

Editorial

Education in Uganda and indeed in most of the developing world is regarded as theoretical and irrelevant to the realities of practical life. It is true that due to the increase in the number of higher education institutions, the number of graduates has also soared. Much as there are limited formal employment opportunities for these fresh job seekers, the challenge is that many of them even lack the skills to perform the duties required of the few vacancies that exist in the job market – let alone the innovativeness to create their own.

However, this situation cannot be entirely blamed on the students because the problem is both historical and structural in nature. Historical in the sense that, before the advent of colonialism, African societies had their own education systems that were relatively well-suited to their diverse settings. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney notes that pre-colonial African education was characterised by:

... close links with social life, both in a material and spiritual sense; its collective nature; its many sidedness; and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional, and mental development of the child. There was no separation of education and productive activity or any division between manual and intellectual education. Altogether, through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well-rounded personalities to fit into that society (1972, p.239).

Therefore, it is axiomatic to say that since the education system used to be context-specific, the question of unemployment would not have arisen or, even if it did, it would have been very minimal. When colonialists replaced the African education system with their own, the conquered people found it difficult to adapt to the new system because it did not reflect their values, beliefs, and traditions (Alemu, 2014). This problem still persists today considering that most of the instructional materials such as text books and the language used originate from the colonial powers, often with the effect of alienating the product from its environment. If this trend continues, it will be an uphill task for the African people to attain a combination of relevant education and meaningful development.

Structurally, most students prefer to attend government owned institutions of higher learning partly because their tuition fees are less compared to privately owned entities and some command higher prestige. Given Africa's youth bulge (African Institute for Development Policy, 2018), there is unprecedented growth in the numbers admitted for undergraduate and graduate programmes. This is how many public universities in Africa have come to have student numbers way higher than they were designed to

handle (Mohamedbhai, 2015). The increase in student numbers is not matched with a proportionate increase in the infrastructural capacities of these universities. This is demonstrated by the evident lack of enough class room space, limited accommodation facilities, under-equipped libraries and laboratories, shortage of computers, etcetera (Africa-America Institute, 2015; Ddumba, 2013). This problem is compounded by the recent phenomenon of simply turning polytechnics and technical colleges into universities (ibid), despite the former's good record in providing practical work skills to students. Under such circumstances, it would be thought that private universities would provide a better alternative to their public counterparts. On the contrary, this has not necessarily been the case. Private universities in Africa tend to compete for students that have not been absorbed into public universities and this competition is driven by the need to survive in the business environment rather than providing quality education. Either way, in both cases, there are de-motivating factors for teaching staff such as low salaries, heavy workload, and limited internal funds for research (Muriisa, 2014). All these compromise the quality of training passed on to the students.

The precarious state of education in some African countries is constantly under threat by prolonged armed conflict and its lasting consequences. There is no doubt that an escalation of conflict leads to a decrease in education (Diwakar, 2015). Due to the menace of endless conflict, Africa has for decades portrayed an image of the wretched continent.

The *Journal of Science and Sustainable Development (JSSD)* contributes to these and other topical issues/debates through well researched papers written by academics from various professional backgrounds. In light of the aforementioned challenges of higher education in Africa, this issue consists of eight articles of which four focus on education. Two of the papers focus on conflict while another is on refugees. The last paper deals with the challenges associated with land cover and land use in parts of Uganda.

In the first paper, Bwegyeme and her co-researchers argue that the Ugandan university education curriculum is efficient in imparting theory to students while ignoring both problem-based and action learning approaches yet these are more practical and realistic with regard to the real world work requirements. Therefore, they set out to make a comparison between action learning and the traditional didactic method while at the same time finding out the relationship between action learning and problem-based learning. The study established that problem-based learning (consists of reflective practice and self-directed learning skills) is of crucial importance for workplace learning, which is action oriented.

Still on higher education, but with particular focus on PhD training, Baligidde's article provides reflective insights on the importance of the relationship between the supervisor and the doctoral student at the initial stages of the PhD programme. His study findings bring forth the necessary elements needed in initiating a working correspondence between the supervisor and the supervisee. He also demonstrates why the common supervisor-centred relationships are increasingly being disputed. The paper avails some strategies that can be adopted to solve the differences in expectations of the supervisor in relation to those of the student. Of paramount importance, the research also provides advice on what should be done to enhance timely completion, among others. He concludes by suggesting that both the supervisor and supervisee should clarify their goals and expectations at the commencement of the programme and that this clarification should be done on a regular and on-going basis throughout the student's studies. This practice provides a basis for timely completion of the course.

What attracts a student to join a university of their choice? In most cases responses to this question would probably include the type of courses offered, location of the campus, quality of teaching and research, or the amount of tuition paid. Otaala's article presents a novel angle to this question. She postulates that the beauty of a university campus can attract potential students to join the institution. Her research focused on the Nkozi campus of Uganda Martyrs University. She discovered that there were students who joined the university because of the campus' beauty, associating it with a cordial study environment. Considering the stiff competition for students among universities, she suggests that Uganda Martyrs University should adopt a marketing strategy in which it uses campus visits as a strategy of attracting students to join the university.

Nakitende's study is as intriguing as its title. She makes an inquiry into the extent to which women in academia take up leadership positions in institutions of higher learning in the United States of America. She brings it to the fore that much as the number of female academics has increased over the years, the number of executive women leaders in higher education administration still remains minimal. She delves into the factors that influence women to acquire leadership roles and examines the challenges they encounter before they attain these jobs. The strategies they use to prevail over these challenges are also explored. On one hand, her findings show that female leaders of higher education institutions are intrinsically motivated by the urge to help others by making a positive difference in their lives. On the other hand, however, she also mentions the extrinsic forces that influence women to take on leadership positions. These include: mentoring, self-efficacy, networks, prior experience, leadership training, and career planning. It was also revealed that women in universities and other institutions of higher learning accept leadership responsibilities for their own personal growth and development. Much as her focus is

American higher education, there is much to learn for the African setting where women involvement in higher education leadership faces even higher challenges.

As earlier noted above, this issue also interrogates the issue of conflict. In this vein, Komakech's work dismisses the conventional view that it is only men that participate in armed conflict. He does this by giving the reasons why women played a pivotal role in the Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) war against the government of Uganda forces, although they did not succeed in toppling the government. He argues that the most important reason why women enlisted as fighters with the rebels was because the rebel leader, Joseph Kony, had envisaged and indeed promised them a 'new Acholi' (Acholi mayen) different from the old one (Acholi macon). It was forecast that this Acholi mayen would be a community free from evils of corruption, disease and political intolerance. Therefore, the 'new Acholi', they believed, would be a place of peace, dignity, pride and prosperity. The paper also underscores the difference between male and female motivation to engage in conflict - that while men participate in war due to political, economic, religious and ethnic deprivations, women often get involved in it in order to achieve basic human security which includes elements such as better homes and families, a better ethnic group and, in general, a better community. The study also discusses other crucial roles undertaken by the female LRA fighters to include, among others: intelligence gathering, nursing, and counselling.

Musinguzi's study explores the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the post-conflict reconstruction and development of northern Uganda. He gives a detailed analysis of the activities of CSOs both during and after the war in northern Uganda. The article helps the reader to understand the concept of CSOs by explaining their evolution from the classical thought of ancient Greece, through the medieval period of Christian thinkers up to the modern and contemporary times. The prolonged LRA war in northern Uganda was the cornerstone of this paper. The author asserts that CSOs were very instrumental in complementing the efforts of the government especially by providing aid to deprived communities. Nonetheless, the article also argues that in the early years of the conflict, support to the victims of armed conflict in northern Uganda was limited due to a constrained relationship between CSOs and the government. This created an environment whereby the activities of CSOs were disjointed since each one of them was working in isolation. Despite this situation, the author argues that the introduction and subsequent implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) ended this confusion because it managed to streamline development interventions in northern Uganda.

Having discussed conflict in the two preceding articles, we now look at the refugee crises which are normally a consequence of such occurrences. Recently it was mentioned that Uganda is among the top three countries hosting the most number of refugees in the world (Masaba, 2017). Therefore, Senkosi's research on Somali

refugees in Uganda is a timely resource that will be of value to both scholars and policy makers. He investigated the role played by socio-culturally mediated agency in the lives of Somali refugees living in Uganda. The word ‘agency’ was used to mean the conscious intentions and the power to act on the intentions. The purpose of the study was to find out whether Somali refugees in Uganda were able to satisfy their needs. It was discovered that they were able to use their socio-culturally mediated agency to meet their needs and hence, they were able to promote their wellbeing. This was demonstrated by their ability to start and maintain small and medium-scale businesses. It was further manifested in their ability to initiate and maintain social networks with fellow Somali refugees in Uganda and those abroad, plus the local host community. The researcher observes that these refugees are partly able to achieve this because of the friendly refugee legal framework provided by the government of the republic of Uganda. The author recommends that all organisations concerned with the welfare of refugees should engage in activities that promote laws, policies and cultural practices that permit the exercise of high level agency.

The last paper in this volume deals with the topical challenge of environmental degradation. The centre of interest of Mbaziira’s work was to identify the impacts of the land cover and land use changes in a rangeland ecosystem in Nakasongola district, Uganda from 1987 to 2005. Among others, the study established that there was a decline in commercial farmland, forests, wetlands and woodland. These changes in land cover and land use were attributed to an increase in poverty, population growth, charcoal production, drought and the introduction of pine tree plantations. The study goes on to show that this led to undesired effects which include reduced soil fertility, food insecurity, shortage of fuel wood, lack of water, etcetera. The researcher concludes by advocating for the strengthening of environmental monitoring and ecosystem conservation strategies in addition to the integration of tree planting into farming systems.

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