

FOSTERING INNOVATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH WORK-BASED LEARNING IN UGANDA: A SYNTHESIS



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ABBREVIATIONS

APD	African Policy Dialogues
CBET	Competence-Based Education and Training
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DIT	Directorate of Industrial Training
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre
ESSP	Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan
FUE	Federation of Uganda Employers
GTP	Graduate Training Programme
IAG-TVET	Inter-Agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development
NASC	National Apprenticeship Steering Committee
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
NDP	National Development Plan
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPA	National Planning Authority
PLE	Primary Leaving Examinations
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
SDF	Skills Development Facility
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UBoS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UGX	Ugandan Shilling
UHOA	Uganda Hotel Owners Association
UHTTI	Uganda Hotel and Tourism Training Institute
UMA	Uganda Manufacturers Association
UNAF	Uganda National Apprenticeship Framework
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UVQF	Uganda Vocational Qualification Framework
WBL	Work-Based Learning

ABSTRACT

This synthesis report explores the state of work-based learning (WBL) in Uganda, emphasising its role in tackling youth unemployment and skills mismatches in a rapidly changing labour market. Drawing on document reviews, stakeholder consultations, and case studies, the report examines the policy and institutional environment, funding mechanisms, progress in implementation, and obstacles to effective WBL. Findings suggest that structured models like graduate trainee programmes, industry-based apprenticeships, and informal training workshops have enhanced job preparedness, reduced recruitment costs, and promoted innovation. However, ongoing challenges such as limited funding, outdated training infrastructure, weak institutional linkages, and low awareness of recognised certification continue to hinder the impact and sustainability of WBL initiatives. The synthesis provides policy recommendations to implement the draft National Work-Based Learning Policy, reinforce public-private partnerships, improve funding mechanisms, and foster inclusivity so that all learners, especially women and marginalised youth, can develop relevant skills for decent and productive employment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological innovations are paving a new path for lifelong learning and work worldwide. These have the potential to eliminate spatial-temporal barriers, enabling participation in a global labour regime that transcends gender, race, and class divides. As industries evolve, employers are increasingly looking for individuals with a diverse skill set, making employability and innovation a top priority for many potential candidates (Amish, 2024). Beyond technical expertise, individuals in the workforce should prioritise developing innovativeness and soft skills such as problem-solving abilities, communication skills, and teamwork capabilities to meet these expectations, as they enhance employment prospects. Employers value individuals who can contribute to organisational innovation by creating and implementing creative ideas for new products, addressing external demands innovatively, and solving complex innovation challenges (Shalley and Gilson, 2004; Stierand, 2015; Yuan and Woodman, 2010). Consequently, educational institutions, in response to industrial demands, are prioritising the development of such skills to improve a learner's employability (Amish, 2024).

Despite this global shift, a persistent challenge remains in bridging the gap between the knowledge required in the workplace and what is taught in educational institutions (formal, informal, or non-formal) (ibid). Industries are facing challenges with graduates who lack the technical and soft skills necessary to succeed in the workplace (Smith et al., 2016). Yet, soft skills such as problem-solving, leadership, communication, critical thinking, and resource management are essential. Integrating work-based learning (WBL) opportunities into education is an effective method to enhance students' practical skills and knowledge. Work-based learning is a continuous professional development approach that enhances knowledge and skills in a work setting (Thapa, 2024). Therefore, WBL plays a significant role in bridging the gap between professional development and lifelong learning. Evidence shows that graduates with work experience are significantly more likely to secure full-time permanent employment compared to those without work experience during their academic studies (Pegg et al., 2012; Little and Colleagues, 2006).

This mismatch between theory and practice not only

constrains individual employability but also shapes wider labour market outcomes. Many graduates enter the workforce with strong theoretical foundations but lack the hands-on abilities that employers seek (Tushar and Sooraksa, 2023). In contrast, those who have taken part in internships, apprenticeships, or volunteer placements have consistently shown greater confidence and productivity from their first day on the job (Online news article, 2025). In Uganda, the extent of youth unemployment and underemployment highlights the urgency of strengthening WBL pathways. Uganda's population grew from 43 million in 2021 (UBOS, 2022) to 45.6 million in 2024 (UBOS Census, 2024). Of the 23.5 million working-age population in 2021, only 10 million were employed, giving an employment-to-population ratio of 43 out of every 100 persons. Youth aged 18–30 accounted for 22 percent of the population (about 9.3 million), yet they faced a 17 percent unemployment rate, with 41 percent Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET). The NEET challenge was partly due to prolonged job searches, discouragement, and unpaid care responsibilities, especially among young women. Among employed youth, over 90 percent worked in the informal sector, excluding agriculture, with 72 percent reporting satisfaction despite high rates of time-related underemployment. While half of the youth held qualifications that matched job requirements, 38 percent were under-educated for their roles.

Across the workforce, skills mismatches persist. More than half (60 percent) of the employed population had adequate skills, while 26 percent had skills exceeding those required for their jobs. Given that learning is a continuous process, 14 percent of the employed individuals with low skills stated that they needed further development in any skills required for their roles. Skill gaps were more pronounced in computer skills (20.3 percent), technical skills (13.2 percent), and problem-solving (10.6 percent). All of these are soft skills that WBL can address and resolve. Likewise, Uganda's labour market faces a critical shortage of technical and vocational skills, with only about 3.4 percent of graduates having attained TVET diplomas during the NDPIII period. This reflects low enrolment in technical training programmes (NPA, 2025). In addition, persistent labour market mismatches have been identified as a key constraint to employment outcomes under NDPIII (NPA, 2025). However, the government financing mechanism for skills acquisition strongly leans towards the supply side (educational institutions) and less towards the demand side (industry).

The necessity for robust public-private partnerships to bridge the funding gaps and subsequently close the skills gaps is vital.

The government of Uganda has implemented various initiatives targeting employment creation, especially for formally educated and uneducated youth. These include the Youth Livelihood Programme (Ugx 191.3bn), Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programmes (Ugx 168bn), Emyooga (Ugx 660bn), Parish Development Model (Ugx 3.3bn), Growth Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs (Ugx 39.8bn)¹, and a disability grant (Ugx 33.6bn)², among others. The programmes aim to improve financial access to the capital needed by youth, women, and persons with disabilities to start businesses for self-employment and create jobs for others. For instance, the Youth Livelihood Programme has contributed positively to employment generation, accounting for an estimated 4 percent of total job creation. The impact has been reflected in the establishment of more than 200,000 direct jobs and an additional 500,000 indirect jobs, generated through multiplier effects within households and communities (MoGLSD, 2021). In addition, incubation centres, such as the Uganda Industrial Research Institute, Namulonge, and Makerere University Incubation Hub, provide spaces for young innovators to practise and implement their innovative ideas. These centres facilitate the practical application of industrial training, leveraging technology and up-to-date equipment, which could otherwise be prohibitively expensive for young entrepreneurs. However, linkages between educational institutions' graduates, programmes, and innovation spaces are lacking, even with the National Apprenticeship Framework (2018) in place to guide such relations.

Leveraging platform technologies and innovation to drive work-based learning is missing from the ongoing debate and evidence in Uganda. By concentrating on the overall picture of WBL components – apprenticeship, internships, on-the-job training, practicum, volunteerism – this synthesis presents various perspectives and concerns regarding WBL in practice by summarising case studies: some address apprenticeships, while others focus on internship programmes in Uganda. It further delves into the policy and institutional environment, financing, to understand the

semantics of WBL in Uganda, ensuring that concrete policy solutions are derived. Therefore, this study examines how effectively existing work-based learning arrangements in Uganda contribute to skills development, innovation, and improved employment outcomes. Specifically, the synthesis focuses on:

- a. Examining the status of work-based learning pillars in Uganda and involves assessing both supply and demand-side actors.
- b. Evaluating the select WBL programmes implemented by government and private sector in Uganda.
- c. Examining the funding modalities of WBL
- d. Assessing the gaps, barriers, and enablers of WBL through a concrete understanding of best practices elsewhere.

This evidence synthesis aims to contribute to the development of the draft National Work-Based Learning policy, initiated by the Government of Uganda in 2020 through the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, with support from the UNDP.

The rest of the synthesis is structured as follows: Section 2 conceptualises WBL and how it is analysed in this paper. Section 3 critiques the existing policy frameworks in the context of addressing WBL. Section 4 examines the WBL approaches and their status, while also showcasing, with examples, those WBL programmes being implemented in Uganda. Here, we highlight their relevance and impact as well. Section 5 delves into the financing landscape for WBL, while Section 6 discusses the lessons Uganda can learn from others in her efforts to implement WBL. Section 7 concludes and provides policy recommendations for the paper.

2. UNDERSTANDING WORK-BASED LEARNING

Understanding and estimating the implementation of work-based learning is complex and not straightforward. Nonetheless, given these complexities, work-based learning models have been developed. This section presents the conceptual framework for analysing work-based learning within the context of this synthesis paper. Furthermore, we emphasise and elaborate on the approach to work-based learning within Uganda's operational environment.

¹ Budget Speech Financial Year 2025/2026

² Disability status report 2019/202-2021/2022 National council for Persons with Disabilities

Work-based learning is a type of learning that occurs in the workplace and through work activities (Seagraves et al., 1996). Work-based learning integrates educational institutions and work organisations to create new learning opportunities within the workplace (Lemanski et al., 2011). This approach provides practical training in real-world work environments, equipping individuals with the necessary skills to secure and advance in employment (Wang et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2021; IAG-TVET, 2021).

2.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework developed in this paper builds on various work-based learning (WBL) models described in Ismail et al. (2014). The framework illustrated in Figure 1 outlines the key aspects that facilitate the analysis and understanding of work-based learning pathways. In this synthesis, we adopt Becker's (2007) definition where WBL is "a learning approach that encompasses a working experience in which students need to go through a learning process in an institution to gain the experience and apply the skills in the related industries according to what is required in an actual working environment under guidance of experienced supervisors." According to this definition, WBL can be acquired from formal, informal, and non-formal educational institutions or organisations (Musset, 2020; Bahl & Dietzen, 2019) (Figure 1).

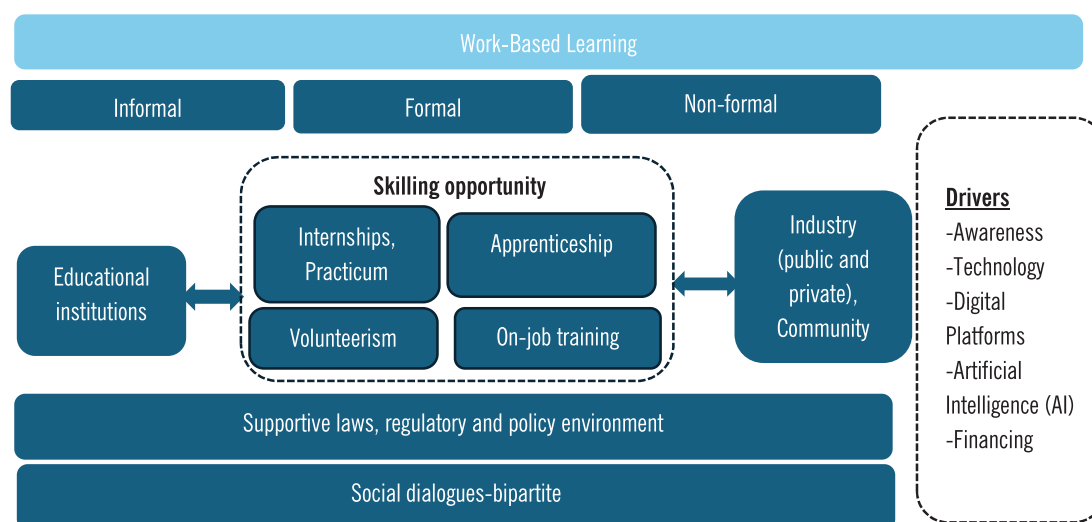
For example, *formal* WBL takes place within TVET institutions through internships, school-based enterprises, and activities such as field trips and career mentoring. *Non-formal* WBL includes structured training programmes like corporate inductions, formal apprenticeships, and in-service training. *Informal WBL*, on the other hand, occurs through community-based work activities and unregulated apprenticeships (Bahl & Dietzen, 2019). The primary channels for WBL in Africa include TVET programmes, informal apprenticeships, and donor-funded skills development initiatives (Ismail & Mujuru, 2020). Other forms of WBL include cooperative education, and project-based learning (Wang et al, 2024). Deissinger & Gonon (2021), highlight that apprenticeships are built on industry-specific knowledge and skills, which must be gained through hands-on training within companies. Therefore, WBL greatly benefits from the development of educational institutions and enterprises in both the public and private sectors (Figure 1).

Two broad pillars underpin the conceptualisation of WBL, all aimed at providing skills development opportunities (internships, practicums, apprenticeships, volunteerism, on-the-job training) at various levels (in educational institutions or workplaces) to promote WBL.

- a. Pillar one: Educational institutions, including schools, universities, and TVET institutions, contribute to WBL by recognising the state of their infrastructure, access, and the nature or usefulness of the skills opportunities they provide. This pillar offers classroom learning theory guided by teachers. The WBL available here is limited, but a revised curriculum, such as the lower secondary school curriculum, incorporates practical components alongside the TVET delivery.
- b. Pillar two: Industrial enterprises encompass small, micro, medium, and large enterprises, public institutions, and the community. This involves leveraging these entities to provide learning from industrial professionals and applying theories from educational institutions in real-world contexts. Most work-based learning (WBL) occurs under this pillar. We analyse the types of enterprises in Uganda, their potential for WBL, and technology adoption. Employers and community partners are vital for skill acquisition, mentorship, and industry exposure. Community partners also inform young people about post-school opportunities and emphasise WBL as a valuable career pathway.

External drivers influence and support the pillars of WBL: awareness, technology, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. Awareness involves promoting the advantages of WBL to students, employers, and institutions to encourage participation. Technology and digital platforms play a vital role in facilitating remote and hybrid learning experiences, rendering WBL more accessible.

Lastly, WBL requires an enabling environment in which laws, regulatory frameworks, and policies are developed through social dialogue among the government, employers, and educational institutions to facilitate WBL access, promote growth, and transform the Ugandan economy and its employment trajectory.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for analysing Work-Based Learning

Source: Authors' conceptualisation

2.2. Document desk review

A review of documents was conducted to assess the status, accessibility, and development of educational institutions in both the private and public sectors, alongside the benefits and challenges of implementing Work-Based Learning (WBL) best practices. Policies, laws, regulations, and programmes were also reviewed to provide context for the analysis and inform recommendations for state and non-state actors. This desk review utilised search engines with keywords such as WBL, apprenticeship, internship, on-the-job training, practical education, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and various WBL methods, focusing on global perspectives, Africa, and specifically Uganda since 2000. The documents from Uganda included a range of sources such as the National Development Plan (NDP) III, NDP IV strategic direction, National Employment Policy (2011), NDP III Digital Transformation Programme Implementation Action Plan, Digital Transformation Roadmap, Digital Uganda Vision, 2022 National Information Technology Survey Final Report, TVET strategic plan, Education Policy, and Uganda National Apprenticeship Framework.

2.3. Stakeholder consultation and key informant interviews

The stakeholder consultations conducted involved co-creation and stakeholder mapping engagements. These ensured that the study design and conceptualisation received

buy-in and fostered a common understanding among key stakeholders. Additionally, it enabled the research team to obtain the most up-to-date information on the subject matter while also building networks and a community of practice around WBL. Conversely, stakeholder mapping was instrumental in identifying and analysing key individuals, groups, or organisations with a vested interest.

Key informant interviews complemented desk document reviews. This approach provided deeper insights into the evolving nature of the WBL landscape and the challenges faced by educational institutions, industry players, students, and employees. By engaging these stakeholders, the interviews identified growth opportunities and underscored policy and infrastructure gaps that require attention. Consultations also gathered valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in WBL.

The Key informant interviews were informed by a structured co-creation process with stakeholders. During a co-creation workshop, participants jointly developed a mapped stakeholder matrix based on institutional roles, mandates, and relevance to WBL policy and implementation. This matrix guided the purposive selection of organisations and individuals for case studies and key informant interviews, ensuring balanced representation across policy formulation, implementation, financing, industry participation, and beneficiary perspectives.

The selection of interviewees followed predefined inclusion criteria (i) direct institutional involvement in WBL policy development, regulation, or implementation; (ii) demonstrated technical or operational experience relevant to WBL; and (iii) representation across public sector institutions, private sector actors, employers' associations, trade unions, and development-oriented organisations. This approach enhanced the relevance and diversity of perspectives while maintaining analytical coherence.

The discussions also explored policy and regulatory challenges, particularly in areas such as financing and their impact on WBL in Uganda. Furthermore, the interviews captured stakeholders' efforts to promote inclusivity, especially for traditionally underserved groups like women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and refugees. The respondents included (i) Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) involved in WBL, e.g. the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Industrial Court; (ii) employers' associations, specifically the Federation of Uganda Employers; (iii) trade unions; and (iv) private sector players such as Stanbic Uganda, Roofings, Bake 4 Me, and Musa Body.

2.4. Analytical approach

Work-based learning programmes were evaluated in terms of their alignment with national skills priorities, ability to enhance employability and improve learner competencies, adequacy of resources invested and training outcomes. This evaluation involved gathering data from selected stakeholders through questionnaires to determine how effectively the programmes meet the needs of the labour market. The goal was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of WBL initiatives and to understand their wider impact on skills development and employability.

2.5. Limitations of the study

This study provided an overview of work-based learning arrangements in Uganda, focusing on policy and institutional frameworks, financing modalities, and implementation experiences, and did not estimate the causal impacts of specific WBL programmes on employment outcomes. Also, the fragmented implementation of WBL in Uganda and the absence of a national WBL database constrained the use of quantitative analytical approaches. Furthermore, available

data across programmes are uneven, largely administrative, and not comparable in terms of participant characteristics, duration of training, or post-training outcomes. These limitations restricted the ability to conduct programme comparisons. Similarly, most WBL initiatives in Uganda do not systematically track beneficiaries beyond the training period. The lack of longitudinal follow-up data on employment trajectories or skills utilisation made longitudinal analysis infeasible within the scope of this study.

3. POLICY CONTEXTS AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Effective laws and administrative frameworks at both national and local levels are essential for optimising work-based learning (WBL) and ensuring its social and economic benefits. These frameworks enable government leadership and create mechanisms for collaboration among social partners, employers, workplaces, schools, and students. Additionally, they help vocational training institutions build connections with the community, ensuring that WBL programs are inclusive and accessible to marginalised groups. On the other hand, social dialogues (Bipartite) facilitate communication and collaboration between policymakers, businesses, and educators to enhance skill development.

Figure 2 highlights the key selected legal and policy provisions that directly or indirectly promote WBL in Uganda. These cover both the supply side (education-hard skills) and the demand side (practical and soft skills).

3.1. What the laws say?

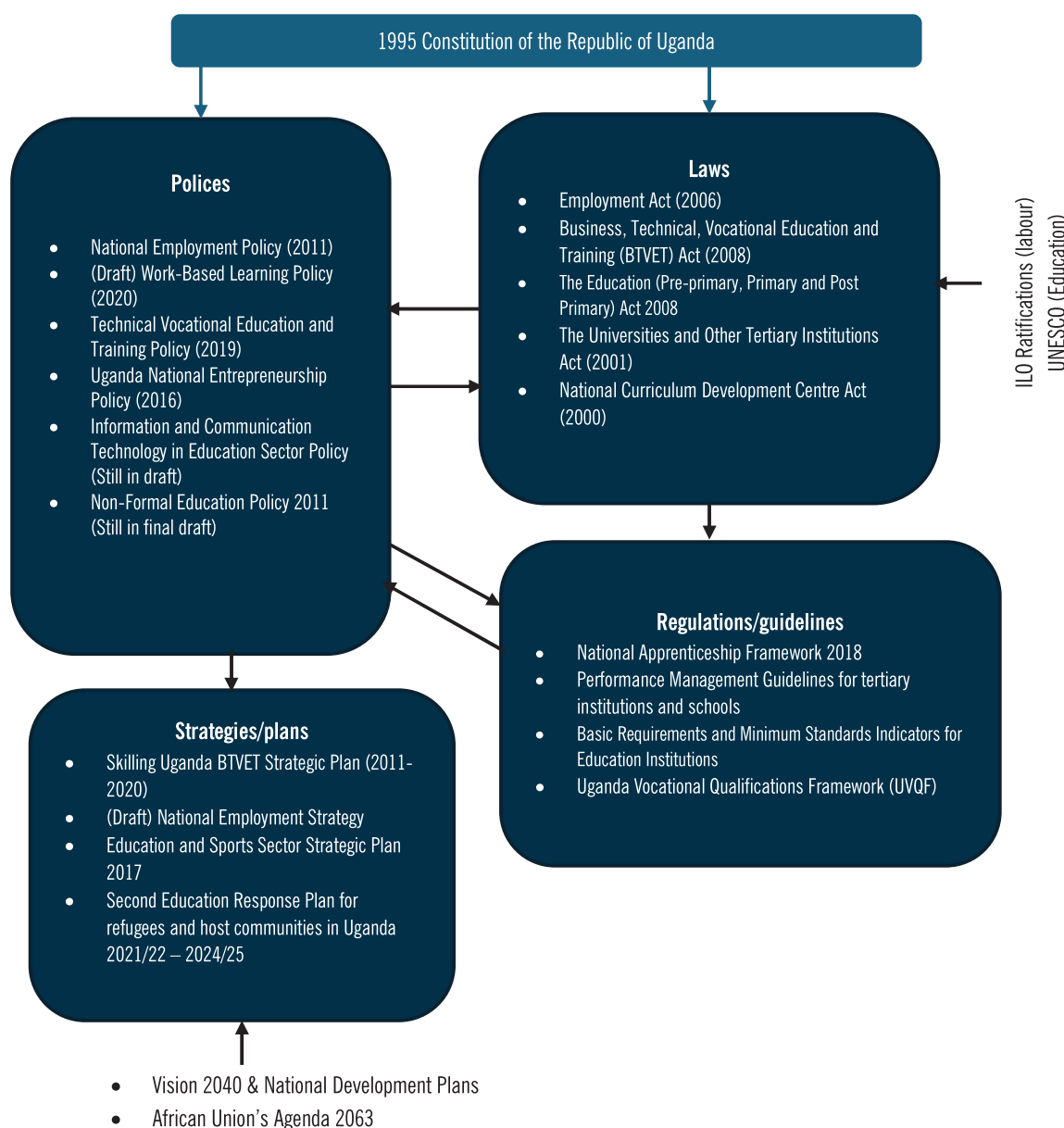
The legal provisions are embedded in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, which emphasises the fundamental right to education and work. For example, Article 30 guarantees every citizen's right to access education, encompassing both formal and informal types. Largely influenced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the major law anchoring WBL is the Employment Act of 2006, which establishes the minimum standards of employment in Uganda. It applies to all employees, regardless of their nationality, who are employed under a

contract of service (oral or written), but is not applicable to family businesses where the family members and relatives are the only employees or employers. Although the Act offers labour protections, enforcement is weak, resulting in non-compliance with work-based training standards. A lack of a functional labour market information system further complicates efforts to align skills training with job opportunities, leading to a mismatch between educational outcomes and labour market needs.

Others, such as the TVET Policy (2019) and the BTJET Act (2008), promote hands-on training, apprenticeships, and

collaboration with industry, while the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001) mandates that higher education institutions incorporate practical skills into their curricula. Laws such as the NCDC Act, the BTJET Act, the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001), the Uganda National Examinations Board Act (1983), and the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF), among others, collectively establish the legal framework for Uganda's education system, especially in grading and certification. These laws ensure a structured, regulated, and quality-driven learning environment.

Figure 2: Mapping of key policies, regulations and strategies supportive of WBL



Source: Authors' construction, 2025

3.2. How are the policies driving WBL?

Until 2018, WBL has been implemented through the Employment Policy 2011. Given its importance, on the regulatory side, the Cabinet approved the National Apprenticeship Framework in 2018, creating a clear process by which any organisation could propose and implement an apprenticeship programme (Box 1). Under this framework, the Ministry reviews submitted projects, vets them against quality criteria and issues endorsements within the first month to allow implementation to begin.

While the framework has provided a strong base, it covers only one aspect of WBL; therefore, the Ministry began drafting a unified work-based learning policy in 2020 to bring internships, apprenticeships, mentorships, and on-the-job training under one cohesive policy umbrella. The new draft unified policy, if completed, would streamline regulations, improve coordination among stakeholders and strengthen employer engagement. Sustained partnership across government, academia and industry will enable Uganda to continue scaling WBL programmes, equipping more young people with the skills needed and in turn drive inclusive economic growth.

Box 1: Highlights of the 2018 National Apprenticeship Framework

Purpose: To formally guide the mechanism of selection and implementation of the apprenticeship programmes in specific occupations (tourism, agriculture and trade (as relevant to manufacturing) a cross section of stakeholders in both government and the private sector.

Coordination: A National Apprenticeship Steering Committee (NASC), chaired by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour, representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sports, employer and workers organizations (FUE), Office of the Prime Minister, National Planning Authority, Ministry of Finance and other government departments. The Scheme goes further to describes each of the stakeholders' roles.

Committee Terms of Reference: The committee also responsible for developing Apprenticeship Training Orders through Sector Apprenticeship Committees. The training order covers the skills requirements from the different occupations, contract, the period of training, training program, the wages payable and the structure of enterprises in each sector. It will also spell out on-job training requirements and the eligibility criteria for enterprises taking on an apprentice.

Apprentices or trainee: These will be required to comply with the terms and conditions set out in the apprenticeship contract, enrol in the pre-apprenticeship literacy and numeracy training and the off-the-job training program as required at a relevant BTET institution and satisfactorily complete all the on-and-off the job training requirements.

Curriculum and Certification: Each Apprenticeship Training Order will specify the course to be delivered and the Uganda Vocational Qualification Framework (UVQF) credential to be issued. The development of these materials to support workplace supervisors, including competency logbooks, will be the responsibility of the MoES. If curriculum and resource materials do not exist for the identified apprenticeship occupation, MoES will develop them. Apprentices will be required to undertake final assessment for the program delivered by the off-the-job training organisation before a formal qualification under the UVQF can be issued at the end of the training from MoES registered assessment centre.

Financing: Government contributions would be through budget allocations from the MoFPED to MGLSD and MoES and other line ministries where apprenticeships might operate such as tourism, agriculture and trade (as relevant to manufacturing). Employer contributions would be in the form of training delivered on the job and possibly through in-kind and cash contributions made by industry and employer associations acting as intermediary bodies.

Apprentices themselves contribute to the cost of the program by accepting reduced wages for the period of the apprenticeship. They could also make a contribution by covering the cost of assessment and certification as is currently the case for BTET students. Development partners will contribute to ongoing efforts to pilot and implement formal apprenticeships in Uganda.

Monitoring & Evaluation: The MGLSD will lead the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the apprenticeship scheme. A database of apprentices and employers will be developed.

Source: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, online

Supportive of the Framework and employment policy is the Uganda National Entrepreneurship Policy (2016), which focuses on youth skilling and entrepreneurship. With changing dynamics of work due to innovations and technology, critics warn against digital surveillance and precarious work arrangements, calling for legal and fair frameworks to address privacy and precarity concerns.

3.3. Strategies enabling WBL implementation

Broader continental and national agendas such as the AU Agenda 2063 and Uganda Vision 2040, with its successive medium-term implementation strategies (National Development Plans), are used as benchmarks for aligning the sector-specific strategies/plans. These emphasize digital learning and skills development, providing opportunities to use digital tools to broaden access to training. Moreover, the Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2017 emphasizes vocational education to ensure learning aligns with labour market demands while the Education Response Plan (2021/22 – 2024/25) offers significant opportunities to enhance work-based learning for refugees and host communities. Uganda can strengthen partnerships between training institutions and industries, as encouraged by the Skilling Uganda BTET Strategic Plan (2011-2020).

3.4. Key takeaways

While Uganda has not had a substantive law, policy, or guideline to drive WBL, several supportive documents exist to this effect (especially the supply side) that have enabled its implementation, albeit with no specific documentation of its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and suitability. Efforts to uniquely structure WBL have emerged through the 2018 National Apprenticeship Framework. Nonetheless, this has mainly focused on apprenticeships—one aspect of WBL—and in the Tourism sector. The 2020 draft national WBL policy has never been completed and hence not operationalised. This has left the other forms of WBL not being documented, coordinated, monitored and evaluated. Hence, the learning agenda on what works and does not to inform policy remains a gap for scale-up.

4. WORK-BASED LEARNING APPROACHES IN UGANDA: PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Work-based learning occurs when education and industrial institutions co-exist, with the former providing mainly theoretical skills and about 25 percent of practical soft skills and later providing about 75 percent of the practice and less of theory (Amish, 2024). This section delves into the extent of implementation of the supply and demand side of skills development for employability in relation to WBL.

4.1. Educational institutions

Education serves as the cornerstone upon which the workforce is built. It equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to excel in their chosen fields. Education plays a vital role in fostering qualities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, all essential for navigating the challenging professional landscape. As technology continues to reshape job roles and industries, these skills are more important than ever. Educational institutions play a significant role in work-based learning (WBL) by providing frameworks and support for students to gain practical experience and develop skills relevant to the workforce (Namjoshi, 2020). They collaborate with businesses, establish WBL programmes, and incorporate these experiences into curricula to enhance student employability. Therefore, education lays the groundwork for a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of driving innovation, fuelling economic growth, and addressing the challenges of the future.

4.1.1. Enrolment and completion rates

Enrolment and completion rates encompass both public and private educational institutions but exclude informal and non-formal education delivery approaches. Gross enrolment rates at the primary level have remained high and stagnant. Net enrolment declined in 2023/24 compared to 2019/20, with a more significant drop among females. This is attributed to the effects of COVID-19, during which many young girls dropped out of school due to early pregnancies, followed by a lack of financial resources. Meanwhile, at the

Table 1: Primary and Secondary enrolment rates 2016/17-2023/24 (%)

	Gross Enrolment Rates (%)			Net Enrolment Rates (%)		
	2016/17	2019/20	2023/24	2016/17	2019/20	2023/24
<i>Panel A: Primary</i>						
Male	117.7	117.0	119.9	78.7	78.7	78.5
Female	115.9	119.0	119.0	80.3	80.9	77.2
National	116.8	118.0	119.5	79.5	80.0	77.9
<i>Panel B: Secondary</i>						
Male	38.7	36.2	34.1	26.7	25.5	22.1
Female	37.1	37.3	33.2	29.0	29.0	24.4
National	37.9	36.8	33.6	27.8	27.3	23.3

Source: Uganda National Household Survey 2023/24 (UBOS, 2025)

secondary school level, both gross and net enrolment rates are three times lower compared to primary school rates. Both gross and net enrolment rates substantially declined in 2023/24, with net enrolments much lower among males (22.1%) compared to females (24.4%) (Table 1). Hence, there are dropouts or non-registration of students even at the enrolment level.

From the net enrolment rates, completion rates at the end of primary and secondary for the years data available indicate that at least more males than females complete primary (Table 2) despite female enrolment rate being higher (Table 1). The key issue to note is first, progression to higher

level of education drops for all. Second, female completion rates remain relatedly higher than males at lower and upper secondary but drop substantially at post-secondary, short-cycle tertiary level (TVET) and bachelor's degree level (Table 2). This signifies relatively higher dropout rates with progression to higher education institutions. Probably, those who drop out earlier are most likely joining the workforce, hence the need for continuous apprenticeship, internships, on-job trainings, and mentorship support that industry must plan for. Further, certifying dropouts in an innovate way must ensue as some join the world of work more informally than formal and supporting skills-specific documents are necessary for progression.

Table 2: Cumulative educational attainment by completion rate, population 25+ (%)

Education attainment by level	2010	2011	2012	2014	2016	2017	2019	2021
<i>Primary</i>								
Female	36.6	30.1	24.0	33.4	33.8	72.3	42.9	81.0
Male	50.6	53.4	42.3	55.1	52.4	88.9	62.4	92.2
Total	44.3	40.9	32.5	43.4	42.3	80.3	52.0	86.4
<i>Lower secondary</i>								
Female	33.7	24.5	32.2	26.8	25.3	35.6	35.8	46.7
Male	22.9	11.2	16.9	12.8	14.1	21.3	20.4	32.7
Total	28.8	17.3	24.0	19.3	19.2	28.2	27.6	39.5
<i>Upper secondary</i>								
Female	10.7	8.2	9.9	10.4	12.3	27.5	14.2	38.8
Male	8.0	5.4	6.3	6.7	8.9	21.0	10.5	32.4
Total	12.8	11.4	13.9	14.8	16.3	34.6	18.5	45.6
<i>Post-secondary</i>								
Female	..	..	..	..	..	7.3	..	9.9
Male	..	..	..	..	..	12.9	..	15.4
Total	..	..	..	..	..	10.0	..	12.6
<i>Short-cycle tertiary</i>								

Education attainment by level	2010	2011	2012	2014	2016	2017	2019	2021
Female	6.4	4.7	5.5	5.3	..	5.6	8.9	7.2
Male	9.7	8.6	11.1	11.1	..	10.1	13.9	11.9
Total	8.2	6.5	8.1	8.0	..	7.8	11.2	9.5
Bachelor's or equivalent								
Female	1.9	1.2	1.1	1.1	0.5	1.9	3.0	3.0
Male	3.0	1.7	1.7	2.4	0.9	2.9	4.3	4.4
Total	3.8	2.2	2.3	3.9	1.4	4.0	5.7	6.0

Source: World Bank Development Indicators compiled from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2025

4.1.2 Assessment approaches and qualifications obtained

The major forms of assessment are the end-of-term and end-of-cycle evaluations. In Primary education, the end-of-cycle assessment is known as the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). In Secondary education, there are two assessments: the Uganda National Examinations for O'Level (Senior Four) and A'Level (Senior Six). All these assessments are conducted by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) and lead to the awarding of a certificate of completion at each stage. Students are primarily equipped with theoretical skills, while practical skills are limited to fieldwork and projects. The development of soft skills such as problem solving and communication skills is mostly confined to computer classes. The newly revised lower secondary curriculum, designed by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and implemented in 2021, aims to incorporate practical and soft skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, among others. This curriculum is technically intensive and necessitates the availability of internet access to execute. However, the penetration of the internet and the availability of computers are still low, hindering the wider use and adoption of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Secondary schools.

Transitioning from secondary education can lead to any tertiary institution, either a vocational course offered in a TVET institution or a degree at a university. Here, students receive various forms of documentation at different levels—certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Universities conduct their own assessments for each degree course, while TVET institutions use their examination bodies, such as the Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB) and the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Examinations Board (UNMEB). Students are equipped with hard

skills, mainly theoretical and practical. Literature points out that while the theory and practicums are good, the equipment is not updated at the speed at which the world of work is changing.

From section 4.1.1, high drop-out rates (noted from low completion rates) and low transition rates to higher education undermine the effectiveness of skills development programmes (MoES, 2019). This reality has led the Directorate of Industrial Training to offer more innovative certification methods for these individuals. Using the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF), individuals can now obtain certification regardless of trade or education level. Simply put, learners who meet the set standards implemented under formal and non-formal education and training, based on the principles of competence-based education and training (CBET), can receive vocational qualifications. This approach, therefore, promotes skills development programmes within the BTNET sub-sector (MoES, 2012). The following qualifications are awarded irrespective of gender or to persons with special needs:

- Modular transcript (partial qualification after undertaking modular assessment in a given occupation)
- Worker's PAS (PAS=Practically Acquired Skills), it is a partial qualification after undertaking modular assessment in a given occupation most especially for apprenticeship individuals in the Informal sector including the JUA KALI's, Katwe and Kisenyi type of skilled artisans.
- **UVQF level 1:** National certificate for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills but under supervision.
- **UVQF level 2:** National certificate for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills under moderate supervision.
- **UVQF level 3:** National certificate for individuals who

merit in performing the full occupational skills at supervisory level.

- **UVQF level 4:** National diploma for individuals who merit in performing the full occupational skills at technician level.
- **UVQF level 3-CVTI:** Certificate in Vocational Training Instruction “(offered to BTNET instructors after 9 months CBET programme conducted at Nakawa VTI).
- **UVQF level 4-DVTI:** Diploma in Vocational Training Instruction (offered to BTNET Instructors after 9 months CBET programme conducted at NakawaVT1).
- **UVQF level 5- DTIM:** Diploma in Training Institution Management (offered to BTNET Principals and Head Teachers after 9 months CBET programme conducted at NakawaVT1) UVQF awards.

All these initiatives are being undertaken with the aim of “promoting employable skills” for Ugandans, especially the youth.

4.2. Industrial enterprises

Industrial institutions, both public and private, play a crucial role in work-based learning (WBL) by providing real-world work environment experiences, fostering partnerships, and ensuring the relevance of training to industry needs. They offer practical experience, mentorship, and opportunities for students to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings, ultimately enhancing their employability (Sawant 2017; Namjoshi, 2020). In Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and courses, WBL practices are a must for its students and industry linkages between theory and practice exist (Ziegler et al., 2020). This subsection puts into context the size of Uganda’s industry and the extent to which it has contributed to WBL overtime.

4.2.1. Status of Uganda’s industry/enterprises

A study by MTIC (2024) covering a nationally representative sample of 3,063 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), 90 percent of enterprises are micro and employ an average of 2.1 employees. Majority of entrepreneurs in Uganda, 30 percent, have primary education as their highest level of education, 22 percent had lower secondary, 8 percent had upper secondary, 27 percent had vocational and tertial education while others (11 percent) had no education at all (ibid). The implication of this is that there is a significant need for life-long learning and certification for those already in employment as well.

Additionally, the 2024 National Entrepreneurship Index Score was 57 percent, averaged from eight indicators comprising of entrepreneurial attitudes, willingness to grow, human capital, internal processes & systems, financial access, registration, technology adoption and linkages. The latter three indicators had scores of less than 40 percent indicating high levels of informality, low technology adoption hence low innovation, and poor linkages (connections and networks within the business community). Partly the inadequate soft skills base (such as customer care, computer & phone skills which enable to maintain stock and orders) were the major drivers of these poor scores which limit businesses from embracing and utilising business-related technology amidst globalisation and technological innovations. In this regard, there is need for on-job training through capacity building schemes to businesses. These are also enterprises that offer both formal and informal WBL approaches such as internships, apprenticeships, mentorships, industrial trainings.

According to the Census of Business Establishment Report, Uganda has about 1,000 large industries or enterprises ranging in the sectors of manufacturing, construction, mining, trade, services (banks, hotels, insurance, musical arts), agriculture (UBoS, 2025). These have the highest potential to offer wider organised formal WBL schemes because they have more financial resources and their scale of operation allows them to train a large number of trainees, however, the need for a conducive business environment to organise and coordinate them is critical, otherwise, many institutions are offering non-uniform forms of WBL without structure such as standard recommended time/period, modules, funding synergies among others to support WBL.

4.2.2. Industry’s contribution to work-based learning

Despite the national WBL policy not yet been operationalized, WBL is occurring in Uganda. Government of Uganda has been implementing an apprenticeship programme in the tourism sector (hospitality) since 2021 (Box 2), Uganda Revenue Authority’s graduate training, UNDP’s graduate volunteer placement programme (but also has elements of apprenticeship), Private Sector Foundation Uganda skilling programme and the new work placement/apprenticeship program for women enterprises under the GROW project at the MGLSD-yet to take off as applications were closed in April, 2025.

Box 2: Apprenticeship in the Hotel Sector

Purpose: To provide structured, employment-based learning and work-readiness skills to unemployed and underemployed youth, in line with the Uganda National Apprenticeship Framework (UNAF 2018), the Employment Act (2006), the Employment Regulations (2011), and the National Employment Policy of Uganda (2011).

Eligibility group: Youth (18–30 years) must be nationals and refugees. Women and persons with disabilities

Target Areas: Isingiro, Arua, Terego, and Madi-Okollo districts

Implementation status

· *Phase I (Pilot, 2021–22):* Enrolled 100 youths but 90 graduated in 2023 from different fields in hotel industry. About 67% of the apprentices had been offered employment by host and non-hosting hotels while others opened up own businesses especially in skills acquired in pastry and baking.

· *Phase II (2022–23):* Enrolled 200 youth and 191 graduated in 2024.

· *Phase III (2025–26):* Yet to enrol 200 youths.

Duration of programme: 12 months

Implementing agencies: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), Uganda Hotel Owners Association (UHOA), Uganda Hotel and Tourism Training Institute (UHTTI), and Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT)

Funding: Kingdom of the Netherlands and ILO through PROSPECTS program

Nonetheless, it is vital to ensure that the curriculum being delivered by UHTTI also includes soft skills and not hard skills alone, as this are needed in the employment and also maintaining customers.

Source: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, online

Another is the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) graduate internship training programme (Box 3).

Box 3: Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) internship training programme

The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has developed a comprehensive Work Based Learning (WBL) model aimed at bridging the gap between academic training and practical employment. Central to this approach is a structured internship program with two intakes per year offering 2–3 months of unpaid but merit-based training. The program receives over 1,000 applications annually but only a limited number are selected based on academic performance. The programme admits interns from a diverse range of disciplines, including engineering, agriculture, and other fields. URA actively promotes diversity and inclusion welcoming Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and applicants from various educational backgrounds though the unpaid nature of the internships may limit access for economically disadvantaged students.

URA's WBL pathway begins with onboarding and values training followed by a structured coaching system with on-the-job training provided throughout the internship period. Though internships do not guarantee employment, top performing interns are retained if opportunities arise.

The program is guided by well-defined internal policies and overseen by a Staff Development Board, ensuring alignment with national labour laws. URA currently does not maintain formal partnerships with universities and vocational institutions (BTVET). However, it plans to transition into a certified tax training hub, a move that could formalize its training programmes and significantly expand their reach nationally.

URA faces two key challenges in delivering effective training opportunities, including:

- **Limited internship slots:** The internship programme consistently attracts a high volume of applications, far exceeding its current capacity. However, resource limitations restrict the number of interns that can be admitted in each cycle. These factors significantly limit the programme's scalability and its potential impact.
- **Lack of formal institutional linkages:** The absence of structured partnerships with universities and training institutions hinders alignment with national skilling frameworks.

Source: Authors compilation from Key Informant Interviews conducted in January, 2025

Despite the challenges mentioned, interns at URA undergo weekly assessments designed to enhance skills development and professional growth. However, the programme does not offer formal certification upon completion. In addition, the internship programme plays a key role in strengthening human capital within tax administration, directly supporting national revenue generation and contributing to the country's economic growth. Funds for the programme are from internal sources and while it strengthens employability it lacks a structured job placement mechanism, making career progression uncertain for its interns.

On-job-training is conducted across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs-state actors) private and development partners (non-state actors) for various occupations. Most MDAs have a retooling component placed under General Administration, Policy and Planning activity line for its staff. Others, nonstate actors call it targeted training (capacity building) for in-house staff. This sometimes occurs on a need basis.

Several WBL programmes are also being offered by the private sector. We document some in terms of their purpose, sector, time, accomplishments.

Box 4: Internship and apprenticeship schemes at Roofings Uganda Limited

Roofings Company Uganda, a 30-year-old manufacturing firm has successfully implemented a structured Work Based Learning (WBL) model through its internship and graduate training programs. The company runs two internship intakes annually in January and June admitting around 30 interns per cycle from over 20 institutions across Uganda including Makerere University, Kyambogo and regional technical institutes in Mbale, Bushenyi and Kabale.

Internship scheme: The internship programme has been running for 18 years, offering two months of practical training in both technical areas such as machine operation, welding, electrical engineering and administrative roles like finance and office management. Interns receive a monthly facilitation of UGX 300,000 and are closely supervised and assessed through weekly follow ups, hands-on projects and final evaluations. Successful interns are awarded certificates, and some are later recruited by the company.

Apprenticeship scheme: The graduate training program initiated in 2023 lasts three to six months and is implemented in partnership with the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) and the Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA). The graduates are facilitated with UGX 800,000 monthly and are treated as full time employees to gain in-depth hands-on experience. While the company also collaborates with the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) through the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), engagement has been limited in recent years.

Inclusion: The company ensures inclusivity by accepting all female applicants despite the low female turnout in technical roles. For instance, during the 2024 internship intake, only six out of 22 interns were female. The training opportunity is also open to refugees and other vulnerable groups, however, the company has not yet received any applications from individuals in these categories. Applications are not limited to university recommendations rather independent applicants and research students can apply directly via email. In addition to technical training, the company emphasizes soft skills such as communication, time management, hygiene, professional conduct and financial literacy.

The program is sustained through strong management commitment and community investment including the sponsorship of students from a company-founded school in Namanve. These students are supported through their education with the hope of integrating them into the company. The company has derived several benefits from offering training opportunities, including:

- Enhanced skills acquisition: Trainees introduce new skills and innovations, contributing to company productivity
- Cost-effective recruitment: Reduced reliance on advertising and formal recruitment channels lowers hiring costs
- Strengthened community relations: Offering training reinforces the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) profile.

Challenges faced by the company in offering these programmes include overwhelming application volumes, lack of facilitation for staff serving as trainers, low female participation in technical fields and occasional mismatches between interns' expectations and the roles assigned during placements.

More specifically, the Key informant interview with Roofings provided insights.

That is:

“We have strong management commitment, which helps keep the programme running”.

“We partner with the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) and the Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA). They notify us about available candidates, and we select those who match our needs. These organizations facilitate the graduates with about 800,000 UGX per month, while we provide hands-on experience. The program runs for three to six months, during which the trainees take on serious roles like full-time employees to help them gain practical knowledge. We also provide them with meals on-site. If we have openings after the program, we consider hiring those who perform well”.

“We also sponsor a few students from partner institutions to encourage them to return and work with us. We built and sponsor a nursery and primary school in Namanve. We follow up on these students, support them through secondary school, and encourage them to pursue certificates or diplomas to keep them on a career path within the company”. (KII – Roofings Company)

Box 5: Stanbic Bank’s graduate internship training programme

Stanbic Bank Uganda has implemented a structured Graduate Training Programme (GTP) as a key work-based learning (WBL) initiative aimed at contributing to efforts to reduce unemployment and building future talent. The programme is an internal initiative driven by sustainability goals of the Bank. Initially the bank offered internships, but these were discontinued in 2022 to channel resources into the more impactful GTP. The programme is internally funded by the Standard Bank Group and runs for one year. The first cohort in 2022 included 20 fresh graduates selected primarily based on academic performance (First-Class and Second-Class Upper degrees). Upon successful completion of the programme, 19 out of the 20 interns were retained as full-time staff. Upon completion of the programme, trainees are issued a clearance letter that outlines the activities undertaken and skills acquired during their placement.

The Graduate Trainee Programme is currently limited to bachelor’s degree holders from universities, excluding applicants from vocational institutions and those with master’s qualifications. The programme is not limited to finance graduates, it is open to individuals from a wide range of academic disciplines. The GTP also places strong emphasis on gender balance and inclusivity. However, participation by persons with disabilities and refugees remains limited, largely due to restrictive entry criteria and a lack of applications from these groups.

The bank maintains a flexible working environment and incorporates departmental rotation as a core component of its trainee programme. This rotation enables trainees to gain practical experience across multiple areas, including credit, sustainability, operations, global markets, and customer service. The approach not only enhances the adaptability and versatility of trainees but also enables the bank to assess trainees’ strengths and determine the best departmental fit for the trainee. The programme also emphasises soft skills such as communication, time management, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Trainees are provided with facilitation, medical benefits, and full access to the learning resources available to Stanbic Bank staff. Each trainee is assigned a mentor and is evaluated monthly by their respective line managers. Feedback is provided at the end of each rotation, which informs decisions on trainee retention. While the programme offers substantial learning and support for trainees, trainers do not receive additional compensation for their roles.

A key constraint limiting the scalability and impact of Stanbic Bank’s Graduate Trainee Programme is inadequate budget. Financial limitations restrict the number of trainees admitted per intake, thereby limiting the programme’s potential to contribute more broadly to national youth employment and skills development objectives.

Source: Authors compilation from Key Informant Interviews, January 2025

During our key informant interviews, the officer said that their effectiveness of the programme was because:

“This program is more structured and allows trainees to rotate across different departments. When trainees rotate through different departments, they discover their strengths. For example, one might start in Global Markets, where there’s a lot of math, then move to Credit, where they deal with loan disbursement. Later, they might go to Operations, which is more about transactions, and then to a branch, where they handle customer service. By the end of the rotations, they should have a good idea

of what area suits them best.” (KII - Stanbic Bank).

One beneficiary noted that:

“I have gained both soft and hard skills. On the technical side, my focus was on finance, corporate and commercial law, energy, and emerging technologies. I also learned about corporate governance. For soft skills, I have improved my communication, both written and spoken. I have also learned how to interact with people at different levels, including board members” (KII – Intern, Stanbic Bank).

Box 6: Musa Body’s apprenticeship programme (informal)

Musa Body is an informal vocational training workshop established in 1956. It combines a fabrication workshop with a hands-on training centre that offers apprenticeships in areas such as motor rewinding, stainless steel fabrication, door and window fabrication and general metalwork. The company operates as a family-owned business and is not formally registered with key regulatory bodies such as the Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB) or the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), limiting its recognition within the formal skilling and certification framework.

The training workshop has a capacity to accommodate up to 100 trainees per intake. However, due to the practical, hands-on nature of skills development, a maximum of 20 trainees is admitted per specific skills training. The programme targets a diverse group of learners, including school dropouts, university graduates, and individuals seeking practical skills to enhance their livelihoods. While the programme promotes inclusivity by admitting both male and female trainees, gender disparities persist. In the current intake, only 3 out of 28 trainees are female. The apprenticeship programme runs for six months, with each trainee required to pay a training fee of UGX 1,000,000. Trainees must also provide their own personal protective equipment, which may pose an additional barrier for low-income participants. Also, trainers most of whom are former trainees are compensated for both their mentorship roles and their contributions to production work.

The company currently operates its apprenticeship programme independently, without external collaborations or institutional partnerships. The programme is sustained through internally generated projects, with training activities integrated into real-time production. For example, machines and equipment assembled during the training process are used by the company or sold to clients, enabling trainees to contribute directly to the company’s output while gaining hands-on experience.

Despite its practical relevance, the scalability of the apprenticeship programme is constrained by several factors. These include limited funding and inadequate training facilities, which restrict the number of trainees that can be accommodated. In addition, high taxes on raw materials significantly increase production costs, limiting the company’s ability to expand its training capacity.

Source: Authors compilation from Key Informant Interviews, January 2025

Voices from our IDIs: several informal institutions offering apprenticeship trainings informally noted that:

“Currently, we absorb most of our trainees into our company after they finish learning because we need skilled workers. For example, when we sell machines to clients in different regions like Arua, we send the trainees we have trained to install them. There is a high demand for these skills, so they always have work opportunities. For example, you may have noticed some young people working when you arrived. These are students who have learned with us and decided to stay and work at Musa Body.” (KII – Musa Body).

“After baking, we train students on how to prepare icing and decorate cakes. We also offer business skills lessons for those who want to start bakeries. We teach them how to manage their businesses and avoid financial mistakes”. (KII – Bake 4 Me).

Another intimated that the programmes have created impact.

That is:

“I feel proud to help them learn. Although “I don’t pay them large salaries, they gain skills that help them earn a living. Some of them can now afford rent and support their families. They also help me a lot in the garage, especially when we have many vehicles to repair. Without them, I wouldn’t manage all the work alone. I have some experienced trainees who now act as senior trainers. For example, Haruna is very skilled. The new trainees learn from them, and I only step in when needed or for supervision” (KII – Auto-mechanics).

4.3. Key takeaways

Despite its limited coordination, work-based learning activities are taking place in Uganda’s labour market.

- Government should fast track the 2020 draft WBL policy to coordinate all schemes. Apprenticeships have taken off and seem organised as operational guidelines are available.
- Industry is endeavouring to provide space for students to learn on the job amidst several challenges ranging from finances, limited space to take on many interns or apprenticeships.

- WBL approaches are being used as grounds for identifying and recruiting talent for permanent employment. Thus, despite the extra costs industries/enterprises face in taking on these WBL programmes, the long-term recruitment costs and the burden of employing the wrong candidate is minimized hence a saving to the company. That is: *“The interns provide us with extra labour, and we often hire them after the program without needing to advertise positions. We also gain access to new skills and innovations from institutions” (KII – Human Resource Personnel, Roofings Limited).*
- Technology and hence innovations application in WBL is low and yet these are essential in the current work streams.

5. FINANCING WORK-BASED LEARNING

Financing work-based learning in Uganda is a complex issue involving multiple stakeholders and funding mechanisms. The government, private sector, and development partners play crucial roles in supporting this type of training, which is seen as a key strategy to address youth unemployment and enhance skills development. In this section, an assessment of financing uses actual expenditures from the Annual Budget Performance Report and documents anecdotal evidence from specific projects.

The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), through the annual budget, disburses funds according to sector activity plans or programmes as approved by the Parliament of Uganda. By the end of each year, the MoFPED allocates and details the budget for all MDAs and prepares an expenditure disbursement plan. This plan provides the basis for the disbursement of funds on a quarterly basis.

5.1. Supply-side financing of WBL

Financing educational institutions (primary, secondary, and tertiary education, including TVET providers and adult education) occurs at the MoES budget level. All public education institutions in Uganda are directly financed from the budgets of the Ministry of Education as part of the MoES

budget. These budget allocations cover all educational expenses of the institution – salaries, operational costs, and capital expenses. Financing may also come from other sources (donations, grants, income generated from the sale of services and goods).

In Uganda, the founder of the school, particularly private ones, ensures all means for establishing the school and for its operations, in accordance with pedagogical standards and norms. He finances the salaries and fees for its employees consistently, as well as the maintenance of the premises, procurement of materials and equipment, professional development of the staff, school competitions, and so on.

In cases where the school generates extra-budgetary profit through re-qualification, TVET, and adult education, these funds are deposited into the treasury account managed by the Government of Uganda.

Table 3 on supply-side financing highlights Uganda's continued investment in education, from pre-primary to skills development, to respond to the changing labour demands. Notably, sustained prioritisation of skills development over the years reflects a deliberate shift towards enhancing employability and preparing a workforce that is responsive to the needs of the labour market.

5.2. Demand-side financing of WBL

In Uganda, the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI), operating under the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, plays an important role in supporting WBL. The following objectives guide the UIRI Programme: 1) Undertake applied research for the development of products and optimal production processes, for Uganda's nascent industry. 2) develop and /or acquire appropriate technology to create a strong, effective and competitive industrial sector. 3) Act as a bridge between academia, government, and the private sector with respect to the commercialisation of innovation and research results. 4) spearhead value addition activities in conjunction with national development priorities. 5) lead national efforts in technology transfer and diffusion, to assure the development of appropriate technologies.

In 2025, for example, UGX 2bn was earmarked for the TVET Apprenticeship Program funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development through Sequa

and implemented by the Chamber of Skilled Crafts (CSC), Koblenz, in Uganda. Additionally, the Skills Development Facility (SDF), implemented by the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), focused on employer-led short-term training programmes designed to bridge the gap between skills acquired from universities and tertiary institutions and those demanded by employers. The funding allocated to the SDF is detailed in Box 7.

Box 7: Skills Development Facility financing

The skills Development Facility project commenced in 2016 with a total allocated funding of US\$ 22.6 million over the project period. The Facility targets six priority sectors: agriculture, construction, manufacturing/auto-mechanic, transport and logistics, information, communication and technology, and tourism and hospitality. The Facility was implemented through four funding Windows.

Financing across the four Windows

Window 1: US\$ 5,944,470
Window 2: US\$ 6,857,356
Window 3: US\$ 2,422,119
Window 4: US\$ 2,525,637

Number of Trainees for the skilling

Window 1: 16,486
Window 2: 49,062
Window 3: 1,026
Window 4: 7,237

Total amount disbursed: US\$ 17,749,582

Source: Private Sector Foundation Uganda, End of Project Report, November 2022

Despite these efforts, funding for vocational education and work-based learning remains limited, leading to challenges such as insufficient training facilities, outdated equipment, and ineffective implementation of WBL programmes.

In other countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, WBL is implemented in several forms. The most common form involves practical education where students spend between 1-3 days per week during a school year working in a company. In this form: 1) The school has the overall responsibility for organising the training and it is responsible for establishing cooperation with the companies for the training of the students. 2) Students do not have employee status and do not receive any remuneration for their work. 3) The school and company sign a WBL Contract, or in some cases a three-way contract involving company, school and parent. Among the schools that collaborate with companies, about 80 percent use contracts.

5.3. Key takeaways

Financing work-based learning is critical to creating a skilled and competitive workforce. Therefore, sustainable financing arrangements are important to expand and improve WBL programmes.

Table 3: Education and industrial development financing

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Supply side										
Pre-Primary and Primary Education	57.14	83.98	122.88	111.3	72.96	80.35	27.52	79.46	13,532,501	13,267,514
Secondary Education	51.36	9.67	11.2	11.6	4.36	7.68	39.6	39.9	100,140,315	205,745,763
Higher Education	29.02	66.47	104.83	138	174.2	97.2	57.61	31.44		139,343,942
Skills development	104.02	114.77	99.05	171.96	216.26	223.46	225.1	170.57	152,302,898	142,184,135
Special Needs Education	3.71	3.09	2.24	3.22	3.03	1.58	4.27	3.23	3,874,420	1,161,171
Career Guidance and Counselling and placement	-	0.94	0.87	0.74	0.9	1.08	1.11	1.04	357,940	514,210
Demand side										
Industrial and Technological Development	6.16	12.92	17.72	50.06	65.98	48.16	139.37	164.93	51,974,958	105,882,156
MSME development (Jua kali and private sector)		0.197	0.112	1.3	0.9	1.17	1.1	0.75		2,442,322
Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI)	14.23	13.23	12.1	14.15	13.81	24.8	22.07	22.98	25,502,094	11,956,191

Notes:

Higher education includes development projects in education

Skills development includes BTVET, NHSTC, the Department of Training institutions, the Skills Development Project, OFID, TVET LEAD, and the Albertine Region Sustainable Development Project

UIRI support Number of Industrial Trainees & Research Students supported; Number of Technical and Vocational trainings conducted; Number of ICT trainings conducted

Source: Annual Budget Performance Reports, Various, MoFPED

- Most public training institutions are funded through the Ministry of Education and Sports budgets. On the other hand, private training providers remain largely self-financed, which can constrain their capacity to offer high-quality WBL.
- Direct resources toward employer-led training helps to connect formal education with workplace needs, for instance, programmes such as the Skills Development Facility (SDF) and TVET Apprenticeship Program
- Many WBL programmes face persistent resource constraints, insufficient training infrastructure and outdated equipment, which continue to limit the effectiveness of WBL.
- Expanding work-based learning will need reliable long-term funding and innovative financing that combines both public and private resources.

6. GAPS, BARRIERS AND ENABLERS FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

This section examines the key gaps, barriers, and enablers that shape the design, implementation, and outcomes of work-based learning programmes.

6.1 Existing gaps in the implementation of WBL programmes

Employer perceptions and programme sustainability. There is employers' hesitancy to host learners due to perceived supervisory burdens despite the ultimate benefits of reduced recruitment costs and a more skilled workforce. This hesitancy limits the number of available placements for learners, affecting the overall effectiveness of work-based learning programmes.

"Many employers still hesitate to host learners, fearing additional supervisory burdens, even though they ultimately benefited from reduced recruitment costs and a more skilled workforce". (KII - Government)

Persistent skills mismatches among youth continue. Many young people remain unemployed because they lack practical skills despite holding

academic qualifications. Consequently, employers find it difficult to locate job-ready candidates who can perform immediately in the workplace. *"Skills mismatches persist among many young people who remain unemployed due to their lack of real-world competencies". (KII- Government)*

Funding constraints hinder programme scale-up. There is a reliance on donor funding that limits the expansion of the WBL programmes in Uganda, underscoring the need for increased domestic resource allocation and private sector cost sharing to sustain and grow these initiatives. Without diversified and sustainable financing, these programmes risk stagnation or discontinuation. *"The scaling up of the programme is constrained by reliance on donor funding and that more domestic resources and private sector cost sharing would be needed". (KII- Government)*

Inclusivity for women and underrepresented groups. There is a need to ensure that work-based learning opportunities are accessible, especially to the underrepresented groups, thus enabling them to gain skills training and certification. This inclusivity is essential for promoting equitable employment outcomes and reducing gender and social disparities in the labour market. *"It is important to make WBL opportunities inclusive so that women and other underrepresented groups can access training and certification". (KII- Government)*

Quality training in institutions. It is recognised that the quality of training in many public and private training organisations in Uganda is inadequate. Institutions face challenges due to insufficient facilities and equipment, with staff lacking current industry skills. As acknowledged in the Skilling Uganda Strategic Plan, additional support for institutions is necessary. *"Schools have raised concerns about limited resources, as some projects require funds for equipment." (KII- Stanbic Bank)*

6.2 Barriers to growth

Technology gap. Many organisations lack access to modern technology, which limits their ability to expose learners to

current industry-standard tools and systems. This impedes the development of relevant technical skills necessary for competitiveness in today's labour market. *"In Canada, factories and workshops are more spacious and their technology is very advanced. Their machines are up to date and on another level. We hope to reach that level in the future."* (KII- Musa Bode)

High levels of informality. Many WBL opportunities exist within informal enterprises that often lack structured training systems and certification processes. As a result, learners may acquire experience but struggle to have their skills formally recognised by employers. *"Right now, anyone who wants to learn is welcome. Some parents bring their children who are not continuing with formal education and ask us to teach them various skills. We train them and afterwards, they can either work with us or start their own workshops. Many of our trainees have successfully started their businesses using the skills they learned from us."* (KII- Auto mechanics)

Weak business linkages. There is limited collaboration between training institutions and businesses, which reduces the effectiveness of work-based learning programmes. Without strong linkages, curricula remain misaligned with workplace needs, and learners miss out on practical opportunities and job placements. *"Ministries, academia, industry associations and development partners need to move beyond siloed operations and finger pointing. There is need to work together and establish a formal community of practice or steering committee to oversee implementation, share best practices and troubleshoot challenges in real time."* (KII – private sector).

Severe budget constraints. This restricts the number of students that internship programmes can accommodate. Demand far exceeds availability, resulting in intense competition, with thousands of applicants vying for limited positions. For instance, URA struggles to manage a high volume of applications, which affects the efficiency of matching interns with opportunities. *"The biggest challenge is finances. Many parents bring their children here without any financial support. Since most of them dropped out due to school fees problems, they often come without money for lunch or transport. This makes it difficult for us to support them"*. (KII – Auto mechanics).

Financial motivation remains very low. Many internship programmes do not offer financial support, making them inaccessible to lower-income students who may struggle to cover transportation and other essential costs. This financial barrier hampers inclusivity and participation. *"Many young people want to learn these skills but lack the funds to pay for training. There is a need for support to help them access this kind of training because it provides a way to earn a living"*. (KII – Apprentice, Tailoring).

Lack of clear post-internship employment opportunities. While some interns secure permanent roles, most programmes do not have a structured recruitment process, making the transition into full-time work uncertain. The absence of defined pathways after internships weakens the long-term sustainability of these initiatives. Additionally, without formal partnerships with universities, the selection and access processes remain ad hoc, complicating efforts to ensure a steady and smooth flow of interns from academic institutions into workplaces. Strengthening collaborations with universities could improve programme efficiency and accessibility. *"Inclusivity is a challenge, especially for women in technical fields. For example, last year, out of 22 interns, only six were female. However, we ensure that all female applicants are accepted. Inclusivity is part of our programme."* (KII – Roofings Company)

Lack of awareness about official certification. This directly affects graduates' employability. Without recognised accreditation, trainees often find it hard to secure formal employment, which limits their career growth and earning capacity. Although efforts are underway to obtain certification from the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), this issue remains until the certification process is fully implemented. *Limited space and equipment hinder training.* Many apprenticeship programmes operate in small workshop environments, making it difficult to accommodate larger numbers of students. As demand for vocational training continues to grow, expansion becomes essential. However, financial and infrastructural constraints pose significant barriers to scaling up these programmes. *"I would increase the number of trainees, but the challenge is space. Since I am renting, I don't have enough room to accommodate more trainees. If I had a bigger place, I would train more people because many youths are interested in learning."*

(KII – Auto mechanics). “Some students are forced by their parents to come, but they are not willing to learn. This makes it hard to train them, and some leave before they gain any skills. Also, space is a big challenge because sometimes we get many students, but the room is too small to accommodate all of them.” (KII – Hair dressing).

6.3 Key Takeaways

Work-based learning in Uganda continues to face challenges, despite some progress. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial to helping more young people access training and secure employment.

- Many young people with academic qualifications remain unemployed, emphasising the importance of aligning education more effectively with practical job skills and labour market needs.
- Budget constraints and limited financial support for trainees hinder the expansion of WBL programmes and compromise equitable access.
- Women and other underrepresented groups often encounter challenges such as gender bias and limited awareness that restrict their participation in work-based learning programmes.
- Accessible certification processes need to be widely promoted and prioritised to help trainees secure recognized accreditation that increase their chances of securing formal employment.

7. LESSONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WBL: CASE STUDIES ELSEWHERE

In this section, some of the innovations that countries have adopted within the above WBL realm are analysed.

7.1. Dual apprenticeship system

The dual apprenticeship system entails cost sharing between the private sector and government. African countries (Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia) and European Countries including Germany and Switzerland have adopted this system³ to improve the success of their TVET programmes. For example, an impact assessment of Egypt’s dual apprenticeship MKI-DS programme (2010) revealed that its graduates earned 20–30 percent more than their counterparts from traditional technical schools. Complementary evidence from another study showed that 85 percent of sampled graduates had secured employment offers by the time of graduation (ILO, 2023). Box 8 provides highlights of the operation of the Dual apprenticeship programme and the prerequisites that Uganda must undertake to adopt this system for improving her apprenticeship WBL programmes.

3 First implemented by Germany and Switzerland

Box 8: Dual apprenticeship system

- The system is hinged on wide stakeholder engagement regarding the implementation of the different roles and responsibilities.
- TVET curriculum development and assessment is the responsibility of a coalition of stakeholders from the labour, business and education sectors.
- The TVET schools are funded by the government while companies (private sector) facilitate the apprentices through monthly payments.
- In Germany, Switzerland, Morocco, and Egypt, where the dual system is in place, businesses, the government, and educational institutions maintain strong partnerships
- Companies work closely with educational institutions to ensure that training programmes are aligned with the demands of the job market. Also, companies actively participate in the training process and pay apprentices

Pre-requisites for Uganda to adopt this system

- The dual system requires Uganda to adjust her regulatory frameworks to make it mandatory for business firms (private sector) to invest in their newly recruited staff.
- Adopt a funding mechanism that integrates funding from the national, regional and private sector.
- Build capacity of stakeholders (the private sector) to be able to identify skills gaps and training needs, and curriculum development.
- Nurtured local institutions that represent the business, professional instructors and administrators.

Source: Adapted from ILO, 2023; OECD, 2018; World Bank 2018; Euler, 2013.

Box 9: How the Consortium Approach was implemented in selected countries**France:**

- The consortium involved four private sector firms namely the Adecco Group, a staffing firm; Sodexo, a food service company; Accor, a hospitality company; and the Korian Group, a nursing facilities company, that set up a joint Apprenticeship Training Centre for the culinary and catering industry.
- The companies collectively recruited and trained 11,000 apprentices to work for them in 2018.
- The consortium approach enabled the firms to build strong industrial alliances that enable small SMEs to participate in WBL programmes that they would not design on their own.
- The approach also enabled the private firms to build business partnerships with local universities which added value to both businesses and university curriculum
- Such partnerships provided a two-pronged solution. Businesses' capacity was built to provide in-house training to apprentices. Conversely, universities become more willing to include apprenticeships in their curricula after getting assurances that apprentices shall be hired by companies/SMEs.

Costa Rica:

- Intel company partnered with a local university to hire students on a part-time basis and help them gain work experience
- To reduce dropout rates, Intel company worked with the university to create attendance and grade-based eligibility criteria

Switzerland:

- Zurich insurance company partnered with Harper College in Illinois, USA and designed a two-year General Insurance Apprenticeship.
- Apprentices are trained in high-demand skills such as general insurance and cybersecurity and receive three days a week, on-the-job training and two days a week of classroom training
- At the end of the programme, apprentices receive an associate degree from the college, in addition to salary and benefits from Zurich Insurance company

Lessons for Uganda

- Uganda should support SMEs in similar sectors to form consortia and run joint training centres, enabling them to overcome resource constraints
- Uganda could introduce financial incentives such as tax reliefs or co-financing arrangements to motivate firms to participate in training consortia
- Foster stronger university, TVET, industry partnerships to align curricula with labour market needs

7.2. Consortium approach

Across the globe small and medium sized enterprises hesitate to implement work-based learning programmes because they lack funding and experience to implement such programmes and are not sure how effective these programmes can be (Namita *et al.*, (2020). As such some developed countries have increasingly encouraged private sector firms to adopt the consortium approach that allows SMEs to work together and share resources and expertise and jointly develop apprenticeship programmes. Box 9 demonstrates how the consortium approach was undertaken in several countries.

7.3 Certification of informal apprenticeships at the Master craftsman's Level

Regarding innovations in informal apprenticeships, countries

with large informal sectors have developed certification processes aimed at adding formality to WBL programmes to benefit both informal SMEs and apprentices. Since 2013, Benin has introduced the Craft Skills certificate to provide apprentices with a government-validated qualification. This was implemented to streamline the certification process for apprentices by setting some minimum requirements. The certificate represents the first step in recognising experience, marking progression from apprentice to craftsman. It requires no formal training beyond that provided by the master craftsman. The certification is inclusive and accommodates out-of-school youth or early leavers, who are at least 16 years old. Box 10 highlights some key strengths and weaknesses of the Crafts Skills certificate offered to informal apprentices in Benin.

Box 10: Key strength and weaknesses of the Crafts Skills Certificate in Benin**Strengths**

- The certification has brought nationwide consistency to the certification of apprentices who train in the traditional way with a master craftsman.
- Despite its highly informal nature, informal apprenticeship encourages social and vocational integration. As such know-how is acquired through years of observation and imitation until the apprentice becomes fully independent.
- Informal apprenticeships also promote interpersonal and life skills that are transferred to the apprentice by the craftsman.

Weaknesses

- Harmonisation of skills obtained by apprentices through these apprenticeships is affected by instructor's and trainer's lack of qualifications. Second, informal apprenticeships are affected by inadequate training facilities and infrastructure in craft workshops

Source: Adopted from ILO (2020)⁴

7.4. Key Takeaway

Uganda could adapt the above Craft Skills certification to bridge the gap between formal and informal apprenticeships. Specifically, the country needs to establish skills standards to assist in implementing a national apprenticeship certificate for apprentices.

8. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

8.1. Conclusion

This synthesis confirms that work-based learning (WBL) is a vital opportunity to equip Uganda's youth with the practical, technical, and soft skills required in an evolving labour market. The country has a young and rapidly expanding population, with youth aged 18–30 making up about 22 percent of Uganda's population. However, 41 percent of these young people are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Additionally, over 90 percent of those who are employed work in informal arrangements, often without formal recognition of their skills.

The study emphasises that, although work-based learning in Uganda has attracted interest across various sectors and institutions, significant gaps still persist that limit its scale and effectiveness. High dropout rates from formal education further aggravate skills mismatches. Net secondary enrolment is only 23 per cent, and completion rates beyond upper secondary remain below 10 per cent.

The report indicates that, despite the establishment of several programmes including internships, apprenticeships, and graduate training schemes across both the public and private sectors, WBL implementation remains largely under-coordinated. Some sectors, like hospitality and manufacturing, have trialled structured apprenticeships with defined training guidelines and assessment processes, but these examples are neither widespread nor systematically documented.

The report underscores ongoing challenges that restrict the scale and impact of WBL. Funding for WBL programmes continues to rely heavily on support from development partners and short-term donor funding, which limits their sustainability and growth. Many training providers, especially informal enterprises and smaller private companies, find it difficult to maintain sufficient facilities and modern equipment, resulting in inconsistent training standards. This issue is worsened by high levels of informality, where apprenticeships and skills training often occur outside formal certification systems, reducing graduates' employability and opportunities for career advancement.

Another key finding is the limited engagement by employers, many of whom see WBL as an extra burden rather than an investment. Concerns about supervisory duties, training costs, and lack of clear incentives or recognition contribute to employers' hesitation. Additionally, the absence of structured partnerships between industries and training institutions has led to weak links between curricula and workplace needs, resulting in skills mismatches that leave many youth with academic qualifications but without relevant competencies. Inclusivity remains a significant issue. Women, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups face systemic barriers to participating in WBL programmes, including financial constraints, cultural attitudes, and

⁴ ILO (2020) Study on quality apprenticeships in five countries of West Africa: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger and Togo

the lack of targeted support. While some employers have introduced gender-sensitive measures and outreach efforts, these practices are still not widespread across industries.

Despite these constraints, Uganda has achieved significant progress by drafting the National Work-Based Learning Policy and establishing frameworks like the National Apprenticeship Framework (2018). The examples documented in this report show that when WBL programmes are well-structured, sufficiently resourced, and aligned with employer needs, they provide tangible benefits such as lowering recruitment costs, developing a skilled workforce, and improving youth employability.

8.2. Policy recommendations

Finalise and implement the National Work-Based Learning Policy

Fast-track the approval, dissemination, and implementation of the National Work-Based Learning Policy. The policy should establish clear objectives, governance frameworks, standards, and guidelines for all forms of work-based learning, including apprenticeships, internships, on-the-job training, volunteer placements, and mentorship programmes. *Develop sustainable financing mechanisms and incentivise employer participation*

It is vital that the government develops various financing frameworks to guarantee sustainable funding for work-based learning programmes. The framework should include specific government budget allocations designated for WBL, along with public-private cost-sharing arrangements where employers contribute either financially or in kind.

Providing tax incentives can motivate businesses to host trainees or invest in modern training infrastructure. Furthermore, matching grants and low-interest financing should be accessible to enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises and informal businesses, enabling them to enhance their training capacity and cover training costs.

Strengthen industry-education linkages

Formal partnerships between educational institutions and businesses are essential for ensuring training meets labour market needs and provides learners with relevant skills. To reinforce these connections, employers, educators, and

regulators need to collaboratively develop curricula and training standards that align with industry requirements. Establishing structured agreements between training institutions and businesses can secure predictable placement opportunities for trainees.

Promote inclusive access for underrepresented groups

To ensure equitable participation in work-based learning, especially for women, persons with disabilities, and marginalised youth, targeted outreach campaigns and information sharing sessions should be introduced to raise awareness about available training opportunities and the benefits of participation. Financial support measures, including scholarships and transport facilitation, are essential to reduce economic barriers that often prevent disadvantaged learners from enrolling and completing training.

Promote clear certification pathways

Creating clear and straightforward processes for assessing and recognising prior learning, especially for those with skills gained through informal apprenticeships, will help ensure all learners can validate their abilities. Simultaneously, awareness campaigns should be launched to educate both employers and trainees about the benefits of certification and how to navigate the process.

Areas for further Research

This study largely examined the state of WBL in Uganda, highlighting its importance in addressing youth unemployment and skills mismatches in a rapidly evolving labour market. It explicitly identified significant data gaps for effective WBL in Uganda, such as inadequate documentation of WBL programmes, weak outcome tracking, and limited evidence on employer costs and benefits. To translate these gaps into a clear and feasible policy agenda, further research into employer cost-benefit analysis, enhancements in administrative data systems, and longitudinal tracking of WBL participants is essential.

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