

Original Article

Advancing Sustainable Higher Education: Embracing the Triple Bottom Line Integration in Uganda

Eutyclus Ngotho Gichuru^{1*}

¹ Makerere University, P. O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5363-5443>; Email: ngothogichuru@gmail.com

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*Economic Viability,
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Uganda.*

The purpose of this conceptual paper was to revise Triple Bottom Line Theory of sustainable development as proposed by John Elkington, so as to propose ways of advancing sustainable higher education in Uganda. The major tenets of this theory are economic viability, environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Reduced fiscal spending by governments to higher education, the global calls for mitigation of climate change, youth unemployment and equity calls for higher education to be sustainable, including in Uganda. This paper concludes by proposing that sustainable higher education in Uganda is as a result of Economic viability (job creation, skill development, research & innovation, community engagement, global education- partnerships with international institutions), environmental sustainability (integration of sustainability in curricula, use of experiential learning, collaboration with stakeholders, addressing resource limitations, empowerment and economic benefits) and social responsibility (community engagement, addressing local and global challenges, integrating social responsibility into missions, and merging social responsibility with internationalization efforts). The paper concludes by recommending empirical validation of the model, both in Uganda and outside Uganda.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions can act as a catalyst for sustainable development by implementing initiatives that address environmental, social and economic dimensions. As such, UNESCO's international environmental program of 1975 gave rise to the concept of sustainable development in higher education institutions; it has metamorphosed over time to encompass environmental, social and economic dimensions (Shetty, 2024). In Uganda, the implementation of education for sustainable development in higher education is driven by Information Communication Technologies in addressing sustainability challenges.

Similarly, management development institutes like Uganda Management Institute play a vital role in fighting corruption and promoting sustainable development goals' realization within Uganda's higher education sector and fostering initiatives towards achieving this kind of growth (Mayanja & Nkata, 2019). The initial move towards sustainable development in Uganda was when universities began aligning with government and the private sector to aid national advancement through special programs and partnerships (Baligidde & Ssempebwa, 2009.). This coupled with increased fees makes the current financing model unsustainable while at the same time limited government support together with inequitable access is prompting for a fairer inclusive funding approach (Amutuhaire, 2022).

Problem Statement

The higher education system in Uganda faces sustainability issues resulting from inadequate means, human resources, and installations, thereby

affecting its ability to respond to national knowledge society agenda demands (Ndibuuza et al., 2021). The current financing model for higher education in Uganda is considered as unworkable given the escalating expenses alongside limited state inputs. According to these sources, higher education in Uganda is not sustainable; thus, the purpose of this conceptual paper was to develop a model that can be used for solving this issue.

Objective

To revise Triple Bottom Line Theory of sustainable development as proposed by John Elkington

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Triple Bottom Line theory guided the argumentation of this paper. The theory originated from John Elkington, in his work, "Cannibals with Forks" (Loviscek, 2020). One of his great works on this theory is titled, "Partnerships From Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business", published in 1998. The major tenets of this theory according to Elkington (1998) include: Economic viability (businesses must remain fiscally sustainable to continue with their operations), environmental sustainability (Businesses should minimize negative effects on the environment), and social responsibility (Businesses should contribute positively to the society). This conceptual paper mainly focused on the aforementioned three postulates. According to this theory, businesses should integrate their business activities with economic viability, environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fig 1. Adapted from the constructs of Elkington (1998).



RESULTS

Economic Viability and Sustainable Higher Education

The sustainability of higher education institutions necessitates their economic viability which should be demonstrated through efficiency, strategic planning and by using quantifiable indices and approaches (Cernostana 2017). The financial stability, efficiency and the development of integrated indicators for evaluating financial sustainability in private higher education institutions are essential for ensuring that economic viability is important to sustainable higher education.

Higher education's economic viability is necessary for its sustenance. A variety of factors such as the economic rises result in reduced public funding, increased students' contributions as well as a shift towards full costing thereby affecting the financial sustainability of institutions (Guang, 2011). Economic viability in higher education fosters sustainability by influencing consumer behavior, values and lifestyle choices thus leading to sustainability focused attitudes and actions in society. Budget allocation for green infrastructure, operations, maintenance and resource management is determined by economic viability in sustainable higher education to ensure long-term environmental, social and economic benefits (Ducie 2013).

Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Higher Education

By deconstructing limitations such as epistemic disparity, capitalism and human-centeredness, environmental sustainability enhances sustainable education in the context of higher learning institutions through principles of distributive eco-justice and fairness for a purposeful learning that is transformational and holistic (Ajaps, 2023). On the other hand, environmental sustainability contributes to sustainable higher education by building on pillars such as green job opportunities, development of energy communities, reducing carbon footprints, supporting green economies, achieving energy independence and ensuring sustainable education (Biancardi et al., 2023). Similarly, Environmental sustainability contributes to sustainable higher education by incorporating the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into curricula thereby promoting transformative learning and encouraging brand social responsibility within institutions (Cleveland et al., 2023).

In addition, environmental sustainability in higher education ensures that future leaders can address social challenges adequately (Menon & Suresh, 2022). Again, Environmental sustainability contributes to sustainable higher education by developing global citizenship; fostering ethics-driven interdisciplinary curriculum; preparing

students to address societal challenges for a just future (Husic, 2024).

Social Responsibility and Sustainable Higher Education

To promote sustainability, higher learning institutions undertake a number of initiatives such as community participation, research and governance that foster a culture in line with sustainable development goals towards their future growth (Afshan et al., 2024). Universities would align themselves with sustainable development goals by embracing social responsibility in higher education that underscores academic integrity and active involvement in resolving economic, social and environmental challenges for global impact. Social responsibility in higher education helps to create better corporate citizenship leading to more responsible practices as well as promotes accountability within the institution. It is also driven by stakeholder value that facilitates innovation and enhances operational efficiency for long term results. The role of social responsibility in high education is ensuring sustainability through these strategies such as distance education, international assistance and resource mobilization so that the barriers can be overcome effectively (Miahkykh et al., 2023). Social responsibility in higher education advances sustainability by incorporating competencies for reporting control and decision making which are all guided by sustainable development principles and natural resource management (Chipriyanova et al., 2022).

DISCUSSIONS

Economic Viability and Sustainable Higher Education in Uganda

In order to establish an enduring higher education system in Uganda, the government should focus on improving employability for graduates through addressing unemployment, skill development, research promotion and global education (Kaahwa & Buregea, 2017). Economic viability can help solve the problem of joblessness among graduates as over 62 % of them are without jobs. Institutions that align their courses with market demands have a better chance of equipping students with relevant skills for available jobs. Concentrating on economic

viability promotes the acquisition of skills required both by local and international labor markets. This involves guided knowledge-based skills and scientific knowledge which may enable sustainable development.

Higher education institutions can be motivated to focus on research and technological progress by economic sustainability. They can use this to stimulate innovative ideas that promote environmental protection and ways of solving social problems. Institutions of higher learning that prioritize the economy are able to reach out to their neighbors and make sure their programs address the issues of their community in particular. As a result, there comes up sustainable development projects which are beneficial for both graduates as well as the society at large. Economic feasibility helps in seeking collaborations with foreign educational centers, in order to improve teaching standards, develop productive subjects, and most importantly – give students an opportunity to become cosmopolitan citizens who can participate in sustainable development processes.

Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Higher Education in Uganda

There are various programs that can be used to promote environmental sustainability in higher education within Uganda such as Agro-ecology summer residency, enhanced agricultural practices and economic empowerment, ecological literacy – all of them targeting rural communities (Ekpe, 2024). This prepares students to understand and address environmental challenges in their future careers. It is however important to note that the sustainability of higher education does not only mean making it “green.” Higher education becomes sustainable by incorporating principles of sustainability into the curriculum so as to prepare students for a future where they will have to deal with environmental issues.

Educational programs like the Agro-ecology summer residency programs that have elements of experimental learning are important for students’ understanding of things that can be repeated. By so doing, it helps foster a stronger bond with environmental concerns. This needs to encompass different entities such as government organizations,

NGOs and also the corporate world. Cooperation between partners in education can ensure the relevance of education programs towards sustainable issues on community level. Higher education that is sustainable has to address some problems like scarcity of resources. When institutions work towards making resources more available and increasing awareness around them, they usually create a better environment for teaching about sustainability. Thus, besides empowering students, these educational schemes promote economic development in rural areas. Consequently, sustainability plays a double role in higher learning environments.

Social Responsibility and Sustainable Higher Education in Uganda

Enhancing social responsibility that makes higher education in Uganda sustainable involves integrating community engagement into internationalization, ensuring fairness and justice, making research richer and more beneficial to society as well as dealing with major problems facing the community effectively (Amutuhaire, 2023). Community engagement is one of the ways through which universities in Uganda can be able to address both local and global challenges. Embedding social responsibility within the mission statements of universities helps in improving service delivery as well as contributing towards public good objectives. This method promotes equality and fairness by ensuring that community engagement does not perpetuate existing disparities. Eventually, combining internationalization with social responsibility may result in more sustainable practices within higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

In Uganda, it is very important that higher education should be sustainable in order to deal with sustainability issues. It is important in improving the management of staff, creating campus collaborations, and promoting equality as

well as communication and training to foster effective global sustainable development. In Uganda, it is necessary for providing comprehensive life-long learning opportunities that will cater for vulnerable groups like disabled persons and rural students who are facing challenges in accessing the digital technologies.

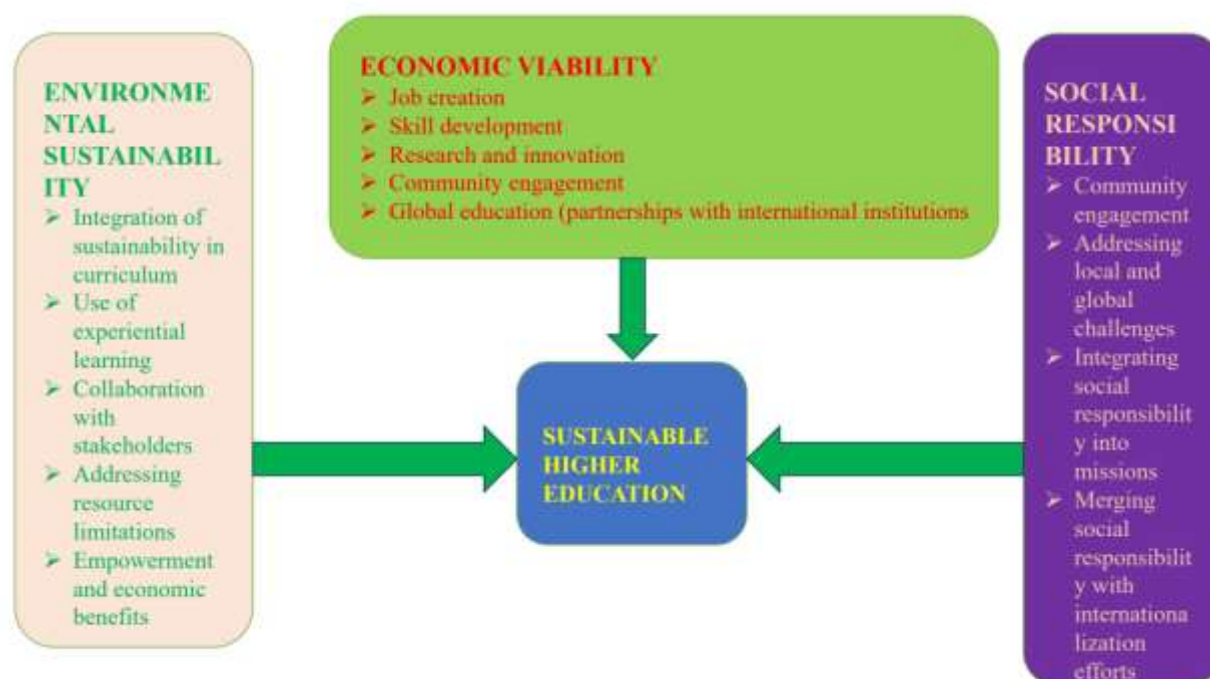
It is vital to ensure just funding models which involve both the students, universities and state thus promoting accessibility as well as equity in financing education. For example, it is crucial to provide employment opportunities for graduates to facilitate and encourage sustainable development purposes that would ease unemployment among youths. It's important to address regional imbalances in order to make equal developing areas strong and empower them at the same time.

It is critical to address gender oppression through transformative education that empowers people, disrupts patriarchy and paves the way for an equitable society. It is important in Uganda because it helps transform universities into business-minded institutions that impart graduates with skills for self-employment, job creation and economic growth as well as tackling challenges.

This has a remarkable effect on improvement of quality, infrastructural developments, and meeting emerging needs that eventually promote development by addressing sectoral gaps. Finally, this initiative is essential to Uganda's pursuit of sustainability targets, its engagement with social and ecological systems, contribution to community development and bridging the gap between youth and established universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this conceptual paper, the researcher revised Triple Bottom Line theory to make it fit to Uganda's context and hence the proposed revised model should be empirically validated in Ugandan context and other contexts too, to ascertain whether it can transition to general assumptions or whether it will remain a construct.

Fig 2. Triple Bottom Line Theory Revised

Source: Researcher constructs

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