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Degrees Are Not Enough: An Analysis of Why Today's Graduates Must Compete Beyond the Classroom in Uganda

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*Employability,
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Skills mismatch,
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This article analyses why university degrees in Uganda no longer ensure employment and examines how skills, work-based learning and the labour-market context influence graduate outcomes. The manuscript synthesises empirical and conceptual studies on Ugandan education, employability and school-to-work transitions. Methods include analysing evidence from tracer studies, cross-sectional surveys, case studies and qualitative inquiries involving students, graduates, employers and educators. The analysis highlights skills mismatches, the quality of internships and industrial training, readiness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR), and structural constraints in the labour market. Findings reveal ongoing gaps between academic knowledge and the skills employers require, especially in practical, digital and soft skills. Work-based learning opportunities tend to be brief, poorly aligned with programmes, and lack adequate mentorship, which limits their effectiveness in enhancing employability. Meanwhile, university curricula only partially address emerging technological demands, leaving many graduates underprepared for technology-driven workplaces. These individual and institutional issues are worsened by high youth unemployment and underemployment and reliance on informal hiring networks, which weaken the signalling value of degrees and increase dependence on social capital and entrepreneurial skills. In conclusion, the synthesis demonstrates that degrees alone are insufficient to secure good jobs in Uganda, as employability now relies on a broader range of skills, experiences, and networks. Recommendations include improving curriculum–industry alignment, adopting structured and mentored work-based learning, embedding digital and Fourth Industrial Revolution competencies across programmes, and expanding career guidance and entrepreneurship support. Universities and policymakers should also work with employers to establish shared standards for graduate attributes and create more transparent recruitment pathways. Future research should explore longitudinal studies of graduate career paths, assess specific employability interventions such as revamped internship models or skills boot camps, and investigate how gender, socio-economic background, and regional factors influence access to opportunities beyond formal education.

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INTRODUCTION

Across Uganda, holding a university degree no longer guarantees access to decent employment. While enrolments in higher education have increased, many graduates find it difficult to turn their academic qualifications into sustainable jobs, highlighting a widening gap between what universities deliver and what the labour market requires (Nakawala et al., 2025; Bogere et al., 2023; Kasule et al., 2023). Employers more frequently report that new graduates have strong theoretical knowledge but lack the practical, behavioural and digital skills needed in today's workplaces (Bagonza et al., 2021; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025). This "skills mismatch" is especially evident in problem-solving, communication, creativity, ICT skills, and adaptability, which are essential to employability in a changing, unpredictable economy (Nakawala, 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).

Work-based learning, which could help fill this gap, is often too brief, poorly coordinated with academic programmes, and insufficiently supervised, thereby reducing its effectiveness in preparing graduates for employment (Kintu et al., 2019; Eseza, 2025; Ngonzi et al., 2024). Industrial training placements often become mere procedural obligations rather than structured opportunities to develop professional skills, build

networks and gain clarity about careers (Nakawala et al., 2025). Consequently, many students graduate with limited exposure to real-world tasks, feedback and mentorship, further diminishing the degree's value as a standalone indicator of employability (Nakawala, 2025).

These challenges are intensified by the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Emerging technologies are reshaping production, services and knowledge work, yet Ugandan university curricula only partially address the technological drivers and competencies associated with 4IR (Kasule et al., 2023; Gyagenda, 2023). Limited awareness of 4IR among both students and staff, coupled with inadequate digital infrastructure and training, means that many graduates leave university without the advanced ICT, data and innovation skills that employers increasingly expect (Nakawala, 2025). This widens the gap between graduates who are merely credentialled and those who are genuinely prepared for technology-intensive labour markets.

At the same time, structural labour market constraints exacerbate these individual-level skill and readiness issues. Uganda's youth face persistently high unemployment and underemployment, with many engaged in low-quality informal work or forced to accept jobs outside their fields of study (Paul et al., 2021;

Babyetsiza, 2018). Recruitment processes are often informal and driven by networks, favouring social capital over formal qualifications (Kintu et al., 2019; Gyagenda, 2023). In this context, networking skills, entrepreneurial abilities and the capacity for self-employment become vital factors for labour market success—yet these are rarely emphasised within traditional degree programmes (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025).

Overall, these trends show why degrees alone no longer guarantee jobs in Uganda. As shown in Figure 1, skills mismatches, limited work-based learning, low 4IR readiness and challenging labour market conditions weaken the value of academic credentials and raise the requirements for graduate employability. Recognising these interconnected issues is crucial for rethinking how universities, employers and policymakers can better support graduates to succeed beyond university.

Background and Problem Statement

Uganda faces high youth unemployment and underemployment, with many graduates lacking the skills needed for the job market and experiencing educational and skills mismatches (Bogere et al., 2023; Gyagenda, 2023). The expansion of the university sector has increased access without a corresponding growth in high-quality, relevant opportunities, putting more pressure on graduates to stand out beyond their formal qualifications (Bagonza et al., 2021; Gyagenda, 2023). Studies highlight a “skills paradox”: shortages of skilled technicians and professionals exist alongside unemployed or underemployed graduates (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Gyagenda, 2023). This situation supports the view that degrees alone are insufficient for today’s graduates.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse why university degrees in Uganda no longer guarantee employment, focusing on graduate labour-market outcomes.

- To examine how skills, work-based learning (internships, industrial training), and Fourth Industrial Revolution readiness shape graduates’ employability.
- To synthesise empirical and conceptual evidence on Ugandan education, employability, and school-to-work transitions in order to propose policy and curriculum strategies that improve graduate outcomes.

Study Questions

The article answers the following study questions:

- How and why have university degrees in Uganda ceased to guarantee employment, given current labour-market conditions?
- How do skills (practical, digital, and soft), work-based learning experiences, and readiness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution influence the employability outcomes of Ugandan graduates?
- How do structural labour-market factors (youth unemployment, underemployment, informal hiring networks) interact with individual skills and educational practices to shape graduate outcomes?

Significance of the Study

- It clarifies why degrees alone no longer ensure employment in Uganda, showing that employability now depends on broader skills, work experience, and networks, not just credentials.
- It informs curriculum reform and work-based learning by identifying specific gaps in practical, digital, and socio-emotional skills and weaknesses in internships and industrial training, guiding universities and policymakers on where to intervene.
- It has policy relevance for tackling youth unemployment and underemployment, by explaining how labour-market structures and informal recruitment weaken the signalling value of degrees and by proposing ways to improve curriculum–industry alignment, embed Fourth Industrial Revolution

competencies, and expand career guidance and entrepreneurship support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Skills Gaps and Competency Deficits

Evidence across secondary, TVET, and university levels consistently reveals deficits in skills required by society and employers. A-level graduates demonstrate strong general knowledge but lack creativity, practical skills, critical thinking, ICT skills, communication, and problem-solving abilities, making them inadequately prepared to apply theory in real-world situations (Bogere et al., 2023). Similarly, university and TVET graduates often lack key employability skills such as communication, teamwork, integrity, initiative and problem-solving, which leads to poor interview performance and early job loss (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Bagonza et al., 2021; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023). Tracer studies in engineering TVET programmes found that although 63% secured employment within a year, underemployment remained high at 37%, with employers citing significant gaps in digital literacy and adaptive problem-solving (Nakawala, 2025). Teacher education research further highlights communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, leadership, adaptability and time management as core employer priorities beyond subject knowledge (Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025).

Curriculum, Pedagogy, and 4IR Readiness

Uganda's education system is often criticised for its colonial legacy, a theory-focused approach, and a lack of adaptability to modern economic and technological demands (Bogere et al., 2023; Kasule et al., 2023; Gyagenda, 2023). Analyses of higher education preparedness for the 4IR reveal that curricula only partially or poorly address key technological drivers, while non-technological skills are unevenly integrated (Kasule et al., 2023). TVET curricula lag behind industrial

change, particularly in digital skills and interdisciplinary applications, resulting in graduates whose competencies risk becoming outdated (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025). Calls for a complete overhaul of the system emphasise the need for competency-based, vocationally relevant, and problem-solving curricula, improved teacher training, and the inclusion of local needs alongside global competitiveness (Bogere et al., 2023; Kintu et al., 2019; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Gyagenda, 2023).

Work-Based Learning, Internships, and Vocational Training

Beyond classroom learning, structured internships and vocational training have significant potential to enhance employability when properly implemented. A systematic review of Ugandan universities and vocational institutions indicates that participation in internships and vocational programmes improves technical skills, soft skills, and employment outcomes, with graduates reporting higher job satisfaction and career progression (Eseza, 2025). However, tracer studies in TVET reveal that industrial training is often too brief, poorly supervised, and insufficiently aligned with job requirements, limiting its positive effects and, in some cases, leading to lower employability—likely due to ineffective design and implementation (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025). Recommendations focus on strengthening links between institutions and industry, expanding apprenticeship schemes, and integrating project-based and problem-based learning to better connect theory with practice (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025).

Labour Market Structure, Networks, and Family Support

Labour market entry is influenced not only by skills but also by structural barriers and social capital. Studies highlight a persistent reliance on informal hiring networks that disadvantages graduates without strong connections and

contribute to unequal access to jobs (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021). Many graduates see family support—financial assistance for job hunting, networking, and start-up costs—as vital for a successful transition; lacking such support is associated with extended unemployment, NEET risks, unstable informal work, and emotional stress (Paul et al., 2021). Due to slow formal job creation, self-employment and entrepreneurship become important routes, with employers and policymakers emphasising entrepreneurial training as a crucial factor in employability (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Babyetsiza, 2018).

Expansion of Higher Education and Employability Outcomes

The expansion of the university sector has boosted enrolment and expanded programmes, but its impact on employability remains mixed. Employer and lecturer surveys indicate that growth is associated with a broader range of employment opportunities and can equip some graduates with the necessary skills. However, concerns about quality and relevance continue to persist (Bagonza et al., 2021). Quality assurance initiatives aim to align education with labour market demands, yet many graduates still lack vital employability skills (Bogere et al., 2023; Bagonza et al., 2021; Gyagenda, 2023). Case studies of leading institutions such as Makerere University highlight tensions between ambitions to become research-led, resource constraints, and ongoing challenges in undergraduate teaching and student support (Ngonzi et al., 2024; Hand, 2025; Etomaru et al., 2023).

Transition Support and Learning Environment

Studies on medical and TVET graduates show that while many utilise knowledge and skills gained at university in their jobs and are satisfied with teaching quality, significant gaps remain in infrastructure, career guidance, and institutional support for internships and job searches (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Ngonzi

et al., 2024). Strategic management efforts on curriculum reform emphasise the necessity of systematically integrating competency-based approaches, industry partnerships, and dynamic capabilities to bridge the gap between degrees and the labour market (David & Okumu, 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).

Conceptual Framing: Competing Beyond the Classroom

The reviewed evidence indicates three interconnected areas in which Ugandan graduates must now “compete” beyond simply holding a degree.

- **Skills Domain** – building a portfolio of technical, digital, entrepreneurial and soft skills that surpass minimum curriculum requirements (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Bogere et al., 2023; Kasule et al., 2023; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).
- **Experiential Domain** – acquiring credible experience through internships, apprenticeships, projects, volunteering, and entrepreneurial ventures that demonstrate work readiness (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024; Babyetsiza, 2018).
- **Relational and Strategic Domain** – utilising networks (family, alums, professional bodies), information and self-marketing in a labour market characterised by informal recruitment and limited formal opportunities (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Kintu et al., 2019; Babyetsiza, 2018).

Within this framework, a degree acts as a necessary but not sufficient entry credential; competitive advantage stems from how graduates enhance and communicate these areas.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The synthesis employed explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only studies

directly relevant to graduate employability in Uganda were included. These encompassed empirical and conceptual works focused on Ugandan education, employability, or transitions to the labour market, drawing on tracer studies, cross-sectional surveys, case studies, systematic reviews, and qualitative explorations involving students, graduates, employers, educators, or university leaders (Nakawala, 2025; Eseza, 2025; Bogere et al., 2023; Bagonza et al., 2021; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024; Hand, 2025; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023; Etomaru et al., 2023). Studies were also included if they examined curriculum, internships, vocational training, employability skills, or institutional factors (e.g., leadership, policy, learning environment) that have a definite impact on graduates' work readiness and labour-market outcomes (Nakawala, 2025; Kasule et al., 2023; Eseza, 2025; Kakooza et al., 2025; Hand, 2025).

Exclusion criteria excluded publications that did not focus on Uganda or that discussed education without any link to employability, skills, or transitions into work. Papers that were purely theoretical or opinion-based without empirical evidence in the Ugandan context, studies focused solely on basic or primary education, and articles where graduate outcomes or labour market transitions were not reported or could not be inferred were also excluded (Bogere et al., 2023; Gyagenda, 2023). Additionally, international comparative studies were included only if Ugandan data were disaggregated and could offer meaningful insights into local graduate employability (Mutebi et al., 2023; Hand, 2025).

To enhance quality and consistency, only peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and formally reported tracer studies published between 2010 and 2025 were included, ensuring coverage of recent reforms and labour-market dynamics (Bagonza et al., 2021; Nakawala, 2025; Eseza, 2025; Kakooza et al., 2025). Conference papers, unpublished theses, and reports lacking sufficient methodological detail were excluded unless they provided unique, rigorously collected

data on graduate transitions or employer perceptions (Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024). These criteria aimed to balance the breadth of evidence with methodological robustness and contextual relevance to Uganda's graduate employability landscape.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Skills, Work-Based Learning and Labour-Market Context

Objective 1: Why Degrees No Longer Guarantee Employment

Evidence from Uganda indicates that having formal qualifications alone does not guarantee secure employment. Follow-up research on engineering diploma holders shows that while many find work within a year, a significant minority face prolonged unemployment and underemployment, highlighting structural issues rather than individual failings (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025). Employers are increasingly valuing practical skills, digital literacy, and soft skills over certificates alone, and report ongoing gaps in these areas (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Guàrdia et al., 2021; Tagulwa et al., 2023). Across both university and TVET routes, poor alignment between curricula and labour market needs, coupled with heavy reliance on classroom-based teaching, leaves graduates inadequately prepared for technology-driven and rapidly evolving workplaces (Nakawala et al., 2025; Sophia & Onen, 2024; Nakawala, 2025; Musisi & Sessanga, 2019; Kasule et al., 2023). Dependence on informal hiring networks and unequal access to opportunities further diminish the signalling power of degrees, favouring those with social capital over those with similar or better academic records but weaker connections (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Ntale et al., 2025). Overall, these factors explain why university degrees in Uganda no longer ensure timely or decent employment.

Objective 2: Skills, Work-Based Learning and 4IR Readiness

Studies consistently show that employability is enhanced when graduates possess a blend of technical, digital, and socio-emotional skills. Employers in engineering, teaching, and hospitality value problem-solving, communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence alongside domain knowledge (Nakawala et al., 2025; Sophia & Onen, 2024; Nakawala, 2025; Kakooza et al., 2025; Tagulwa et al., 2023; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Tushabe et al., 2024). However, multiple Ugandan and regional studies report that these skills remain underdeveloped during university programmes, leading to a partial skills mismatch (Sophia & Onen, 2024; Nakawala, 2025; Guàrdia et al., 2021; Tushabe & Murimi, 2024; Rwabuhinga et al., 2025).

Work-based learning (internships, industrial training, attachments) is a critical but underperforming bridge. Systematic review evidence indicates that well-structured internships and vocational training enhance technical and soft skills and are associated with higher employment and better career progression (Eseza, 2025). However, Ugandan tracer studies highlight that many internships are short, poorly mentored, or weakly integrated with curricula; in some TVET cases, participation in monitored internships is even negatively associated with employability, signalling implementation problems rather than inherent ineffectiveness (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025). Strengthening design, supervision and assessment of work-based learning is therefore central to improving outcomes.

Regarding the Fourth Industrial Revolution, graduates report only partial exposure to key technological drivers, with digital and advanced technology competencies lagging behind non-technical skills in most university curricula (Kasule et al., 2023). Employers note deficits in digital literacy, CAD, and IoT-related applications even in technical fields, emphasising

that current programmes do not fully prepare graduates for technology-driven workplaces (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kasule et al., 2023). Integrating 4IR-relevant digital and innovation skills across disciplines, rather than in isolated ICT courses, is a crucial requirement.

Objective 3: Synthesis for Policy and Curriculum Strategies

Synthesising evidence from Uganda and East Africa, three key strategies emerge: curriculum alignment, high-quality work-based learning, and strengthening labour-market institutions. Curriculum reforms at universities and TVET institutions should more systematically incorporate employability skills (such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, entrepreneurship, digital skills, and emotional intelligence) and offer authentic, practice-oriented learning experiences (Eseza, 2025; Mgaiwa, 2021; Sophia & Onen, 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Iwara, 2025; Tagulwa et al., 2023; Musisi & Sessanga, 2019; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Rwabuhinga et al., 2025). Structured and mentored internships, apprenticeships, and project-based learning—developed collaboratively with employers—are essential to transform classroom knowledge into workplace-ready skills (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala et al., 2025; Kakooza et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Tushabe & Murimi, 2024; Tushabe et al., 2024; Jackson & Dean, 2022).

At the same time, education reforms alone cannot address high youth unemployment, underemployment, and segmented labour markets. Evidence on the role of social capital shows that networks and relationships significantly influence the impact of education on employability, making transparent recruitment pathways, active labour-market information systems, and employer–university partnerships vital complements to curriculum changes (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Bagonza et al., 2021; Guàrdia et al., 2021; Ntale et al., 2025). Policies supporting entrepreneurship training, innovation hubs, and

rural and sector-specific ecosystems can further diversify pathways into work, especially where formal wage jobs are limited.

Overall, the literature indicates that enhancing graduate outcomes in Uganda requires shifting from a “degree-first” approach towards a comprehensive strategy that integrates robust, 4IR-compatible curricula with high-quality work-based learning and more inclusive, transparent labour market structures.

Why Degrees Are No Longer Enough

First, credential inflation and the expansion of higher education mean more graduates compete for a limited pool of formal jobs, reducing the signalling power of a degree alone (Bagonza et al., 2021; Hand, 2025; Gyagenda, 2023). Employers differentiate applicants based on practical competence, behaviour and adaptability rather than solely by academic ranking (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Bagonza et al., 2021; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025).

Second, skills mismatch and curriculum rigidity weaken the labour market value of purely academic achievement. Evidence of deficiencies in practical, 21st-century, and digital skills among A-level, TVET, and university graduates shows that formal qualifications may not directly translate into workplace performance (Nakawala, 2025; Bogere et al., 2023; Kasule et al., 2023; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023). Without intentional beyond-classroom learning, graduates risk being underprepared compared to employer expectations.

Third, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and rapid technological change require continuous upskilling and interdisciplinary abilities. Many graduates only have a basic understanding of 4IR and limited exposure to its technological drivers, emphasising the importance of extra-curricular and self-directed learning with digital tools and emerging technologies (Nakawala, 2025; Kasule et al., 2023; David & Okumu, 2025).

Fourth, labour market structure and social capital mean that holding a degree does not guarantee access to opportunities. Informal networks dominate many hiring processes, and lacking family or social support hampers effective job searching and entrepreneurship (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Babyetsiza, 2018).

Finally, the psychosocial and economic pressures of transition—ranging from financial difficulties to emotional stress and reliance on peers—necessitate resilience and agency that are seldom developed through classroom instruction alone (Bogere et al., 2023; Paul et al., 2021; Babyetsiza, 2018; Gyagenda, 2023).

CONCLUSION

In Uganda’s modern labour market, degrees are essential but not enough for secure and meaningful jobs. Structural constraints, skills gaps and 4IR-related changes mean that graduates must go beyond the classroom by developing broader skills, gaining real work experience and navigating labour market structures strategically. A coordinated approach combining graduates’ agency with institutional reform and national policy is needed to ensure that higher education provides not only qualifications but also the skills for personal growth and national progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Pathways to Compete Beyond the Classroom

The literature identifies several strategies graduates can employ to boost their competitiveness:

- **Participation in quality internships and industrial attachments:** focusing on placements that provide real responsibilities, mentorship and alignment with occupational skills (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024).

- **Participation in vocational or skills-focused training alongside or after degree programmes:** especially in high-demand technical and digital competencies (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kasule et al., 2023; Kintu et al., 2019).
- **Entrepreneurship and self-employment preparation:** including access to start-up capital, tools and business skills; this is particularly relevant given the limited formal job creation and the strong self-employment culture among young people (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Kintu et al., 2019; Babyetsiza, 2018).
- **Intentional development of soft skills**—such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, leadership, emotional intelligence, time management and self-sufficiency—through co-curricular activities, student leadership, community projects and targeted training (Bogere et al., 2023; Bagonza et al., 2021; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).
- **Strategic networking and utilisation of information:** leveraging family, alumni, mentors, employment agencies and labour market information systems to identify opportunities and navigate recruitment practices (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Kintu et al., 2019).
- **Continuous learning and up-skilling** in 4IR-related technologies, supported by scholarships, grants and public-private partnerships that promote research and innovation (Nakawala, 2025; Kasule et al., 2023; David & Okumu, 2025; Etomaru et al., 2023).
- and regularly update curricula to address changing industry requirements, especially digital and 4IR skills (Nakawala, 2025; Bogere et al., 2023; Kasule et al., 2023; David & Okumu, 2025; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).
- Systematically embed employability skills with clear outcomes and assessment of communication, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, leadership and adaptability (Bogere et al., 2023; Bagonza et al., 2021; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).
- Strengthen industry collaborations to co-develop curricula, broaden apprenticeships and promote joint training with production (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024; Hand, 2025).
- Develop strong career services and labour market information systems to assist with internships, job searches and career planning (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024).
- Enhance learning environments and infrastructure, especially in laboratories, ICT and practice-based spaces, to enable graduates to convert theoretical knowledge into practical skills (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Ngonzi et al., 2024; Gyagenda, 2023).

For Government and Policymakers

Policy should align education reform, youth employment and industrial strategies:

- Deepen the implementation of competency-based curriculum reforms throughout the education system and harmonise them with higher education (Bogere et al., 2023; Kasule et al., 2023; David & Okumu, 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).
- Offer incentives to encourage employer participation in training, such as tax benefits, recognition programmes and co-funded apprenticeship schemes (Nakawala et al.,

Policy and Institutional Implications

For Universities and TVET Institutions

Institutions must shift from merely credentialing to a broader engagement in employability and innovation.

- Incorporate competency-based and problem-based approaches throughout programmes

2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; David & Okumu, 2025).

- Increase funding for research, innovation and postgraduate training to strengthen the national knowledge base and generate higher-skilled employment opportunities (Kasule et al., 2023; David & Okumu, 2025; Etomaru et al., 2023).
- Support schemes for youth entrepreneurship and start-ups encompass targeted finance, incubation and mentorship programs (Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Kintu et al., 2019; Babyetsiza, 2018; Gyagenda, 2023).

For Students and Graduates

Within current constraints, individual graduates can act strategically by:

- Treating the degree as a foundation rather than a final product and investing in targeted skills training and certifications that meet demand (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kasule et al., 2023; Rwabuhinga et al., 2024; Kakooza et al., 2025; Gyagenda, 2023).
- Seeking high-quality experiential learning (such as internships, volunteering, projects, and part-time work) early in their studies, rather than only after graduation (Eseza, 2025; Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Kintu et al., 2019; Ngonzi et al., 2024).
- Actively developing professional networks through social media, alumni associations and professional bodies, while also leveraging family and community ties where available (Nakawala et al., 2025; Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Babyetsiza, 2018).
- Focusing on entrepreneurial and self-management skills to stay adaptable across formal employment, self-employment and hybrid career paths (Nakawala, 2025; Paul et al., 2021; Kintu et al., 2019; Babyetsiza, 2018; Gyagenda, 2023).

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