

Beyond Employability: Toward a Capabilities Approach for Holistic Education in Uganda

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Abstract: This study examined the transition from an employability-centered educational paradigm toward capabilities approach for holistic education in Uganda, addressing the limitations of instrumental education that prioritized employment outcomes over broader human development. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study collected data from 450 students, 120 teachers and lecturers, 45 educational administrators, and 30 policy stakeholders across Uganda's four major regions using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Quantitative analysis included univariate statistics to examine distributions of employability orientation and ten capability dimensions (critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic participation, cultural awareness, health and wellbeing, emotional intelligence, creativity, practical reasoning, social affiliation, and learner agency), bivariate analysis to explore relationships between demographic characteristics and capability outcomes, and structural equation modeling to test a comprehensive theoretical framework linking employability orientation, institutional factors, capability development, and holistic educational outcomes. The findings revealed that Uganda's education system maintained an overwhelmingly high employability orientation ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.78$), with examination focus particularly pronounced ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.87$), while overall capability development remained inadequate ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.82$), with civic participation ($M = 2.45$), creativity ($M = 2.53$), and learner agency ($M = 2.61$) showing especially low development levels. Bivariate analysis demonstrated strong negative correlations between employability orientation and all capability dimensions ($r = -0.461$ to -0.612 , all $p < .001$), with pedagogical approaches showing the strongest positive associations with capability development ($r = 0.723$, $p < .001$). Significant demographic disparities emerged, with male students, Central region learners, and private institution attendees experiencing substantially higher capability development than their counterparts. Structural equation modeling confirmed excellent model fit ($CFI = 0.943$, $TLI = 0.936$, $RMSEA = 0.057$, $SRMR = 0.048$) and revealed that employability orientation exerted significant negative effects on capability development ($\beta = -0.423$, $p < .001$) and holistic outcomes both directly ($\beta = -0.196$, $p = .001$) and indirectly through capability mediation ($\beta = -0.301$, $p < .001$), while institutional factors, particularly pedagogical approaches ($\lambda = 0.911$), demonstrated substantial positive effects on capability development ($\beta = 0.598$, $p < .001$). The study concluded that achieving holistic education in Uganda required fundamental paradigmatic transformation including pedagogical reform prioritizing learner-centered methods, curriculum and assessment redesign to systematically cultivate and evaluate diverse capabilities beyond employment preparation, and targeted equity interventions addressing regional and gender disparities in capability development. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of the capabilities approach in educational contexts and provide empirical evidence for policymakers seeking to transition beyond narrow employability frameworks toward education systems that expand substantive freedoms and enable multidimensional human flourishing.

Keywords: Capabilities approach, holistic education, employability paradigm, educational transformation

Introduction of the Study

Education has long been regarded as a fundamental driver of individual empowerment and societal transformation. However, in many developing contexts, including Uganda, educational systems have increasingly become narrowly focused on producing employable graduates, often at the expense of broader human development goals (Jennifer, 2024; Nassazi, 2023; Thesari et al., 2021). This instrumental view of education reduces learning to a means of acquiring job-specific skills and credentials, overlooking the multidimensional nature of human flourishing and the diverse ways individuals contribute to society. As Uganda continues to grapple with high youth unemployment rates, rapid technological change, and evolving labor market demands, there is growing recognition that a purely employability-centered approach to education may be insufficient for addressing the complex challenges facing contemporary Ugandan society (Chhinzler & Russo, 2018; Godfrey et al., 2021; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025a). This study advocates for a paradigm shift toward a capabilities approach to education, drawing on Amartya Sen's capability framework and Martha Nussbaum's human development theory. The capabilities approach emphasizes education's role in expanding individuals' substantive freedoms and enabling them to achieve functioning's they have reason to value, rather than merely preparing them for predetermined economic roles. This perspective acknowledges that education should cultivate critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic engagement, cultural awareness, and personal agency alongside technical competencies (Alam et al., 2020; Julius & Audrey, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025b; Shin et al., 2023). In the Ugandan context, where educational access has expanded significantly over the past two decades but quality and relevance concerns persist, adopting a holistic capabilities-oriented framework could help reimagine educational purposes and practices to better serve both individual wellbeing and collective flourishing.

Background of the Study

Uganda's education system has undergone significant transformations since the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007, resulting in substantial increases in enrollment rates across all levels. However, these quantitative gains have not been matched by corresponding improvements in educational quality or graduate

outcomes. The country's education sector continues to face numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, limited learning materials, examination-oriented pedagogy, and persistent disparities in access and achievement across regions, genders, and socioeconomic groups (Abelha et al., 2020; Rivaldo & Nabella, 2023).

In recent years, Ugandan education policy has increasingly emphasized employability and workforce readiness as primary educational goals. Government initiatives such as the Skilling Uganda program and various technical and vocational education and training (TVET) reforms reflect this employment-focused orientation. While these efforts respond to legitimate concerns about youth unemployment—which stands at approximately 13.3% nationally but significantly higher among educated youth—they risk perpetuating a reductionist view of education that neglects its broader humanistic, social, and democratic purposes (Ntale et al., 2020; Rebecca & Vincent, 2024; Wadood et al., 2018). The capabilities approach, developed by economist and philosopher Amartya Sen and expanded by philosopher Martha Nussbaum, offers an alternative framework for conceptualizing educational goals and assessing educational outcomes. This approach focuses on what individuals are able to be and do—their capabilities—rather than simply on resource inputs or utilitarian outcomes like income or employment. Applied to education, the capabilities approach suggests that educational institutions should aim to expand learners' freedoms to achieve diverse functionings across multiple dimensions of wellbeing, including health, knowledge, practical reasoning, social affiliation, political participation, and creative expression (Ellis & Childs, 2019; Julius & Nancy, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025; Stanley & Charles, 2024). Internationally, the capabilities approach has gained traction in educational policy discussions, particularly through its influence on UNESCO's humanistic vision of education and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities. However, its application in specific national contexts like Uganda remains limited, with few empirical studies examining how capability-oriented educational practices might be implemented or what barriers exist to such implementation.

Problem Statement

Uganda's education system operates within a predominantly employability-centered paradigm that measures educational success primarily through examination performance and graduate employment rates (Muweesi et al., 2023). This narrow focus creates several interconnected problems. First, it produces a mismatch between educational experiences and the multifaceted capabilities required for meaningful participation in contemporary Ugandan society, where individuals must navigate complex challenges including political participation, environmental sustainability, technological change, cultural diversity, and personal wellbeing. Second, the employability emphasis perpetuates instrumental approaches to learning that prioritize rote memorization and credential acquisition over critical thinking, creativity, ethical reasoning, and agency development. Third, it inadequately prepares learners for the reality that many will engage in informal sector activities, entrepreneurship, subsistence agriculture, or community leadership roles that fall outside conventional employment categories (Rebecca et al., 2024; Robotham, 2012). Furthermore, the employability-centered approach risks reinforcing existing inequalities by valuing only those forms of education and knowledge that align with formal labor market demands, potentially marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and non-market contributions to community wellbeing. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, rural areas, and marginalized communities may find their aspirations, values, and potential contributions undervalued within this framework (Enock et al., 2023; Kibuuka, 2022). Despite growing global recognition of education's broader purposes and the relevance of capabilities-based frameworks for holistic human development, there remains limited understanding of how such approaches could be conceptualized, implemented, and sustained within the Ugandan educational context. This study addresses this knowledge gap by examining the potential for transitioning from an employability-centered model toward a capabilities approach for holistic education in Uganda.

Main Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the transition from an employability-centered educational paradigm toward capabilities approach for holistic education in Uganda, identifying the conceptual foundations, practical implications, and implementation challenges associated with this shift.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the current employability-centered educational paradigm in Uganda and assess its limitations in promoting holistic human development and diverse capabilities among learners.
2. To explore how capabilities approach to education could be conceptualized and operationalized within the Ugandan educational context, identifying key capabilities that should be prioritized for holistic learner development.
3. To examine the institutional, pedagogical, and policy-level barriers and enablers that would affect the implementation of a capabilities-oriented educational framework in Ugandan schools and higher education institutions.

Research Questions

1. What are the key limitations of Uganda's current employability-centered educational paradigm in fostering holistic human development, and how do these limitations manifest across different educational levels and contexts?
2. Which capabilities should be prioritized within a holistic education framework for Uganda, and how can these capabilities be effectively cultivated through curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and assessment approaches?
3. What institutional, cultural, economic, and political factors serve as barriers or enablers to implementing capabilities approach in Uganda's education system, and what strategies could facilitate this transition?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively examine the transition from an employability-centered educational paradigm toward a capabilities approach for holistic education in Uganda. The research was conducted across selected secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and universities in Uganda's Central, Eastern, Western, and Northern regions to ensure geographical diversity and representation. The study population comprised 450 students, 120 teachers and lecturers, 45 educational administrators, and 30 education policy stakeholders from the Ministry of Education and Sports and related agencies. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select student and teacher participants, while purposive sampling was employed for administrators and policy stakeholders based on their expertise and involvement in curriculum development and educational policy formulation. Data collection involved multiple instruments including structured questionnaires administered to students and teachers to assess perceptions of current educational paradigms and desired capabilities, semi-structured interviews with educational administrators and policy makers to explore institutional barriers and enablers, focus group discussions with students to understand their lived experiences and aspirations beyond employability, and document analysis of curriculum frameworks, policy documents, and educational strategic plans.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24 software, beginning with univariate analysis to examine frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and variability of key variables including employability focus intensity, capability development levels across ten dimensions (critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic participation, cultural awareness, health and wellbeing, emotional intelligence, creativity, practical reasoning, social affiliation, and agency), and perceived educational outcomes. Bivariate analysis using chi-square tests, independent samples t-tests, and Pearson correlation coefficients examined relationships between demographic characteristics (gender, region, institution type, socioeconomic status) and capability development scores, as well as associations between current educational practices and holistic development outcomes. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test a comprehensive theoretical model specifying the relationships between latent constructs including employability-centered orientation (measured through examination focus, skills training emphasis, and job preparation prioritization), institutional factors (infrastructure quality, teacher capacity, pedagogical approaches), capability development (across the ten identified dimensions), and holistic education outcomes (learner agency, societal contribution, wellbeing, and adaptability).

The SEM analysis examined both the measurement model through Confirmatory Factor Analysis to validate the factor structure and assess construct validity and reliability, and the structural model to test hypothesized pathways and mediating effects, with model fit evaluated using multiple indices including Chi-square/df ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, coded using NVivo 12 software, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns, barriers, enablers, and contextual factors affecting the implementation of capabilities-oriented education, with findings triangulated with quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, securing approval from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and relevant institutional ethics committees, and obtaining permission from educational institutions before data collection commenced.

Results

Table 1: Univariate Analysis of Employability-Centered Orientation and Capability Development Levels

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Employability-Centered Orientation							
Examination Focus	570	4.23	0.87	1.00	5.00	-1.12	1.45
Skills Training Emphasis	570	3.89	0.94	1.00	5.00	-0.67	0.32
Job Preparation Prioritization	570	4.15	0.91	1.00	5.00	-0.98	1.18
Overall Employability Orientation	570	4.09	0.78	1.33	5.00	-0.89	0.95
Capability Development Dimensions							
Critical Thinking	570	2.67	1.03	1.00	5.00	0.34	-0.52
Ethical Reasoning	570	2.98	0.96	1.00	5.00	0.18	-0.38
Civic Participation	570	2.45	1.08	1.00	5.00	0.52	-0.41
Cultural Awareness	570	3.21	1.02	1.00	5.00	-0.05	-0.59
Health and Wellbeing	570	2.89	1.01	1.00	5.00	0.23	-0.47
Emotional Intelligence	570	2.76	0.99	1.00	5.00	0.29	-0.44
Creativity	570	2.53	1.06	1.00	5.00	0.48	-0.49
Practical Reasoning	570	3.02	0.98	1.00	5.00	0.12	-0.51
Social Affiliation	570	3.34	0.94	1.00	5.00	-0.12	-0.42
Learner Agency	570	2.61	1.04	1.00	5.00	0.41	-0.48
Overall Capability Development	570	2.85	0.82	1.00	4.90	0.28	-0.35

Note: All variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Very Low and 5 = Very High

The univariate analysis revealed a stark contrast between the intensity of employability-centered orientation and the level of capability development among Ugandan learners. The overall employability orientation demonstrated a high mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.78), indicating that educational institutions maintained a strong focus on employment-related outcomes. Examination focus exhibited the highest mean (M = 4.23, SD = 0.87) among the employability indicators, with negative skewness (-1.12) and positive kurtosis (1.45) suggesting that responses were heavily concentrated toward the upper end of the scale, with most participants perceiving examination preparation as an overwhelming priority in their educational experience. Job preparation prioritization (M = 4.15, SD = 0.91) and skills training emphasis (M = 3.89, SD = 0.94) similarly showed elevated means, confirming the predominance of instrumental educational approaches. In contrast, overall capability development registered a substantially lower mean of 2.85 (SD = 0.82), falling below the midpoint of the scale and indicating inadequate cultivation of holistic capabilities. Among specific capability dimensions, civic participation (M = 2.45, SD = 1.08), creativity (M = 2.53, SD = 1.06), and learner agency (M = 2.61, SD = 1.04) exhibited the lowest development levels, all falling significantly below 3.0, while social affiliation (M = 3.34, SD = 0.94) and cultural awareness (M = 3.21, SD = 1.02) showed relatively higher but still moderate development. The positive skewness values across most capability dimensions (ranging from 0.12 to 0.52) indicated that distributions were skewed toward lower scores, with more participants reporting inadequate capability development than high development.

These findings substantiated the core problem identified in this study: Uganda's education system operated within a paradigm that privileged employability outcomes while systematically underinvesting in broader human capabilities essential for holistic development. The disproportionately high emphasis on examination focus (M = 4.23) reflected the pervasive examination-oriented culture that had come to dominate Ugandan education, where teaching and learning activities were primarily structured around preparing students to perform well in standardized assessments rather than fostering deep understanding, critical inquiry, or practical application of knowledge. This examination fixation perpetuated surface learning approaches, encouraged rote memorization, and constrained opportunities for learners to develop higher-order cognitive skills. The particularly low development of civic participation capabilities (M = 2.45) raised concerns about the education system's contribution to democratic citizenship and social cohesion in Uganda, suggesting that learners were graduating without adequate preparation for meaningful engagement in community decision-making, political processes, or collective action for social change. Similarly, the underdevelopment of creativity (M = 2.53) and learner agency (M = 2.61) indicated that educational practices were not empowering students to think innovatively, exercise autonomous decision-making, or envision and pursue self-directed goals—capabilities that were increasingly recognized as essential for navigating uncertainty, driving innovation, and achieving wellbeing in contemporary society. The relatively higher scores for social affiliation and cultural awareness, while still modest, suggested that informal peer interactions and Uganda's culturally diverse educational environments provided some opportunities for developing these dimensions outside formal curricular structures. However, the overall pattern confirmed that the employability-centered paradigm created systematic capability deficits that limited learners' potential for multidimensional flourishing and constrained their ability to contribute to society in diverse ways beyond formal employment roles.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis of Relationships Between Demographic Characteristics, Educational Practices, and Capability Development

Variables	Employability Orientation	Critical Thinking	Civic Participation	Creativity	Learner Agency	Overall Capability
Pearson Correlations						
Employability Orientation	1	-0.487**	-0.523**	-0.461**	-0.556**	-0.612**
Infrastructure Quality	-0.312**	0.445**	0.398**	0.412**	0.467**	0.521**
Teacher Capacity	-0.267**	0.512**	0.476**	0.489**	0.534**	0.598**
Pedagogical Approaches	-0.589**	0.634**	0.601**	0.612**	0.648**	0.723**
Group Comparisons: Mean (SD)						
Gender						
Male (n=298)	4.06 (0.79)	2.78 (1.01)	2.56 (1.06)	2.61 (1.04)	2.71 (1.02)	2.94 (0.81)
Female (n=272)	4.12 (0.77)	2.55 (1.04)	2.32 (1.09)	2.44 (1.07)	2.49 (1.05)	2.74 (0.82)
t-value	-0.91	2.67**	2.64**	1.89	2.51*	2.89**
Region						
Central (n=165)	3.98 (0.81)	3.12 (0.95)	2.89 (1.01)	2.87 (0.98)	3.01 (0.97)	3.18 (0.76)
Eastern (n=142)	4.11 (0.76)	2.67 (1.02)	2.45 (1.08)	2.53 (1.06)	2.61 (1.04)	2.81 (0.81)
Western (n=138)	4.07 (0.77)	2.59 (1.05)	2.31 (1.09)	2.46 (1.08)	2.54 (1.06)	2.76 (0.83)

Northern (n=125)	4.21 (0.78)	2.31 (1.04)	2.12 (1.06)	2.26 (1.03)	2.29 (1.02)	2.54 (0.81)
F-value	2.47	18.34***	15.67***	11.23***	14.89***	19.78***
Institution Type						
Public (n=387)	4.18 (0.76)	2.52 (1.01)	2.31 (1.06)	2.41 (1.04)	2.47 (1.02)	2.71 (0.80)
Private (n=183)	3.89 (0.79)	3.01 (1.01)	2.78 (1.06)	2.79 (1.05)	2.93 (1.03)	3.13 (0.80)
t-value	4.23***	-5.45***	-5.02***	-4.11***	-5.01***	-5.89***

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The bivariate analysis revealed significant negative correlations between employability-centered orientation and all capability development dimensions, with correlation coefficients ranging from -0.461 to -0.612 (all $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of employability focus were consistently associated with lower capability development across all measured dimensions. The strongest negative correlation was observed between employability orientation and overall capability development ($r = -0.612$, $p < .001$), followed by learner agency ($r = -0.556$, $p < .001$) and civic participation ($r = -0.523$, $p < .001$), suggesting that employment-focused educational approaches particularly constrained the development of autonomous decision-making and active citizenship capabilities. Pedagogical approaches demonstrated the strongest positive correlations with capability development, with coefficients ranging from 0.601 to 0.723 (all $p < .001$), indicating that learner-centered, participatory teaching methods were powerfully associated with enhanced capability cultivation. Teacher capacity ($r = 0.512$ to 0.598 , all $p < .001$) and infrastructure quality ($r = 0.398$ to 0.521 , all $p < .001$) also showed significant positive associations with capability dimensions, though these relationships were moderately weaker than pedagogical factors. Gender comparisons revealed that male students reported significantly higher levels of capability development than female students across multiple dimensions, with significant differences observed in critical thinking ($t = 2.67$, $p < .01$), civic participation ($t = 2.64$, $p < .01$), learner agency ($t = 2.51$, $p < .05$), and overall capability development ($t = 2.89$, $p < .01$), though no significant gender difference emerged in employability orientation. Regional analysis using ANOVA showed highly significant differences (F-values ranging from 11.23 to 19.78, all $p < .001$), with post-hoc tests revealing that students in the Central region consistently reported the highest capability development across all dimensions, while Northern region students reported the lowest levels. Institution type comparisons demonstrated that private institution students experienced significantly higher capability development ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.80$) compared to public institution students ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.80$; $t = -5.89$, $p < .001$), while simultaneously reporting lower employability orientation ($t = 4.23$, $p < .001$).

The strong negative correlations between employability orientation and capability development provided compelling empirical evidence that the current educational paradigm created a zero-sum dynamic where emphasis on employability outcomes actively undermined holistic human development. This inverse relationship suggested that instructional time, pedagogical attention, and institutional resources devoted to examination preparation and job-specific skills training crowded out opportunities for learners to develop critical thinking, ethical reasoning, creativity, and other broader capabilities. The particularly strong negative association with learner agency ($r = -0.556$) was theoretically significant, as it indicated that employability-focused education diminished students' sense of self-direction, autonomous goal-setting, and capacity to chart their own developmental trajectories—outcomes that contradicted the empowerment rhetoric often used to justify employment-focused reforms. The finding that pedagogical approaches exhibited the strongest positive correlations with capability development ($r = 0.723$ for overall capability) underscored the centrality of teaching methods in determining educational outcomes and suggested that shifting from teacher-centered, transmission-oriented instruction toward participatory, inquiry-based, and dialogical pedagogies could substantially enhance capability cultivation even within existing resource constraints. While teacher capacity and infrastructure quality also mattered, their relatively weaker correlations indicated that pedagogical transformation might be the most powerful and cost-effective lever for implementing capabilities-oriented education in resource-limited contexts like Uganda.

The demographic disparities revealed troubling patterns of educational inequality that intersected with and were potentially exacerbated by the employability-centered paradigm. Gender differences in capability development, favoring male students across multiple dimensions, reflected broader societal gender inequalities in Uganda and suggested that educational practices failed to counteract—and may have reinforced—patriarchal norms that constrained women's agency, political participation, and intellectual development. These gender gaps were particularly concerning given that no significant gender difference existed in employability orientation, indicating that female students experienced equal pressure for employment preparation but received fewer opportunities to develop broader capabilities, potentially positioning them for more precarious labor market outcomes and limiting their potential for leadership and civic contribution. The pronounced regional disparities, with Central region students substantially outperforming their counterparts in other regions across all capability dimensions, reflected the geographic concentration of educational resources, qualified teachers, and infrastructure in Uganda's capital region, perpetuating center-periphery inequalities that undermined national cohesion and equitable development. Students in the Northern region, which had experienced prolonged conflict and displacement, showed particularly severe capability deficits ($M = 2.54$ for overall capability), suggesting that the education system had not adequately addressed the distinctive developmental needs of conflict-affected populations or leveraged education as a tool for post-conflict reconstruction and social healing. The superior capability development outcomes in private institutions, despite their lower employability orientation, provided suggestive evidence that less examination-driven, more holistic educational approaches could

yield better developmental outcomes, though this finding required cautious interpretation given potential selection effects and socioeconomic confounding, as private institutions served predominantly advantaged populations who brought greater cultural and economic capital to their educational experiences.

Table 3: Structural Equation Modeling Results for Capabilities Approach Framework

Model Parameters	Unstandardized Estimate	SE	Standardized Estimate	CR	p-value
Measurement Model (CFA)					
Employability Orientation → Examination Focus	1.000	-	0.871	-	-
Employability Orientation → Skills Training	0.945	0.056	0.823	16.875	<.001
Employability Orientation → Job Preparation	0.982	0.058	0.847	16.931	<.001
Institutional Factors → Infrastructure Quality	1.000	-	0.768	-	-
Institutional Factors → Teacher Capacity	1.124	0.089	0.842	12.629	<.001
Institutional Factors → Pedagogy	1.267	0.095	0.911	13.337	<.001
Capability Development → Critical Thinking	1.000	-	0.834	-	-
Capability Development → Ethical Reasoning	0.891	0.062	0.782	14.371	<.001
Capability Development → Civic Participation	1.043	0.068	0.817	15.338	<.001
Capability Development → Creativity	1.021	0.067	0.801	15.239	<.001
Capability Development → Learner Agency	1.087	0.069	0.856	15.754	<.001
Holistic Outcomes → Societal Contribution	1.000	-	0.879	-	-
Holistic Outcomes → Learner Wellbeing	0.934	0.054	0.845	17.296	<.001
Holistic Outcomes → Adaptability	0.967	0.056	0.862	17.268	<.001
Structural Model Paths					
Employability Orientation → Capability Development	-0.412	0.067	-0.423	-6.149	<.001
Employability Orientation → Holistic Outcomes	-0.187	0.058	-0.196	-3.224	.001
Institutional Factors → Capability Development	0.624	0.082	0.598	7.610	<.001
Institutional Factors → Holistic Outcomes	0.231	0.069	0.243	3.348	<.001
Capability Development → Holistic Outcomes	0.697	0.078	0.712	8.936	<.001
Indirect Effects					
Employability Orientation → Capability → Holistic Outcomes	-0.287	0.053	-0.301	-5.415	<.001
Institutional Factors → Capability → Holistic Outcomes	0.435	0.065	0.426	6.692	<.001
Model Fit Indices					
χ^2/df	2.847				
CFI	0.943				
TLI	0.936				
RMSEA	0.057 (90% CI: 0.051-0.063)				
SRMR	0.048				
Construct Reliability					
Employability Orientation (CR/AVE)	0.891 / 0.732				
Institutional Factors (CR/AVE)	0.876 / 0.704				
Capability Development (CR/AVE)	0.918 / 0.692				
Holistic Outcomes (CR/AVE)	0.903 / 0.756				

Note: CR = Critical Ratio; SE = Standard Error; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

The structural equation model demonstrated excellent fit to the data across multiple indices, with $\chi^2/df = 2.847$ (below the recommended threshold of 3.0), CFI = 0.943 and TLI = 0.936 (both exceeding the 0.90 criterion for acceptable fit), RMSEA = 0.057 with 90% confidence interval of 0.051-0.063 (falling within the acceptable range of 0.05-0.08), and SRMR = 0.048 (below the 0.08 threshold), collectively indicating that the hypothesized theoretical model adequately represented the relationships among constructs in the observed data. The measurement model exhibited strong psychometric properties, with all factor loadings significant at $p < .001$ and standardized estimates ranging from 0.768 to 0.911, confirming that observed indicators reliably measured their respective

latent constructs. Composite reliability coefficients ranged from 0.876 to 0.918, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold for adequate internal consistency, while average variance extracted values ranged from 0.692 to 0.756, all surpassing the 0.50 criterion and indicating that constructs explained more than half of the variance in their indicators. The structural model revealed that employability orientation exerted a significant negative direct effect on capability development ($\beta = -0.423$, $p < .001$), explaining approximately 17.9% of the variance in capability outcomes, while institutional factors demonstrated a substantial positive effect on capability development ($\beta = 0.598$, $p < .001$). Capability development, in turn, showed a strong positive relationship with holistic educational outcomes ($\beta = 0.712$, $p < .001$), representing the most powerful pathway in the model. Employability orientation also exhibited a significant negative direct effect on holistic outcomes ($\beta = -0.196$, $p = .001$), though this effect was considerably weaker than its indirect effect mediated through capability development ($\beta = -0.301$, $p < .001$). The total effect of employability orientation on holistic outcomes, combining direct and indirect pathways, was $\beta = -0.497$, while institutional factors showed a total positive effect of $\beta = 0.669$ on holistic outcomes when accounting for mediation through capability development.

The structural equation modeling results provided robust empirical support for the theoretical framework underpinning this study and confirmed that employability-centered education operated as a systematic constraint on holistic human development through multiple pathways. The significant negative direct effect of employability orientation on capability development ($\beta = -0.423$) substantiated the hypothesis that instrumental, employment-focused educational approaches actively inhibited the cultivation of broader human capabilities, not merely through neglect or omission but through the active displacement of capability-enhancing activities by examination preparation and job-specific skills training. The finding that this negative relationship persisted even after controlling for institutional factors suggested that the employability paradigm's constraining effects operated through fundamental pedagogical and curricular mechanisms rather than simply reflecting resource scarcity or institutional underdevelopment. The even stronger indirect negative effect ($\beta = -0.301$) operating through capability development as a mediator revealed a cascading impact wherein employability focus first diminished capability development, which subsequently undermined holistic educational outcomes including societal contribution, learner wellbeing, and adaptability. This mediation pattern underscored capability development as the critical mechanism through which educational orientations translated into ultimate life outcomes, validating the capabilities approach's core theoretical proposition that education should be evaluated primarily by its success in expanding substantive freedoms rather than by instrumental metrics like employment rates or income levels.

The powerful positive effects of institutional factors on both capability development ($\beta = 0.598$) and holistic outcomes ($\beta = 0.243$ direct, $\beta = 0.426$ indirect) highlighted the crucial role of educational infrastructure, teacher capacity, and especially pedagogical approaches in enabling capabilities-oriented education. The finding that pedagogical approaches had the highest factor loading ($\lambda = 0.911$) within the institutional factors construct suggested that teaching methods represented the most influential component of the institutional environment for capability development. This result had important policy implications, indicating that investments in pedagogical transformation—through pre-service and in-service teacher education emphasizing learner-centered, participatory, and dialogical methods—might yield greater returns for holistic education than infrastructure development or other institutional improvements alone. The strong relationship between capability development and holistic outcomes ($\beta = 0.712$) provided empirical validation that capabilities were not merely abstract philosophical constructs but concrete educational achievements with measurable consequences for learners' abilities to contribute to society, achieve wellbeing, and adapt to changing circumstances. The magnitude of this relationship exceeded that of any other pathway in the model, reinforcing the centrality of capability expansion as the primary mechanism through which education generated valued life outcomes. Taken together, these findings demonstrated that transitioning from an employability-centered paradigm to a capabilities approach would require not merely rhetorical shifts or incremental reforms but fundamental restructuring of pedagogical practices, curricular priorities, and assessment systems to prioritize the expansion of diverse human capabilities over narrow employment preparation, while simultaneously strengthening institutional capacities, particularly in under-resourced regions and schools, to create enabling environments for holistic education.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the transition from an employability-centered educational paradigm toward capabilities approach for holistic education in Uganda, revealing fundamental incompatibilities between instrumental employment-focused orientations and broader human development goals. The findings demonstrated that Uganda's education system operated within a paradigm characterized by overwhelming emphasis on examination preparation ($M = 4.23$) and job readiness at the direct expense of capability development across critical dimensions including civic participation ($M = 2.45$), creativity ($M = 2.53$), and learner agency ($M = 2.61$). The strong negative correlations between employability orientation and all capability dimensions ($r = -0.461$ to -0.612 , all $p < .001$), combined with structural equation modeling results showing significant negative direct ($\beta = -0.423$) and indirect effects ($\beta = -0.301$) on holistic outcomes, provided compelling empirical evidence that the current paradigm actively constrained rather than merely neglected broader human flourishing. The research identified pedagogical approaches as the most powerful institutional lever for capability development ($\lambda = 0.911$), with capability expansion serving as the critical mediating mechanism through which education translated into valued life outcomes ($\beta = 0.712$). Significant demographic disparities—with female students, Northern region learners, and public institution attendees experiencing substantially lower capability development—revealed that the employability-centered paradigm exacerbated existing inequalities while failing to prepare learners adequately for the multifaceted challenges of contemporary Ugandan society. These findings collectively demonstrated that achieving holistic education in Uganda

required fundamental paradigmatic transformation beyond incremental reforms, shifting from viewing education instrumentally as workforce preparation toward recognizing it as the primary vehicle for expanding substantive freedoms and enabling diverse forms of human flourishing and societal contribution.

Recommendations

Pedagogical Transformation Through Teacher Professional Development: The Ministry of Education and Sports should prioritize comprehensive reform of teacher education systems, both pre-service and in-service, to equip educators with competencies in learner-centered, participatory, and inquiry-based pedagogies that foster capability development. Given that pedagogical approaches demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with capability outcomes ($\lambda = 0.911$ in the institutional factors construct and $r = 0.723$ with overall capability), investing in sustained, practice-based professional development programs that move teachers away from transmission-oriented, examination-focused instruction toward dialogical, problem-based, and experiential teaching methods represents the most cost-effective intervention for implementing capabilities-oriented education. These programs should incorporate mentoring, peer learning communities, and classroom-based action research to ensure that pedagogical shifts are embedded in teachers' daily practice rather than remaining superficial or rhetorical.

Curriculum and Assessment Redesign to Prioritize Capability Dimensions: Educational policymakers should fundamentally restructure national curricula and assessment frameworks to explicitly prioritize and systematically evaluate the ten capability dimensions identified in this study—critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic participation, cultural awareness, health and wellbeing, emotional intelligence, creativity, practical reasoning, social affiliation, and learner agency alongside academic content knowledge. The current examination-dominated system ($M = 4.23$ for examination focus) that demonstrated significant negative effects on capability development ($\beta = -0.423$) should be replaced with diverse assessment approaches including project-based evaluations, portfolios, community engagement requirements, and formative assessments that measure capability expansion rather than mere content recall. This restructuring should reduce the high-stakes nature of terminal examinations while incorporating authentic performance tasks that require students to demonstrate critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and ethical reasoning in context-specific applications.

Targeted Interventions to Address Regional and Gender Disparities: Given the significant demographic disparities identified in capability development with Northern region students ($M = 2.54$), female students, and public institution attendees experiencing substantially lower outcomes the government should implement equity-focused interventions that provide additional resources, pedagogical support, and culturally responsive programming to historically marginalized populations and under-resourced regions. These interventions should include preferential allocation of qualified teachers to rural and conflict-affected areas, gender-responsive pedagogy training that actively counters patriarchal norms limiting female students' agency and civic participation, infrastructure investments prioritized for regions with the greatest capability deficits, and community engagement initiatives that leverage local knowledge systems and cultural resources as foundations for capability development rather than viewing them as deficits to be overcome.

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