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### Enhancing Employability Skills in Pre-Service Teacher Training: Strategies for Higher Education Institutions in Uganda. A Case Study of Kyambogo University

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Curriculum Reform.*

Despite the growing demand for competent teachers in Uganda, pre-service teacher training programmes have been criticised for inadequately equipping graduates with employability skills essential for the dynamic education sector. These skills, including communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, are crucial for success in the contemporary education environment but remain inconsistently integrated into training curricula. This study investigated strategies for enhancing employability skills in pre-service teacher training programmes in higher education institutions, using Kyambogo University as a case study. Guided by Human Capital Theory, the study employed a qualitative case study design involving 40 purposively selected participants: 2 heads of department, 8 lecturers, 22 final-year pre-service teacher trainees, and 8 head teachers of graduate teachers. Data were collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions and analysed thematically. Findings revealed seven key strategies for enhancing employability skills: (1) explicit integration in curricula, (2) stronger collaboration between universities and employing institutions, (3) structured career guidance and counselling, (4) staff capacity building, (5) holistic assessment approaches, (6) policy development and enforcement, and (7) improved institutional infrastructure and support systems. The study concludes that a multi-faceted approach anchored in curriculum reform, policy alignment, and institutional investment is critical for preparing pre-service teachers to meet labour market demands. This study provides practical insights for curriculum developers, university administrators, and policymakers seeking to improve teacher preparedness and employability in Uganda and similar educational contexts.

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is a growing demand for educators who possess not only subject matter expertise but also transferable competencies such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and adaptability. In response to the evolving nature of education, many countries have transitioned toward competency-based learning models that prioritise the development of holistic skills essential for success in contemporary classrooms (Annan-Brew et al., 2024; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Employers in the education sector increasingly value such employability skills, considering them critical indicators of a teacher's readiness to function effectively in diverse and dynamic learning environments (Cornali, 2018; Tabieh et al., 2021).

In Uganda, however, pre-service teacher training has traditionally focused on content mastery and pedagogical theory, often neglecting the structured development of practical employability competencies. As a result, newly qualified teachers frequently struggle with classroom management, instructional adaptability, digital tool integration, reflective practice, and professional collaboration (Tabieh et al., 2021; Trixa & Kaspar, 2024). This misalignment between pre-service training and the realities of the teaching profession has raised

concerns among education stakeholders regarding the effectiveness and preparedness of graduate teachers (Kintu et al., 2019).

Despite a growing emphasis on content and pedagogy, many pre-service teacher training programmes in Uganda continue to offer limited opportunities for pre-service trainees to develop and apply employability skills in real-world contexts (Wambi et al., 2023). Employers increasingly report that new teachers lack essential competencies such as communication, creativity, teamwork, and critical thinking, which are necessary for navigating complex classroom dynamics and implementing learner-centred instructional strategies (Annan-Brew et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2024). Without addressing this gap, pre-service graduates may face reduced job prospects, slower career progression, and diminished instructional effectiveness.

Addressing this challenge requires higher education institutions to adopt intentional and context-responsive strategies that embed employability skills within the design and delivery of pre-service teacher training programmes. These strategies may include experiential learning, digital literacy training, reflective teaching practices, and collaborative engagement with educational stakeholders and employers (Maina et al., 2022;

Abd et al., 2021). Kyambogo University, as a leading institution in teacher training, provides a relevant case for exploring how such skills can be more effectively integrated into pre-service programmes.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate how employability skills can be enhanced in pre-service teacher training programmes in higher education institutions in Uganda. It is guided by the following research question: What strategies can be employed to enhance employability skills in pre-service teacher training programmes in higher education institutions in Uganda?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is informed by Human Capital Theory, a foundational economic and educational theory that emphasises the role of education in enhancing individuals' productivity and employability. The theory, as developed by Schultz (1961) and further advanced by Becker (1964), conceptualises education and training as forms of investment in human capabilities. These investments yield returns in the form of increased economic productivity, personal income, and societal advancement. In the context of higher education, Human Capital Theory provides a powerful rationale for aligning academic programmes with the skills required in the labour market. It underscores the importance of equipping learners with competencies that go beyond theoretical knowledge to include practical, transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, digital literacy, and adaptability (Adeoye et al., 2024). These skills collectively enhance an individual's employability and capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development.

Within pre-service teacher training, the application of Human Capital Theory implies that pre-service teacher training institutions must design programmes that not only prepare teachers to deliver subject content but also develop their capacity to operate effectively in dynamic

educational environments. Strategies such as practicum-based learning, inquiry-oriented pedagogy, feedback literacy, ICT integration, and reflective practice serve as mechanisms for cultivating this human capital.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The need to enhance employability skills among graduates of pre-service teacher training programmes has become increasingly critical in the context of global labour market demands. Pre-service teacher training in higher education institutions now goes beyond imparting pedagogical knowledge; it requires the intentional development of transferable skills such as communication, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration. A number of studies have explored strategies for effectively embedding these competencies into teacher education curricula.

One common strategy involves the use of inquiry-based and cognitive pedagogies to foster critical thinking. Verawati et al. (2019) demonstrated that incorporating a conflict-cognitive approach within inquiry-based learning significantly enhanced the critical thinking skills of pre-service physics teachers in Indonesia. This study affirms the role of structured inquiry in strengthening higher-order cognitive abilities essential for the teaching profession. Reflective practice and structured feedback have also been identified as essential strategies in pre-service teacher training. Delbart et al. (2023), in a study conducted in Belgium, found that triad debriefing sessions and peer feedback helped pre-service teachers improve classroom management and instructional strategies. Similarly, Ropohl and Rönnebeck (2019) examined formative assessment practices among pre-service chemistry teachers in Germany, concluding that targeted training in feedback provision enhanced their ability to evaluate student learning and support learner progress. These findings highlight the value of integrating reflection, peer interaction, and feedback literacy into teacher education to develop professional competencies.

Micro-credentialing has emerged as another promising approach for employability skills development in higher education. Maina et al. (2022) implemented an Employability Skills Micro-credentialing (ESMC) initiative across three East African universities—Maseno University (Kenya), Makerere University (Uganda), and the Open University of Tanzania. Their findings revealed that lecturers underwent a conceptual shift in teaching, aligning learning outcomes with industry-relevant skills and adopting more learner-centred, active learning methodologies. This example provides a regionally relevant model for enhancing employability skills within the Ugandan teacher education context.

Curriculum review and realignment based on priority graduate skills have also been suggested as effective strategies. Caingcoy (2021), through a scoping study on teacher education in the Philippines, identified communication, ICT, leadership, problem-solving, and research as high-demand skills. The study recommended that teacher education institutions explicitly integrate these skills into module outcomes and teaching practices. Thaanyane and Jita (2024), focusing on business education in Lesotho, emphasised the importance of ICT integration, linking pre-service teachers' professional competence to self-efficacy, institutional infrastructure, and targeted training. Technology integration and digital pedagogy are also vital in preparing pre-service teachers for contemporary classrooms. Syaniah and Fithriani (2023) explored how Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers navigated challenges during distance learning, noting that self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and digital resourcefulness were key to sustaining engagement and motivation. Similarly, Abd et al. (2021) analysed reflective journals of Malaysian pre-service teachers during online internships, identifying instructional adaptability, digital proficiency, and student-centred engagement as crucial skills developed through online practicum experiences. These studies affirm the necessity of

equipping teacher trainees with digital and adaptive teaching competencies for the evolving educational landscape.

Together, these studies illustrate a diverse range of strategies, including inquiry-based learning, reflective practice, formative assessment, curriculum realignment, micro-credentialing, and digital integration used to enhance employability skills among pre-service teachers. While global and regional insights are useful, it was equally important to explore how these strategies are interpreted and applied within the local institutional contexts of Uganda. This study, therefore, focused on Kyambogo University, a major teacher education institution in Uganda, to investigate current practices and identify effective strategies for integrating employability skills into pre-service teacher training programmes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, to explore strategies for enhancing the integration of employability skills in pre-service teacher training programmes at Kyambogo University in Uganda. The interpretivist orientation, drawing from Dworkin (1978), views knowledge as socially constructed through the lived experiences of participants. A qualitative approach was adopted to gain rich, descriptive insights into participants' experiences and institutional practices, allowing the researcher to explore multiple perspectives in depth (Creswell, 2014; Subramanian et al., 2020). A case study design was appropriate because it enabled a detailed, contextual examination of employability skills integration within a bounded real-life setting (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Harrison et al., 2017). Kyambogo University was purposively selected due to its prominence in teacher education and its leadership in curriculum development for teacher training in Uganda (Otaala et al., 2013).

A total of 40 participants were selected through purposive homogeneous sampling, ideal for

qualitative research involving information-rich cases (Naderifar et al., 2017; Mwange et al., 2023). Data were collected using key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews with two heads of department, eight lecturers, and eight employers provided expert insights into curriculum content, teaching approaches, and labour market expectations. Focus group discussions (FGD) with 22 final-year pre-service teacher trainees captured shared experiences and perceptions in a dynamic group setting (Creswell, 2014). Thematic analysis followed Creswell's (2014) framework, involving transcription, coding, and theme development. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, and audit trails (Fitzpatrick, 2019; Ghafouri, 2018). Ethical approval was secured, and participant confidentiality was strictly observed.

## FINDINGS

This study investigated strategies for enhancing employability skills in pre-service teacher training programmes within higher education institutions in Uganda. The findings, derived from key informant interviews and focus group discussions, revealed seven major themes: (1) explicit integration of employability skills into training programmes, (2) linkage with employing institutions, (3) career guidance and counselling, (4) staff capacity building, (5) holistic assessment, (6) policy implementation, and (7) management support.

### Explicit Integration of Employability Skills

Participants strongly emphasised the need for the deliberate and structured inclusion of employability skills into the curriculum. Respondents argued that embedding these skills within teaching content and methods would ensure that trainees are equipped for both the classroom and the broader job market. One employer noted, "Incorporating employability skills training into the curriculum ensures that teacher trainees are equipped with the necessary skills for success in the workforce upon graduation" (45-year-old female head teacher). A lecturer echoed

this by stating, "Whatever we facilitate should strongly reflect the extent to which it promotes the employability skills sought by employers for our learners" (48-year-old male lecturer). Hands-on activities, such as demonstration lessons and group projects, were suggested to foster critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving. A male trainee from FGD-2 commented, "We should be encouraged to conduct independent research to gain a deeper understanding and improve our confidence and problem-solving abilities."

### Linkage with Employing Institutions

Respondents underscored the need for consistent dialogue and collaboration between universities and employers to ensure alignment between training and workplace expectations. A 45-year-old female head teacher stated, "Higher education institutions should collaborate with us so that the curriculum aligns with employer needs, benefiting both students and employers." Similarly, a lecturer added, "We assume we know what employers need, but without direct input, we may miss important skills that students must acquire" (a 50-year-old male lecturer). Workshops, joint curriculum reviews, and employer feedback sessions were recommended to address this gap.

### Career Guidance and Counselling

The study revealed that structured career guidance is essential for helping pre-service teacher trainees understand the demands of the profession and develop the appropriate mindset. A 48-year-old female head teacher proposed, "Give students guidance and counselling sessions so that they are taught to appreciate their profession." Respondents also suggested that students need platforms to share their academic and career-related concerns. A female trainee from FGD-1 observed, "We should meet our lecturers to tell them what is hurting us and get bonded with them."



### Staff Capacity Building

Lecturers acknowledged a need for pedagogical training and professional development to integrate employability skills into their teaching. One lecturer stated, “Those who don’t have pedagogical skills need to be re-oriented to modern ways of teaching, especially in the content areas” (45-year-old male lecturer). Attending seminars and conferences was viewed as beneficial. A 55-year-old lecturer remarked, “Sometimes those plenary sessions have skills and values that change your perspective. Lecturers need that exposure.”

### Holistic Assessment

Participants emphasised the value of assessments that go beyond academic knowledge to include skills like communication, adaptability, and professionalism. A 55-year-old head teacher advised, “Assess students in all aspects of life to ensure they are well-rounded and prepared for the workforce.” Involving employing schools in assessing student teachers during practicum was seen as crucial. “School administrators should also assess student teachers and give feedback to help them improve their teaching skills,” suggested a 48-year-old female head teacher.

### Policy Implementation

There was a strong call for institutional and national education policies to mandate the integration of employability skills in all pre-service training programmes. “At faculty and university level, we must ensure that every course unit has content for employability skills,” stated a 55-year-old male lecturer. Trainees shared similar sentiments, noting that employability skills should be explicitly included in subject content rather than left to chance (FGD-1).

### Management Support

Finally, respondents discussed institutional challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited infrastructure, and lack of resources. These constraints were said to hinder quality training.

“The administration should consider the workload, the space, the motivation,” remarked a 58-year-old male lecturer. Trainees expressed the need for adequate lecture rooms, improved internet access, and financial support for internships. “Universities should give Wi-Fi to learners and make it accessible,” said a trainee from FGD-2. Others requested materials such as manila papers and internship allowances.

In sum, participants advocated for a multi-dimensional approach to enhancing employability skills in pre-service teacher training. This includes curriculum reform, stakeholder collaboration, staff development, improved assessments, enabling policies, and institutional support mechanisms to prepare future teachers for dynamic educational environments.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted and interconnected set of factors that influence the enhancement of employability skills within pre-service teacher training programmes. Central to this is the explicit integration of employability skills into the curriculum, a move that reflects global shifts towards competency-based education. Guided by Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964), the study confirms that education systems must intentionally cultivate market-relevant competencies such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability. By embedding these competencies into content delivery, pre-service programmes ensure that graduates are equipped not only for teaching but also for navigating dynamic and competitive professional environments.

The data also illuminate the critical role of employer-university linkages. Participants emphasised the necessity of institutional dialogue with employing schools to align training content with the job market demands. This echoes previous research by Hahn and Gangeness (2019), who advocate for strategic employer engagement to

ensure curricular relevance. When employer feedback mechanisms, such as workshops, internships, and collaborative curriculum reviews, are institutionalised, they help close the skills gap and increase graduate readiness.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of structured career guidance and counselling. Trainees benefit from personalised support systems that guide their career paths, foster motivation, and enhance professional identity. This aligns with Cachó et al. (2022), who emphasised mentorship and counselling as integral to fostering workplace readiness. The participants' call for stronger lecturer-student relationships further demonstrates the significance of emotional support and career development within teacher education.

Lecturers, as both educators and role models, play a pivotal role in employability skills development. The study found that many lecturers require capacity building in learner-centred, experiential, and technology-integrated pedagogies. This supports the findings by Maina et al. (2022), who highlighted the transformative impact of micro-credentialing and professional development workshops on lecturer practices. Institutions that invest in equipping their academic staff with modern teaching strategies are better positioned to develop graduates who meet workforce expectations.

The theme of holistic assessment reinforces the shift from traditional grading to authentic, skills-based evaluation. The participants emphasised assessing behavioural and interpersonal skills in addition to academic performance. This finding is supported by Othman et al. (2018) and Kelly et al. (2022), who argue that simulations, open-book tasks, and problem-based assessments provide a more accurate picture of student competencies. Moreover, involving school administrators in practicum evaluations ensures diverse and realistic perspectives on student performance.

Policy implementation was identified as both a barrier and an enabler of employability skills development. Participants noted that while institutions acknowledge the importance of these skills, few policies explicitly require their inclusion across all course units. This aligns with Delbart et al. (2023), who emphasised the role of institutional mandates in mainstreaming pedagogical innovation. Strong policy frameworks can guide curriculum design, resource allocation, and lecturer accountability.

Finally, management support emerged as a foundational factor in operationalising employability strategies. Overcrowded classes, resource scarcity, and insufficient funding for student activities were reported as significant barriers. These challenges echo broader systemic issues in African higher education (Wambi et al., 2023; Marja & Annah, 2021). Institutions must prioritise infrastructure development, reduce student-lecturer ratios, and provide digital and instructional resources. In doing so, they create environments conducive to effective teaching and learning.

In conclusion, this study affirms that enhancing employability skills in pre-service teacher education requires an ecosystem-wide approach. Guided by Human Capital Theory, it demonstrates that strategic investments in curriculum, pedagogy, staff development, policy, infrastructure, and stakeholder engagement collectively shape employability outcomes. By addressing these areas holistically, higher education institutions in Uganda and similar contexts can better prepare teacher graduates to thrive in contemporary educational settings and contribute meaningfully to national development.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored strategic approaches for enhancing employability skills in pre-service teacher training programmes at Kyambogo University, Uganda. Findings emphasised that embedding employability skills such as

communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability into teacher education curricula is essential for preparing graduates for contemporary educational demands. The study affirmed the value of employer-university linkages, structured career guidance, lecturer capacity building, holistic assessments, policy enforcement, and institutional support in creating a conducive environment for skills development. Ultimately, a systemic and multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to close the employability gap and produce competent, workforce-ready teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Higher education institutions should revise and align pre-service teacher training curricula to explicitly embed employability skills across all course units. Beyond curriculum design, institutions should adopt experiential learning methodologies, including microteaching, role plays, collaborative group projects, and community-based practicum placements. These approaches help learners connect theory to practice, develop transferable skills, and cultivate professional identities early in their careers.
- Higher education Institutions should establish formal mechanisms for engaging with employers, such as advisory boards, alumni networks, and co-designed practicums, to ensure that curriculum content and delivery align with labour market expectations. Regular workshops, feedback sessions, and joint training initiatives can foster shared understanding and collaboration between academic and industry stakeholders.
- Higher education institutions should implement structured and ongoing professional development programmes focused on learner-centred pedagogy, ICT integration, inclusive education, and employability-oriented assessment methods. Equipping lecturers with these competencies enables them to model and

transfer employability skills effectively to trainees.

- Higher education institutions should establish career guidance units with trained personnel to offer pre-service teachers access to counselling, peer mentorship, and career planning resources. Scheduled career awareness events, professional development talks, and alumni sharing sessions can support career identity formation and improve transition into the job market.
- Higher education institutions should introduce holistic assessment frameworks that include formative and summative evaluations of both academic content and soft skills. Engage employers, school mentors, and peers in the feedback process during school practicum to ensure assessments reflect real-world teaching expectations.
- Ministry of Education and Sports and Higher education institutions should enact and enforce policies mandating the integration of employability skills into all education programmes. These policies should be accompanied by detailed implementation guidelines, regular monitoring, and dedicated resources to support curriculum innovation and institutional accountability.
- Higher education institutions should invest in expanding classroom infrastructure, digital learning tools, and student support services. Provision of Wi-Fi access, updated textbooks, internship funding, and accessible learning spaces are essential to fostering an environment conducive to employability skills.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was confined to one institution, Kyambogo University, which may limit the generalisability of the findings across all higher education institutions in Uganda. Additionally, the qualitative approach, while rich in depth, does not



provide quantifiable data on the prevalence of practices or outcomes. The use of purposive sampling may have also introduced some selection bias.

### Suggestions for Further Study

Future studies should include multiple institutions to examine the variability and commonalities in employability skill integration across different contexts. Mixed-methods approaches could combine qualitative depth with quantitative data on the effectiveness and prevalence of interventions. Longitudinal research is recommended to track how pre-service teachers apply employability skills post-graduation and the long-term impacts on their professional trajectories.

### Study Contributions

This study provides a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of how employability skills can be strategically integrated into pre-service teacher training in Uganda. It contributes to the theoretical discourse by applying Human Capital Theory to frame the integration of practical competencies within higher education curricula.

The study proposes a multidimensional framework of curriculum reform, institutional collaboration, staff development, and policy alignment for improving teacher preparedness.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for education policymakers, curriculum developers, university administrators, and lecturers on how to design and implement employability-focused training. Its findings offer a roadmap for systemic reform, emphasising the importance of stakeholder engagement, institutional investment, and pedagogical innovation.

Moreover, the study elevates the voices of key stakeholders, pre-service teachers, employers, and lecturers, whose perspectives enhance the credibility and relevance of the findings. By focusing on the Ugandan context, this research also provides a model for comparable initiatives across

sub-Saharan Africa and other regions grappling with graduate unemployment and teacher readiness challenges.

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