



Reflections on Uganda's Educational Philosophy: Towards a Paradigm Shift for Fostering Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Start-up Ecosystems in Higher Education

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Abstract

Uganda's formal education system, rooted in colonial paradigms, continues to produce graduates oriented towards employment rather than enterprise creation. Despite over a century of educational evolution, the underlying philosophy has not sufficiently shifted to cultivate innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems essential for economic transformation. Yet, while existing studies have highlighted the absence of a coherent educational philosophy in Uganda, few have critically examined how this philosophical vacuum specifically constrains the development of innovative and entrepreneurial graduates. This paper addresses that gap by examining how Uganda's educational philosophy can be reimagined to foster innovation-driven and entrepreneurial mindsets in higher education. The study identified the philosophical foundations underpinning Uganda's higher education, and assessed how the available philosophy enabled and constrained conditions for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems. Using the qualitative approach, the study adopted a descriptive and explanatory design. Data was collected from a sample of eight key informants (KIs), three in-depth

interviews (IDIs), and two focus group discussions (FGDs). The two FGDs comprised university lecturers (UCU–Mbale Campus) and teacher trainees (Gulu University). Participants were drawn from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), NCHE, research organisations, and among educationists and university professors, representing university administrators, policymakers, professors of education and philosophy, education research organisations, university lecturers, and teacher trainees. Higher education stakeholders across four regions of Uganda were consulted in 2022. The reflective interview guides were administered and analysed thematically with descriptive and analytical methods. The study found that the country lacks a coherent, explicitly articulated educational philosophy and instead operates with an amalgam of competing philosophical orientations. We argue that this philosophical fragmentation, inherited from colonial educational models that emphasised passive knowledge consumption over active knowledge creation, fundamentally constrains graduates' capacity to innovate and establish enterprises. The paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational reform by offering a contextual framework for embedding innovation and entrepreneurship within Uganda's higher education philosophy, ultimately supporting the development of sustainable start-up ecosystems that address local challenges while connecting to global opportunities.

Keywords: *Educational philosophy; Paradigm shift; Innovation; Entrepreneurship; Higher education.*

Introduction

In many African countries, formal schooling was introduced through missionary activity during the colonial era. In Uganda, Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries established formal schooling in 1877 and 1879, respectively (Ssekamwa, 1997). According to Tiberondwa (1998), the missionaries did not introduce formal schooling to create citizens who would be meaningful creators, innovators, and enterprising; rather, the aim of missionary education was to enable their converts to read the Bible. This missionary orientation had lasting consequences for the character of Uganda's education system. Over time, the system evolved

from missionary education to Western, colonial, and, ultimately, the formal education that is currently in place. With this evolution came a greater emphasis on the 3Rs (writing, reading, and arithmetic), which led to increased literacy rates but also a disproportionate focus on academic achievement rather than the holistic development of values and skills needed to produce an all-round person (Ssekamwa, 1997). Critically, from its very inception, formal schooling in Uganda was founded on British philosophy, influenced by the Enlightenment in Europe and the imperatives of colonialism. This meant that Uganda's education was oriented not towards fostering creativity and innovation in graduates, but rather towards conforming to the agendas of its colonial rulers. By implication, the Ugandan formal education system was not built on any of the indigenous philosophies that might have enabled graduates to become independent thinkers and problem solvers; instead, it was designed to produce workers who would serve British interests. As Mamdani (1976) observes, Uganda's education system was formed to serve foreign interests, with an intrinsic purpose of creating classes which would be employed at the discretion of the colonial or imperial sub-systems. This colonial legacy in educational philosophy remains central to understanding why Uganda's higher education system continues to struggle with producing graduates who are innovative and entrepreneurial, a concern that this paper seeks to examine through philosophical reflection.

Concept of philosophy

To interrogate Uganda's educational system through a philosophical lens, it is necessary to first clarify the concept of philosophy itself. Philosophy has no univocal definition; however, this study adopts Bhatti's formulation, which defines philosophy as "a systematic reflection on the entirety of life with an intent of understanding its nature" (Bhatt, 2018, p. 14). When applied to the educational context, the philosophy of education entails taking a critical outlook at pedagogy. It also implies reflectively examining educational policy and law, critically evaluating teaching and learning spaces, and assessing the implicit and explicit results of learning, including the quality and character of school graduates. The significance of philosophy in this context is that, ideally, every nation should possess its own general philosophy or national philosophical

framework that guides society and serves as a pivot for all other sub-philosophies, including educational philosophy. Various studies have confirmed that nationals or citizens are a reflection of the philosophy espoused by their nation (Bhatti, 2018; Moore, 1982; Muwagga, 2006). Conversely, countries or nations without a clear philosophy produce citizens who are challenged in many ways, most especially in terms of ethos, civility, creativity, and other human survival skills. It is precisely these capacities, including innovation and entrepreneurship skills, that are assumed to be cultivated through the school's explicit and implicit, or hidden, curriculum.

Educational philosophy

Building on the above general understanding of philosophy, it is important to specify what constitutes an educational philosophy. An educational philosophy is a sub-philosophy that examines the rationale of our educational ideals in order to evolve a suitable system for educational planning and administration, teaching, learning, and evaluation, and to develop a strategy for an effective and worthwhile educational process that solves the problems of life in any society (Bhatti, 2018). In the case of Uganda, findings from Namanya's study (2024), *Ethical Implications of Uganda's Education System on Graduates*, revealed that, like all other African countries whose education systems are generally Euro-skewed, Uganda does not have a general national philosophy from which other sub-philosophies can be drawn. The lack of a clear general philosophy to guide sub-philosophies such as educational philosophy partially explains why Uganda's education system has been constrained in its capacity to produce graduates who are creative, innovative, and enterprising. It is worth noting that Uganda has established several important education policy frameworks, including Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary School Education (USE), and the elaborate 1992 Government White Paper on Education for National Integration and Development. Nevertheless, there has been persistent disquiet over the quality and orientation of Uganda's education graduates at all levels of formal schooling. Understanding why this disquiet persists requires an examination of the key concepts that this paper argues should be at the centre of any philosophical reorientation of higher education: innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems.

Innovation

Innovation in higher education encompasses the continuous pursuit and application of novel ideas, methodologies, and technologies to enhance the quality and relevance of teaching, research, and administrative practices within academic institutions (García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno, & Martín-Rojas, 2021; Tierney & Lanford, 2016). Unlike mere invention, which refers to the creation of something new, innovation requires that new ideas be implemented and create demonstrable value. O'Sullivan and Dooley (2008) emphasise that innovation focuses on introducing something new to established processes, products, services, or technology with the intention of improving effectiveness and efficiency. In the context of higher education, innovation manifests across multiple dimensions: curricular innovation that revamps programmes to foster cross-disciplinary learning and analytical skills; pedagogical innovation that incorporates digital technologies and online platforms for customised instruction; and institutional innovation that transforms how universities engage with industry and community stakeholders (Aithal & Maiya, 2024).

The open innovation paradigm, which has evolved from Schumpeter's new production function of 1912 to the current context of global networks and virtual communities, recognises that universities play a central role in producing innovative ideas and facilitating their transfer to industry applications (Mochnacs, Pirciog, Sigurjonsson et al., 2024). This perspective positions universities not merely as repositories of knowledge but also as active generators and disseminators of innovative solutions to societal challenges. For African higher education institutions, innovation assumes particular significance, given the need to address context-specific challenges through locally appropriate solutions rather than wholesale adoption of Western models that may not align with indigenous realities.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship refers to the practice of identifying opportunities and mobilising resources to exploit them, typically involving risk-taking and the creation of new ventures (Feola, Parente, & Cucino, 2021). In the higher education context, entrepreneurship has evolved beyond its traditional

commercial connotations to encompass social entrepreneurship addressing societal problems, and academic entrepreneurship involving the commercialisation of research outputs (Ruiz, Martens, & da Costa, 2020). The concept of the entrepreneurial university, which emerged in the early 1980s as a key element of the Triple Helix model developed by Etzkowitz, identifies the evolution of the university's role to include a third mission: contributing to economic development through the transfer of research results from the laboratory to the economic system (Feola, Parente, & Cucino, 2021; Guerrero, Urbano, & Gajón, 2020).

Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly critical in African higher education institutions as a response to persistent youth unemployment and socio-economic challenges. According to the Brookings Institution (2024), Africa boasts the world's highest rates of entrepreneurship, with more than one in five working-age Africans starting a new business and more than three-quarters of youth planning to start one within five years. However, this entrepreneurship is predominantly characterised by self-employment in the informal sector, what the International Labour Organization classifies as "vulnerable employment". This distinction is crucial for understanding why entrepreneurship education moves beyond teaching business plan development to cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets, skills, and competencies that enable graduates to transform ideas into sustainable enterprises.

Start-up ecosystems

A start-up ecosystem refers to the interconnected network of actors, institutions, and resources that support the creation and growth of new ventures in a particular location or sector (Startup Genome, 2024). Key components of a thriving start-up ecosystem include access to finance through angel investors and venture capital; availability of skilled talent; robust mentorship networks; supportive policy and regulatory environments; research institutions that generate commercialisable knowledge; physical infrastructure such as incubators, accelerators, and co-working spaces; and cultural attitudes that tolerate risk and learn from failure (Ayala-Gaytán, Villasana, & Naranjo-Priego, 2024). The university-based entrepreneurial ecosystem represents a specific

configuration where higher education institutions serve as “natural incubators” supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability within the university community and beyond through civic engagement (Guerrero & Urbano, 2024).

African start-up ecosystems have demonstrated significant growth in recent years, with cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Cape Town, and Cairo emerging as continental hubs attracting substantial venture capital investment (StartupBlink, 2024). Uganda, while not yet among the top-tier African start-up destinations, has shown growing potential, with Kampala hosting an emerging tech ecosystem supported by innovation hubs and incubators. However, African start-up ecosystems face persistent challenges, including uneven access to appropriate funding instruments, high operational costs due to inadequate infrastructure, and government policies that are not always supportive of business creation (Brookings Institution, 2024). For higher education to effectively contribute to thriving start-up ecosystems, universities should develop comprehensive internal systems for knowledge commercialisation, including technology transfer offices, business incubators, and strong industry-academia linkages that connect academic research with market opportunities (Audretsch & Belitski, 2022).

The relationship between these three concepts is synergistic: innovation provides the novel ideas and solutions; entrepreneurship provides the agency, risk-tolerance, and resource mobilisation to transform ideas into viable enterprises; and start-up ecosystems provide the enabling environment that increases the probability that ventures will emerge, survive, and scale. It is against this conceptual background that the present study examines whether Uganda’s higher education system, as currently philosophically constituted, possesses the capacity to promote these interconnected elements. The question is not merely one of curriculum reform or pedagogical innovation, but a more fundamental one concerning the philosophical orientation that shapes the entire educational enterprise. Accordingly, the study focused on two objectives: To identify the philosophy guiding Uganda’s higher education, and make a philosophical reflection on how the available philosophy enables conditions for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship and start-

up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education. These objectives were followed by two research questions:

- a) What philosophical foundations underpin Uganda's higher education?
- b) Can the said philosophy create enabling conditions for a paradigm shift for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education?

Literature Review

Seemingly good philosophical studies on Uganda's education system, such as that by Nsereko (1997), provide very good reasons why Uganda lacks a good general and educational specific philosophy of education framework, and why they remain at the lamentation level and do not provide or suggest remedies to the inherent challenge. This is true of other philosophical studies elsewhere in the world, such as those by Bhatt (2018), Dash (2015), Noddings (2007). Rodney (1973) and Tuck and Moore (1984), which all allude to the said challenge without providing clear benchmarks to solve the philosophical framework void challenge. This is also true of Noddings (2007), who states that philosophy is a mother of education closely related to human life and, therefore, deserves attention. This is true; but what next after stating that fact? How can we tap into philosophy to solve the challenge of Uganda's education system's failure to make graduates that possess creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship skills that would enable them to create work rather than looking for employment that is thin on the ground? Alternatively, how can we solve the ethical and moral dilemma created by an education system which lacks a campus to stir its beneficiaries to relate with reality?

The Government White paper on education (1992), Nsereko(1997), Muwagga (2016), and Muhanguzi & Tumusiime (2021) all emphasise the challenge of moral and ethical values, national unity, and thin cultural heritage in the Ugandan education system. Their salient leaning at university education makes them thin in providing a global solution to Uganda's macro education terrain and the philosophy so required. It is evident lack of a clear educational philosophy contributes to training

amorphous graduates without entrepreneurship skills equipped for start-up ecosystems that apart from the challenge of not being creative and innovative, there is a challenge of lack of a clear educational philosophy specifically crafted from Uganda's rich indigenous philosophical and cultural diversity. This, thus impacts the innovativeness and enterprising state of Uganda's education system graduates.

Different studies or reports pertaining to education systems worldwide, not limited to that of Uganda, typically focus on presenting factual information. However, this particular study delves deeper into philosophical and ethical reflections, surpassing the boundaries of mere factual knowledge. Writings such as those by Bhatt (2018), Lamichhane, (2018), Muwagga (2006), Tuck and Moore (1984) Dewey (1916), and Whitehead (1916), much as they fall within the philosophical realm, do not provide a full treatise on education, especially the evaluation of the end products of education, i.e., the graduates, and their innovative and entrepreneurship state. Specific studies on Ugandan education sub-systems, namely primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, for example those by Muwesi, Sarah, and Muwagga (2024) make an exploration study of the Ugandan education system using John Dewey's philosophical correlates. This would have been a very good study to anchor this particular reflection but it falls short of examining the issue of graduate employability and ethical implications therein. On the other hand, Kwesiga et al. (2019) make factual statements on the state of the youth in Uganda and the role of government in investing in young people. Though this is a good study, it also falls short of proving to be a good philosophical reflection on Ugandan graduates' innovative and entrepreneurship skills other than stating their unfortunate socio-economic state.

Other salient reports on Uganda's micro-education system, such as the Kajubi Report (1989), provide valuable insights into the reasons for graduate unemployment in Ugandan schools. However, these reports often stop short of offering a comprehensive analysis of creativity and innovativeness. This particular study aims to take a more reflective and critical approach to the relationship between the educational philosophy in place and the graduates it produces. Whereas the reflections of Mitana et al. (2018), Mugizi (2018) and Muhwezi (2022) on both secondary and

Ugandan higher education graduates are worth considering, they also do not divulge much of the ethical or philosophical issues therein and their effects on graduates.

On the other hand, whereas Nawangwe et al. (2021) provide a very good and critical review of Uganda's education, their focus is limited to university education in Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying shock, and yet this study's focus goes beyond the pandemic and the resultant shock on education, let alone the failure of graduates to become innovative and enterprising that arises out of the educational spaces. The same applies to Tumuhimbise et al. (2024), who provide a very thin reflection on ethical issues and the financial implications of Uganda's education, specifically the Church of Uganda education sub-sector.

Basing on the qualitative research conducted in 2022, it was discovered that Uganda does not adhere to a specific philosophy, but rather follows multiple philosophies (Namanya, 2024). This situation confuses graduates, causing them to struggle to focus on their strengths, ultimately denying them opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. This state of affairs extends from lower levels to that of higher education institutions. However, this paper concentrates on two questions: What philosophical foundations are guiding the higher education institutions and how can they be reconfigured to nurture innovation, entrepreneurship and thriving start-up ecosystems? This is because higher education institutions work as a pinnacle to guide universities and tertiary institutions that train graduates of different stages to train other learners at lower levels.

Methodology

The methodology section covers the procedures that were followed in conducting the study. These were the basis for the collection and analysis of data.

Approach and research design

This being a philosophical and reflective study, descriptive and explanatory research designs were adopted. These designs were deemed

appropriate because of their potential to generate rich study data. The descriptive design enabled the study to decipher why and what exactly is happening in Uganda's higher education space. The descriptive research design was used to help decipher and find answers to questions such as: What is Uganda's higher education philosophy? Can the said philosophy create enabling conditions for a paradigm shift for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education? To make the activity more rigorous, the study also adopted the explanatory research design. This design devolved into the why, how and what of the occurrences in Uganda's higher education. This is very much in line with the Socratic Method, which is key to any genuine philosophical reflection and study (Paul & Elder, 2007).

This study used a qualitative approach which involved utilisation of the participant reflective experiences on Uganda's education system. The gathered results were transcribed and analysed thematically under topics derived from the two study questions: What philosophical foundations underpin Uganda's higher education; and how the philosophical foundations can be reconfigured to nurture innovation, entrepreneurship, and thriving start-up ecosystems in Uganda.

Sampling

A selected number of Uganda's higher education stakeholders, including university administrators, policymakers, professors of education and philosophy, education research bodies, university lecturers, and students, were purposefully chosen for their knowledge of education in general. They were engaged in individual and focus group reflective sessions on the questions: What philosophical foundations underpin Uganda's education system that includes higher education? How can these philosophical foundations be reconfigured to nurture innovation, entrepreneurship, and thriving start-up ecosystems? Participants were selected based on their experience of the philosophical understanding of Uganda's education terrain and their accessibility. To achieve regional representativeness, accessible districts in the four regions of Uganda – namely Bushenyi in Western, Mbale in Eastern, Gulu in Northern, and Kampala in Central – were selected.

Data source

This study utilised both primary and secondary sources. Primary data involved five categories of policymakers and informers. First, eight key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted, involving a Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) official (KII1), a professor of education at Nkumba University (KII2), a Uganda Management Institute (UMI) official (KII3), a National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) official (KII4), an Uwezo official (KII5), a *Twawezo* official (KII6), a Gulu University administrator (KII7), and a professor of philosophy at Gulu University (KII8). Second, three in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with a former MoES commissioner (IDI1), a home educationist and parent (IDI2), and an educationist and university secretary in Bushenyi (IDI3). Third, two FGDs were held, one with university lecturers from Uganda Christian University (UCU–Mbale Campus) and one with teacher trainees at Gulu University. Fourth, official national documents were consulted, including the Uganda National Development Plans (NDPs), the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), the National Objectives and Directives of State Policy (1995), the Educational Policy Review Commission (EPRC) Report (1987–89), the Government White Paper (1992), and the Education Act (2008). Fifth, secondary data was drawn from educational books and journal articles related to educational philosophy, innovativeness, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems.

Data collection instruments

This study employed multiple qualitative data collection tools, including reflective interview guides, to obtain knowledge about the subject matter of Uganda's philosophy and explore the participants' rich, detailed perspectives, feelings and experiences of educational philosophy. FGD guides were used to gather data from a group of university lecturers and teacher trainees, besides an observation checklist. A document review guide was used to collect secondary data from relevant documents, including reports, textbooks and journal articles on Uganda's education philosophy.

Data quality control

The quality of qualitative data was controlled by ensuring trustworthiness, focusing on dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data from participants was cross-checked against other data during thematic analysis and cross-examined with archival and documentary reviews to ensure that the correct data was reported to ensure dependability. Credibility was addressed through the use of multiple qualitative methods, such as the use of interview guides for KIIs and IDIs, an FGD guide and observation checklist, and archival and documents analysis that was later triangulated. Confirmability was ensured by controlling the researchers' bias through constant note-taking in the field and with an observation checklist to be transparent enough, and through peer debriefing the research team before interviews. Finally, regarding data transferability, this study provides readers with different rich contexts verbatim to enable them to judge the findings and apply them to other situations.

Data analysis

The analysis began in the field with daily debriefings. This was followed by transcribing information into field memos and transcripts. The data from the transcripts was then categorised into themes and analysed manually by comparing interviews and archival documents. The codes used were KIIs from 1 – 8 and IDIs from 1– 4, as already highlighted.

Themes were derived from data, presented and discussed with thick verbatim voices of the respondents to visualise their views on the knowledge of education and the CBC to analyse the continuities.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Makerere Social Science (MAKSS) Research Ethical Committee (REC) under number MAKSSREC 01.22.527. This approval enabled the study to be cleared by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) under research clearance number SS1312ES. The study was authorised by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) on 30 June 2022, the Department of Religion and Peace Studies (RPS), as well as the local authorities in the study areas visited. Data collection observed the ethical principles of good research practice. Before commencement of any interview, the researchers sought consent from the respondents and participants by signing the informed consent form. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by using no clue identities and avoiding

direct names or the titles of the respondents. Balancing risks and benefits were achieved by a clear explanation of the objectives of the study, which was essentially for academic purposes. All aspects of ethical considerations, such as compensation, were done as per the protocol guidelines contained under UNCST SS1312 ES.

Presentation of Findings

Given the nature of the study, the findings are presented following reflective interviews and FGDs as were generated, together with information from the national and educational documents, in response to the following research questions: What philosophical foundations underpin Uganda's higher education? What is Uganda's higher education philosophy? Can the said philosophy create enabling conditions for a paradigm shift for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education? The study findings are presented first and reflections done in the next section.

Philosophical foundations underpinning Uganda's higher education

The central objective in this paper raised a central research question: What is the philosophy underpinning Uganda's higher education? This question is answered using data collected on Uganda's entire formal education system in 2022. A general philosophical question was posed to address the guiding philosophy of formal education in post-independence Uganda, including higher education: *What is Uganda's post-independence philosophy of education?* This question was posed to three categories of informants – the KIIs, IDIs and two FGDs – and substantial responses were given and are categorised as: we do not know; not sure; and suggestions about what educational philosophy should focus on.

In responding to the question, KII1 remarked: "We do not have a philosophy. We do not have a clearly spelt out philosophy. It is 'try and error'" (KII1, reflective interview, 3 October 2022). The same question was posed to a renowned professor of education and his response was: "Any philosophy for education? No philosophy" (KII2, personal reflective interview, 15 June 2022). KII2's doubts regarding the existing philosophy were confirmed by KII5, who responded that "the philosophy guiding Uganda's education is not clear" (KII5, personal reflective interview,

30 June 2022). KII5 shared the same view with IDI1 by remarking: “No clear philosophy guiding education in Uganda” (IDI, personal reflective interview, 14 June 2022). The participants’ response – both the KIIs and IDIs – relate to the unanimous response from the university lecturers (UCU) in an FGD at Mbale Campus, which was: “We do not have a philosophy guiding the education system” (Mbale lecturers in an FGD, UCU–Mbale Campus, 22 August 2022).

When KII8 was asked the same question, he instead decided to pose more other philosophical questions: “What is the philosophical theory behind Uganda’s education system? ...kind of education and where are we going? We seem not to understand the education we are in...what is the purpose and plan for education in Uganda?” (KII8, personal interview, 12 September 2022).

Other KIIs, IDIs and FGDs instead responded to the same question with suggestions, as elaborated. For the *Twaawezo* official, “There is no philosophy to the current formal education philosophy. If we are to think about philosophy to guide our education system, it should speak to our identity and concerns as Ugandans” (KII6, personal reflective interview, 18 October 2022). KII6’s response is related to that of IDI4, who responded:

No philosophy, nothing brings us together. There is no nationalism if you compared us with Japan – a child grows with Japanese ideals but in Uganda, the ideals are ‘cutting deals’; education is being despised. (IDI4, personal reflective interview, 27 July, 2022)

KII6 and IDI4 point to what the focus on identity should prioritise if the educational philosophy is to be formed. The NCHE official confirmed the educational philosophical gap. The official asserted:

There has not been any unified philosophy of education in the country. But the education providers have their philosophies in their institutions depending on each university. The arch philosophy has not been crafted by the nation – there is that gap. As far as I know, I have not seen any education philosophy. (KI4, personal reflective interview, 14 June 2022)

Apart from the NCHE official’s confirmation of the educational philosophical gap, he also hinted at the presence of the multiplicity of philosophies among different education providers in Uganda. He noted that different universities in the country have particular philosophies,

which finding matches Muwagga's (2016). This finding also relates to the representative of university students at Gulu University. The student described the education system in Uganda as "a garden where you plant everything, and they fight for survival" (university student, FGD, Gulu University, 15 September 2022). These responses from the FGDs still indicate the philosophical gap.

Relatedly, in an interview with an educationist who is at the same time a homeschooler, he responded by stating the implicit aim of the existing education system in Uganda. He empathetically observed:

Every education system has a philosophy, but Uganda's education is likened to Bantu education system. It determines the curriculum; Africans never rise at their level without exposing its graduates to be critical. You can imagine the way how you are looked at when an educated person starts a business ... Educated do not do business ... mindset. (IDI2, personal reflective interview, 14 June 2022)

IDI2's response directly explains why some graduates are not trained to become enterprising – a mindset embedded and transferred to them by the existing system at Uganda's higher education institutions. IDI2's response and concern regarding the need to enable graduates to become innovative was expounded on by KII7 in responding to the same question: "There is no particular philosophy guiding the education system in Uganda. We need a philosophy that is talent- and passion-driven education system is what we need. The teachers must be keen to identify who fits where" (KII7, personal reflective interview, 13 September 2022). KII7 challenged Ugandans to focus on the students' talents and passion if they are to set Uganda's higher education's philosophy.

According to KII3, "The philosophy guiding our education is not there. But check in the documents closely" (KII3 personal reflective interview, 14 June 2022). KII3's response pointed to the cross-checking of the national documents on education and Uganda in general. These included the Uganda National Development Plan (UNDP) of 1960/61–1965/1966, the Education Act 1963, the National Development Plan (NDP) 1966/67–1970/7, the Educational Policy Review Commission (EPRC) (1987–89), the Government White Paper (1992), the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), the National Objectives and Directives of

State Policy (1995), the Education Act (2008) and the recent NDPs I, II, III, and IV (from 2010 to 2040).

According to national documents consulted, such as the UNDPs of 1960/61–1965/1966, the education system was basically concerned with the national concerns rather than the philosophical framework needed to guide Uganda's higher education and education terrain in general. It was discovered that the UNDP of 1960/61–1965/1966 was prepared by the colonial administration long before independence. As Evans and Kajubi stated:

The plan was published several years before independence and reflected the priorities of the outgoing colonial administration. Its overall emphasis was on preparing Uganda for independence. The education system was charged with providing the high-level manpower needed to Africanize the government administration and meet the demands of a growing economy. As a result, the plan stressed secondary and technical education and left primary education to continue pretty much as it was. These recommendations were largely parallel to those of the World Bank Survey Mission, whose results were available to the government planners responsible for the five-year plan. (Evans & Kajubi, 1994, p. 132)

In connection with the Education Act 1963, they stated:

When the Education Act (1963) was implemented, the philosophy guiding Uganda's education since independence was not highlighted. "The education policy framework in place at Uganda's independence was determined largely by the recommendations of the de Bunsen Committee, which met ten years earlier in 1953. (Evans & Kajubi, 1994, p.131)

The 1963 Education Act, too, did not attend to the formulation of the philosophy to guide the future of education in Uganda.

The NDP 1966/67–1970/71 as well as the UNDP (1966–1971) addressed different education items, and the philosophy guiding education was not given priority. They emphasised growth in post-primary education to produce high-level manpower. From 1966–1967 to 1970–1971, the NDP concentrated on addressing the heavy financial losses made in the previous plan that had put Uganda in a difficult financial position. Thus, the plan's focus was to handle the increase in coffee production, as noted:

In view of the unpromising export prospects for coffee, the shortage of skilled technicians and artisans and trained managerial personnel and the slow rate of diversification so far, a figure of perhaps about 4½ to 5 percent per annum over the five-year period would appear more probable. (NDP 1966/67–1970/71, 1966, p. 8)

The Educational Policy Review Commission (EPRC) (1987–89), newly appointed by the new government – the National Resistance Movement (NRM) – was set up under the leadership of Ssentenza Kajubi to carry out a thorough review of the education system, including the educational aims, objectives, curriculum, and general education structure. However, after the report's completion, the government focused on promoting the NRM party's philosophy, which it assumed to be the national philosophy (Evans & Kajubi, 1994; Government White Paper [GWP], 1992).

When it comes to the Government White Paper (1992), concerning education, it clearly stated:

The government endorses the national goals of development as identified by the commission on the basis of its analysis of available documents. They are in line with the Ten-Point Programme of NRM as outlined in its publication. (GWP, 1992, p.6)

This way, the educational aims were skewed towards the NRM, and did not necessarily entail a complete change of the education system, implying that the philosophy of education was not given priority, leaving Uganda operating within the framework of the old system, characterised by the colonialists' aim of training job seekers rather than job creators. IDI3 further illuminated this observation by likening the philosophy guiding education in Uganda to leadership style as:

Relating this observation with IDI3 by likening the philosophy guiding education in Uganda to leadership style as:

Leadership principal manager style, guided by what they want. If you want to stay in power then you employ methods that will achieve that compares to Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years in prison but ruled for few yours, he had all reasons to stay longer in power but he did not. Uganda has failed to see others go off stage. If you want change it starts with you to deal with poor leadership and incompetent people. Education ideally it should have been changed 15 years ago, to mark the global trend. (IDI3, personal reflective interview, 28 July 2022)

To IDI3, education has been manipulated to suit the leadership in Uganda.

The researcher (corresponding author) consulted the existing documents on the subject of educational philosophy. When the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy (1995), the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), and the Education Act (2008) are consulted, what emerges is the fact that the responsibility for education is open to individual parents, private investors, religious bodies, and aid agencies, and this gives rise to the availability of multiple philosophies.

Muwagga (2016) asserts that the general philosophy informing the Uganda Formal Education System (UFES) is not precise and so is the philosophy informing Uganda's higher education. Although he notes that the assumed philosophy behind Formal Education (FE) might have informed the current aims, objectives, and goals as spelt out in the Government White Paper (1992), it remains not explicitly stated for its citizens.

A closer look at NDPs I, II, III, and IV (from 2010 to 2040) reveals that the focus is on different aspects altogether with the vision of *transforming Ugandan society from a peasant to modern and prosperous country within 30 years*, with no emphasis that education is key to this vision. There is no explicit statement of the philosophy guiding UFES after independence.

Recent findings from Namanya's (2024) examination of Uganda's education system identify an amalgamation of competing philosophical orientations operating within a single system. As Namanya (2024, p. 225) observes, "The Summary of the philosophies that make up Uganda's Formal Education include; ideal, philosophy of power, individualistic, stratified, religious and secular philosophies." The ideal philosophy can be traced to the framers of formal education. The philosophy of power emerged from the tension between the EPRC (1989) and the Government White Paper (1992). The individualistic philosophy mushroomed and was exacerbated by the liberalisation of education in 1993. The stratified philosophy reflects the differentiated types of educational institutions serving different social classes of Ugandans. The religious philosophy is rooted in church- and mosque-founded institutions. The secular philosophy represents a continuation of Western education in modern times, with its emphasis on human agency over transcendental concerns.

A philosophical reflection on how the available philosophy fosters innovation, entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education

While making a philosophical reflection, can the said philosophy create enabling conditions for a paradigm shift for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up Ecosystems in Uganda's higher education? Three elements are handled under this section: entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education; the paradox of multiple philosophies and philosophical nascence; and implications of fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems.

Entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education

The findings presented in this study reveal a fundamental philosophical vacuum at the heart of Uganda's higher education system. The unanimous response from key informants, in-depth interviewees, and focus group participants that Uganda lacks a clearly articulated educational philosophy raises profound questions about the capacity of the current system to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and thriving start-up ecosystems. This section offers a critical philosophical reflection on how the amalgamation of philosophies identified in the study, namely ideal, power-oriented, individualistic, stratified, religious, and secular, either enables or constrains the development of innovative, entrepreneurial graduates capable of creating employment rather than merely seeking it.

The paradox of multiple philosophies and philosophical absence

The study reveals a paradoxical situation: Uganda's higher education operates with multiple philosophies yet effectively has no unifying philosophy. As KIII from the Ministry of Education and Sports candidly observed, the system operates on a "try and error" basis. This philosophical incoherence creates a hostile environment for innovation and entrepreneurship. Innovation requires a clear vision of what society seeks to achieve and the freedom to experiment within defined parameters. When educational philosophy is fragmented across ideal, power-oriented, individualistic, stratified, religious, and secular orientations without integration, graduates receive contradictory

signals about what constitutes valuable knowledge and a meaningful contribution to society. The philosophy of power, which emerged from the tension between the Educational Policy Review Commission (1989) and the Government White Paper (1992), prioritised regime survival over educational transformation, embedding a culture where conformity rather than creativity is rewarded.

Colonial legacy and the reproduction of dependency

ID12's comparison of Uganda's education to the "Bantu education system" is philosophically significant. The Bantu education system in apartheid South Africa was explicitly designed to limit African intellectual development and prepare Africans only for subservient roles, which is also observed by Ssekamwa (1997). While Uganda's education system was not designed with such explicit malice, the observation highlights how the inherited colonial philosophy continues to reproduce graduates oriented towards employment in systems designed by others rather than creating systems of their own. The informant's observation that "the educated do not do business" reflects a deeply embedded mindset where academic credentials are associated with formal employment rather than enterprise creation. This philosophical orientation fundamentally contradicts the requirements for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial university concept, as articulated in contemporary higher education discourse, requires universities to cultivate risk-taking, opportunity recognition, and resource mobilisation capacities that are systematically suppressed when education trains graduates to "swim with the tide" rather than create new currents.

The stratified philosophy and unequal access to innovation opportunities

The stratified philosophy embedded in Uganda's higher education creates differential access to quality education and, by extension, differential exposure to innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities. When different types of institutions serve different social classes with varying quality of education, the capacity to participate in start-up ecosystems becomes similarly stratified. Elite institutions may produce graduates exposed to innovation hubs, industry linkages, and entrepreneurship programmes, while the majority of graduates from less-resourced

institutions lack such exposure. This stratification reproduces existing inequalities rather than democratising access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, the individualistic philosophy exacerbated by liberalisation since 1993 has transformed higher education into a commodity where institutions compete for students as customers rather than collaborating to build robust innovation ecosystems. The proliferation of private universities operating under a market logic often prioritises enrolment numbers over educational quality, producing graduates with credentials but without the competencies required for innovative enterprise creation.

The absence of indigenous philosophical grounding

Perhaps the most profound philosophical deficit is the absence of indigenous African philosophical foundations in Uganda's higher education. KII6's observation that any philosophy guiding Uganda's education "should speak to our identity and concerns as Ugandans" points to a critical gap. Indigenous African philosophies such as *Ubuntu*, which emphasise communal well-being, collective responsibility, and the interconnectedness of human flourishing, could provide alternative foundations for innovation and entrepreneurship that transcend the individualistic, profit-maximising assumptions of Western entrepreneurship models. An education system rooted in indigenous philosophy might foster social entrepreneurship oriented towards community problem-solving, collaborative innovation networks built on trust and reciprocity, and start-up ecosystems that measure success not merely in terms of financial returns but in terms of social impact. The current philosophical vacuum, filled by competing foreign and fragmented orientations, forecloses these possibilities.

Implications of fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems

The philosophical analysis reveals that Uganda's current higher education philosophy or, more accurately, the absence of a coherent philosophy creates structural impediments to fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems. First, without a clear philosophical vision of the educated person as a creative, innovative problem-solver, curricula remain oriented towards knowledge transmission rather than knowledge

creation. Second, pedagogical approaches continue to emphasise passive learning and examination success rather than experiential learning, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial skills development. Third, institutional arrangements prioritise administrative conformity over the flexibility required for industry-academia linkages, incubation programmes, and technology transfer mechanisms that characterise entrepreneurial universities. Fourth, the stratified and individualised nature of the system prevents the collaborative networks essential for thriving start-up ecosystems. As the university student at Gulu University metaphorically described, the system is “a garden where you plant everything, and they fight for survival”, a philosophical orientation antithetical to the nurturing, supportive ecosystems required for innovation and entrepreneurship to flourish.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the philosophical foundations underpinning Uganda’s higher education and to reflect on how these foundations enable or constrain the fostering of innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems. The findings reveal a troubling reality: Uganda’s higher education system operates without a coherent, explicitly articulated educational philosophy. Instead, it functions with an amalgamation of competing and often contradictory philosophical orientations, namely ideal, power-oriented, individualistic, stratified, religious, and secular, none of which is specifically designed to cultivate innovative, entrepreneurial graduates capable of creating employment opportunities. The colonial origins of Uganda’s formal education, established to serve British interests rather than Ugandan development, continue to cast a long shadow over the system. Despite over six decades of independence and numerous educational reforms, the fundamental philosophical orientation towards producing employees rather than employers, consumers of knowledge rather than creators, and conformists rather than innovators, remains largely intact. The Government White Paper of 1992, rather than effecting genuine philosophical transformation, essentially preserved the colonial structure while embedding a

philosophy of power that prioritises regime interests over genuine educational reform. The philosophical reflection demonstrates that without deliberate philosophical reorientation, Uganda's higher education cannot adequately foster the innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems required for economic transformation and graduate employability. The current system, characterised by philosophical fragmentation, colonial continuities, social stratification, and the absence of indigenous grounding, creates structural impediments to cultivating the creative, risk-taking, opportunity-recognising graduates that thriving economies require. The challenge facing Uganda is not merely one of curriculum reform or pedagogical innovation, but of fundamental philosophical reconstruction. The articulation and implementation of a coherent educational philosophy rooted in Ugandan identity and aspirations, oriented towards creativity and enterprise creation, and capable of producing graduates who transform challenges into opportunities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and philosophical reflections presented in this study, we recommend the development of a national educational philosophy, curriculum transformation towards entrepreneurial competencies, the establishment of university-based entrepreneurial ecosystems, policy and regulatory reforms, cultural reorientation, talent- and passion-driven education, and inter-institutional collaboration for reconfiguring Uganda's higher education philosophy to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and thriving start-up ecosystems.

First, the Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), should spearhead a national dialogue to develop an explicit, coherent educational philosophy for Uganda. This philosophy should be grounded in Ugandan identity, values, and aspirations; oriented towards creativity, innovation, and enterprise creation; inclusive of indigenous African philosophical perspectives such as Ubuntu; and clearly articulated in national policy documents to guide all levels of education.

Second, higher education institutions should systematically integrate entrepreneurship education across all disciplines, not merely as standalone courses but as a philosophical orientation that permeates teaching and learning. This includes embedding problem-based learning, design thinking, and experiential learning approaches that cultivate the entrepreneurial mindset, skills, and competencies required for venture creation.

Third, regarding the establishment of university-based entrepreneurial ecosystems, universities should develop comprehensive internal systems for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, including technology transfer offices, business incubators and accelerators, innovation hubs, and strong industry-academia linkages. These structures should provide students and faculty with mentorship, access to seed funding, prototyping facilities, and connections to broader start-up ecosystems.

Fourth, for policy and regulatory reforms, the government should create an enabling policy environment for graduate entrepreneurship by reducing bureaucratic barriers to business registration and operation, providing targeted financial support mechanisms for graduate-led start-ups, and creating incentives for universities that demonstrate success in producing entrepreneurial graduates and commercially viable innovation.

Fifth, addressing the mindset that “the educated do not do business” requires deliberate cultural intervention through public campaigns celebrating graduate entrepreneurs, the integration of successful entrepreneurship role models into educational programming, and shifting societal narratives about what constitutes success for educated persons.

Sixth, as KII7 emphasised, Uganda needs “a philosophy that is talent- and passion-driven.” Higher education should incorporate robust mechanisms for identifying and nurturing individual talents and passions, recognising that innovation and entrepreneurship flourish when individuals pursue areas of genuine interest and aptitude rather than conforming to standardised pathways.

Finally, rather than competing as isolated entities, universities should collaborate to build a shared innovation infrastructure, joint entrepreneurship programmes, and networked start-up ecosystems that pool resources and expertise. This collaborative approach would help overcome the limitations of the individualistic philosophy that currently fragments the higher education landscape.

Fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems in Uganda's higher education requires more than incremental reforms, which demands a paradigm shift in educational philosophy. This shift should move from producing graduates who seek employment to cultivating graduates who create employment; from emphasising knowledge consumption to prioritising knowledge creation; from rewarding conformity to celebrating creativity; and from serving inherited colonial purposes to addressing Uganda's contemporary challenges and aspirations. Such philosophical transformation is the essential foundation upon which curricular, pedagogical, and institutional reforms can be built.

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