouragement and support to the youth; greater involvement of the youth in self-employment-yielding activities; awareness creation and changing of students and graduates' attitudes; learning more from family business experiences; and provisioning of education that imparts real-life practical skills. In the participants' view, the relevance of AWU's curriculum in achieving the desired effects mentioned above, was found wanting and leaving a lot to be desired in meeting the challenge of instilling a mindset of self-employment and skills among students and graduates.

The participants found government's contribution as a stakeholder support system in the development of self-employment equally lacking. Government's policies for YLP were found to be restrictive instead of helping youths/students and graduates to access the government portal for financing self-employment initiatives among students and graduates. Nonetheless, government was commended for acknowledging that the problem of unemployment of tertiary graduates is a ticking time bomb that could undo the socio-economic and security gains of government during the last three decades. Government programmes such as the YLP kindred programmes and the NAADS which distributes seeds to farmers at no cost, were viewed in a positive light. These are the deliberate efforts by government to promote self-employment in agriculture and among tertiary education graduates. Government was also commended as a partner in the education system, and providing policy guidelines for education that is sensitive to the promotion of self-employment.

Taken together, self-employment by many tertiary education students and graduates is survivalist and by necessity, and is seen as less productive than opportunity-seeking. Due to disheartening unemployment being the driver of survivalist self-employment, tertiary education graduates are typically less innovative, operate mostly in low productivity and low value-added activities, and produce traditional goods and services with minimal latest technologies. This impedes the growth potential of their business start-ups and limits their success in self-employment. Their business initiatives,

although important to the survival of the self-employed, do not generate significant wider benefits. However, survivalist self-employed persons may become opportunity-driven entrepreneurs that could have a more positive impact on economic growth. This signals to educational institutions and government that all is not dismal, but that encouragement should continue to increase the success associated with survivalist self-employment. This could be achieved by developing new ways of preparing students to face the realities of a labour market that is in track with a growing number of tertiary graduates and establishes ingredients for educational institutions to develop a model to enhance transition to gainful self-employment.

It is the duty of educational institutions and government to react to the abovementioned challenges. They can learn from FAO, UNESCO and ILO (1984) and, Mittal's (1988) components for a training model for gainful self-employment, which envisages training that is integrated with production so as to develop technical and social skills and reap the benefits of efficiency; and set up youth in their own production units with assistance from the industry. These are essential components of a training model for tertiary education institutions as they need to extensively plan for promoting gainful self-employment skills, entrepreneurial orientation, skills in modern technology and managerial capabilities.

Drawing from the conclusions above, it is recommended that the development of gainful self-employment skills for tertiary graduates are prioritised by the Ugandan government, universities and other tertiary education institutions. Those interested in combating Uganda's disheartening levels of graduate unemployment call on tertiary graduates to retool themselves with vocational skills even after the completion of university studies in order to survive the shifts and complexities of the modern labour market. As this study is also aimed at improving social justice and ensuring social transformation, it recommends replacing the UACE with UVTCE.

As the focus areas of students that are not part of the faculties on Science and IT are often devoid of sufficient practical applications, the study recommends that students from all faculties participate in at least one project pitched by students from the Science and IT environment, and that they work together on projects that could be replicated in the community or be commercialised for gainful self-employment. This could serve as a major ingredient for AWU to develop a model to enhance its graduates' transition to gainful self-employment.

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