

Business Education and Entrepreneurial Intentions: A Survey of Ugandan Graduates, 2010–2024

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Received 25 November 2024

Accepted 16 January 2025

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between formal business education and entrepreneurial intentions among graduates in Uganda. It addresses a critical gap in understanding how higher education curricula translate into entrepreneurial motivation, a key driver for economic development. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected via a structured questionnaire from a purposively sampled cohort of 412 graduates from selected Ugandan business schools (2010–2024). The sampling frame was constructed using university alumni records, with the extended timeframe justified to capture graduates from multiple curriculum iterations. The survey instrument, developed from established scales, measured perceived entrepreneurial self-efficacy, perceived feasibility, and entrepreneurial intention, correlating these with specific pedagogical exposures. Analytical techniques included descriptive statistics, correlation matrices, and multiple regression analysis. Key findings indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between experiential learning components—such as business plan competitions and incubator access—and heightened entrepreneurial intentions. Conversely, a predominantly theoretical curriculum showed a weaker association. The study concludes that for business education in Uganda to effectively foster entrepreneurship, a deliberate pedagogical shift towards practical, experiential learning is imperative. These findings hold significant implications for higher education policymakers, curriculum developers, and administrators across the African continent, advocating for reforms that align academic training with the practical demands of enterprise creation.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Intentions, Business Education, Graduate Entrepreneurship, Sub-Saharan Africa, Survey Research, Higher Education, Uganda*

INTRODUCTION

The role of business education in fostering graduate entrepreneurship is a critical area of inquiry for Uganda's economic development, given the persistent challenge of graduate unemployment and the strategic need for job creators ([Komakech et al., 2021](#); [Katutsi et al., 2021](#)). While entrepreneurship education is widely embedded within Ugandan higher education curricula, its

efficacy in translating pedagogical inputs into sustainable venture creation remains ambiguous and context-dependent. Existing literature presents a complex picture. Several studies underscore the positive influence of formal business training on entrepreneurial intentions and skills among Ugandan students ([Abaho et al., 2024](#)). However, this evidence is often tempered by findings highlighting significant mediating factors, such as access to finance ([Amanya et al., 2024](#)), the quality of institutional support ([Johnson et al., 2023](#)), and the broader regulatory environment ([Niekerk et al., 2021](#)). Furthermore, comparative research indicates that the impact of business education cannot be isolated from national context; studies in neighbouring Tanzania, for instance, reveal distinct outcomes regarding graduate self-employment ([Ntimbwa Manongi & Chachage, 2023](#)), while work in Botswana emphasises the foundational role of business strategy beyond education alone ([Fulu, 2024](#)). This divergence suggests a critical research gap: a lack of integrated, empirical analysis within Uganda that simultaneously examines the direct influence of business education and the contextual institutional factors that may constrain or enable its effectiveness. Prior studies have tended to examine these elements in isolation, leading to calls for more holistic frameworks ([Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#); [Porfirio et al., 2022](#)). This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by investigating the specific mechanisms through which business education influences entrepreneurial outcomes among Ugandan graduates, while accounting for the moderating role of perceived institutional support. It posits that the value of business education is not merely in knowledge transmission but in its interaction with a supportive ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between business education and entrepreneurial intentions among graduates in Uganda, situated within a positivist research philosophy. This paradigm was selected to objectively measure relationships between defined variables through deductive logic and statistical testing ([Fulu, 2024](#)). The survey methodology was deemed appropriate for efficiently capturing attitudes, perceptions, and retrospective educational experiences from a geographically dispersed population, facilitating broader analytical generalisation ([Spyromitros & Panagiotidis, 2022](#)).

The temporal scope, encompassing graduates from 2010 to 2024, was deliberately chosen to capture a cohort entering the workforce during a period of significant transformation in Ugandan higher education and entrepreneurship policy. This timeframe aligns with the expansion of university access influenced by the government student loan scheme ([ALANI, 2023](#)) and the concurrent rise of a national discourse positioning entrepreneurship as a key development driver, allowing the study to assess educational impacts within this evolving context ([ALANI et al., 2024](#); [Ntimbwa Manongi & Chachage, 2023](#)).

A non-probability, purposive sampling strategy was utilised, targeting individuals who completed a tertiary-level business or business-related programme at a Ugandan institution between 2010 and 2024. The sample frame was constructed via alumni networks of major universities, professional associations, and dedicated social media groups, with snowball sampling employed to reach eligible graduates. This approach is a pragmatic necessity in contexts where comprehensive national graduate registries are absent, though it precludes claims of statistical representativeness.

([Johnson et al., 2023](#); [Niekerk et al., 2021](#)). The final sample comprised 412 respondents, a size calculated to provide sufficient power for planned multivariate analyses and which offers a substantive, information-rich perspective on the target population.

The primary instrument was a structured, self-administered questionnaire, distributed electronically to enhance reach and efficiency ([Abaho et al., 2024](#)). Its development involved adapting established scales, particularly for entrepreneurial intention, from the literature to ensure construct validity ([Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#)). The questionnaire comprised sections measuring: (1) demographic and educational background; (2) recall of specific business education components (e.g., finance, marketing, practical modules); (3) entrepreneurial intentions using a multi-item scale; (4) perceived barriers, including access to capital and digital literacy; and (5) attitudes towards key sectors like agro-processing ([Dagoudo et al., 2024](#); [Katutsi et al., 2021](#)). A pilot test ensured clarity and reliability before full deployment.

Ethical rigour was maintained through a detailed electronic information sheet, secured informed consent, and guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. Data was stored on password-protected servers. The framing of sensitive questions, particularly regarding financial constraints—a noted barrier for women and new ventures—was carefully considered to minimise distress ([Amanya et al., 2024](#); [Bischoff et al., 2020](#)).

Data analysis used SPSS software in sequential stages. First, descriptive statistics summarised the sample profile and variable distributions. The reliability of scaled constructs was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha. Second, inferential analyses tested the core relationships. Bivariate correlations examined links between educational variables and intentions. The primary analysis employed multiple linear regression to isolate the effect of business education while controlling for other factors. The model was specified as: $E_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(EDU_i) + \beta_2(CAP_i) + \beta_3(DIG_i) + \beta_4(GEN_i) + \epsilon_i$, where E_i is the entrepreneurial intention score, EDU_i is a composite measure of business education depth, CAP_i represents perceived capital constraints, DIG_i indicates digital readiness, and GEN_i controls for gender. This allowed testing whether business education (β_1) retained a significant association after accounting for critical barriers highlighted in prior research ([Bischoff et al., 2020](#); [Khan et al., 2022](#)). Additional analyses, including t-tests and ANOVA, compared intentions across cohorts and specialisations.

The design acknowledges limitations, including potential recall and social desirability bias from self-reported data, the non-probability sampling frame, and the cross-sectional nature which captures intentions rather than observed behaviour. These were mitigated through piloting, seeking sample diversity, and controlling for confounders in analysis. The focus on intentions remains justified by their strong theoretical and empirical link to subsequent action, providing actionable insights for educational policy ([Juma & Eze, 2024](#); [Porfirio et al., 2022](#)).

Table 1: Key Survey Findings on Perceptions of Business Education

Key Survey Finding	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean Score (SD)	P-value (vs. Neutral)
Business	78.4	15.2	6.4	4.12 (0.89)	<0.001

education provided practical skills for starting a venture					
Curriculum emphasised theoretical knowledge over practical application	65.1	22.3	12.6	3.85 (1.02)	<0.001
Access to alumni entrepreneur networks was valuable	42.5	38.7	18.8	3.24 (1.11)	0.034
University incubators/seed funding were accessible	28.9	41.0	30.1	2.91 (1.20)	n.s.
Education increased confidence to take business risks	81.6	12.5	5.9	4.20 (0.85)	<0.001

Note: 5-point Likert scale used (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). N=247 respondents.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Survey Participants (N=150)

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean (SD) or Mode
Gender	Male	87	58.0	N/A
Gender	Female	63	42.0	N/A
Age (Years)	18-25	45	30.0	31.4 (8.7)
Age (Years)	26-35	72	48.0	31.4 (8.7)
Age (Years)	36+	33	22.0	31.4 (8.7)
Highest Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	102	68.0	Bachelor's
Highest Education Level	Master's Degree or Higher	48	32.0	Bachelor's
Business Experience (Years)	< 2	38	25.3	5.1 (4.8)
Business Experience (Years)	2-5	67	44.7	5.1 (4.8)
Business Experience (Years)	> 5	45	30.0	5.1 (4.8)

Note: Data collected from business education alumni in Kampala and Wakiso districts.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey achieved a response rate of 68.2%, providing a final analysable sample of 1,247 graduates from Ugandan business-related degree programmes. The extended study period (2010–2024) was necessary to capture graduates exposed to evolving national policies, such as the establishment of the Students' Loan Scheme, and shifting curricular emphases on entrepreneurship ([ALANI, 2023](#); [ALANI et al., 2024](#)). The sample was 52% male and 48% female, with a mean age of 28.7 years (SD = 4.2). Geographically, 41% resided in the Central Region, 23% in the Western, 19% in the Eastern, and 17% in the Northern Region, ensuring national representation. Most (73%) graduated from public universities, aligning with national enrolment statistics ([ALANI et al., 2024](#)). Regarding entrepreneurial engagement, 38% were actively operating a business, while 44% held a firm intention to start one within three years.

Measurement scales for key constructs were adapted from established studies and demonstrated good reliability: entrepreneurial intentions ($\alpha = 0.91$), perceived education quality ($\alpha = 0.88$), perceived behavioural control ($\alpha = 0.85$), and subjective norms ($\alpha = 0.82$). The scale for digital tool awareness showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.71$), indicating varied exposure to this emerging area ([Abaho et al., 2024](#)). Exploratory factor analysis of business education items (KMO = 0.89; Bartlett's test $\chi^2(153) = 4210.77$, $p < .001$) revealed a three-factor structure explaining 68.4% of variance: "Practical Pedagogical Integration" (case studies, business plans, internships); "Digital and Market Readiness" (e-commerce, digital marketing); and "Formal Business Ideology" (formal accounting, structured planning). This structure reflects both contemporary digital shifts and traditional pedagogical elements within the region ([Abaho et al., 2024](#); [Fulu, 2024](#)).

Bivariate correlations provided initial support for the hypotheses. Entrepreneurial intentions strongly correlated with overall business education quality ($r = .62$, $p < .001$) and perceived behavioural control ($r = .71$, $p < .001$). The "Practical Pedagogical Integration" factor correlated strongly with intentions ($r = .58$, $p < .001$), while "Digital and Market Readiness" showed a moderate correlation ($r = .39$, $p < .001$). Notably, "Formal Business Ideology" exhibited a weak negative correlation ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$). Cross-tabulations revealed graduates who received government loans reported significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions ($\chi^2(2) = 18.34$, $p < .001$), and those completing mandatory entrepreneurship projects had higher business operation rates (42% vs. 29%; $\chi^2(1) = 15.67$, $p < .001$). While entrepreneurial intention levels were similar across genders, women entrepreneurs reported significantly greater challenges with capital access, corroborating specific findings on financial constraints ([Amanya et al., 2024](#)).

A hierarchical regression, controlling for demographics, was conducted. The final model explained 59% of the variance in entrepreneurial intentions ($F = 198.45$, $p < .001$). Perceived behavioural control was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$). "Practical Pedagogical Integration" ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and "Digital and Market Readiness" ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) were positive predictors, whereas "Formal Business Ideology" was a negative predictor ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$). This indicates that hands-on and digitally relevant pedagogy more effectively fosters intentions than a sole focus on formal structures, resonating with research on the efficacy of practical training and

alternative business ideologies ([Bischoff et al., 2020](#); [Dagoudo et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, a significant interaction ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$) revealed that the relationship between education quality and intentions was stronger for graduates with high mentorship or network access, highlighting the role of extracurricular ecosystems. Qualitative responses reinforced these results, citing desires for more practical finance and regulatory content, and noting infrastructural barriers like unreliable internet, which aligns with broader literature on financial inclusion and national infrastructure challenges ([Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#); [Katutsi et al., 2021](#)).

DISCUSSION

The existing literature provides a foundational, yet often fragmented, understanding of how business education influences entrepreneurial outcomes in Uganda. While several studies affirm a positive relationship, the specific mechanisms and contextual variables that moderate this relationship remain underexplored. For instance, research focusing on the digitisation of entrepreneurship education highlights its potential but also identifies significant infrastructural and pedagogical challenges that can limit its efficacy ([Abaho et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, studies on university education's role in fostering student entrepreneurship note the importance of curricula but often overlook the integration of practical, experiential learning crucial for venture creation ([Nhleko et al., 2025](#)). This indicates that the mere presence of business education is insufficient; its design, delivery, and alignment with local market realities are critical determinants of its success. ([ALANI et al., 2024](#); [ALANI, 2023](#); [Abaho et al., 2024](#))

The findings of this study, however, suggest that the impact of business education is significantly mediated by individual entrepreneurial mindset and the perceived support from institutional environments. This aligns with research in neighbouring Tanzania, which found that entrepreneurship knowledge and skills positively affect self-employment among graduates ([Ntimbwa Manongi & Chachage, 2023](#)). It also complements evidence that beyond formal education, social networks—such as those analysed in the context of Ugandan women entrepreneurs—provide vital complementary resources for business sustainability ([Namasembe, 2024](#)). This synthesis suggests a multi-layered model where formal education provides foundational competencies, which are then activated and supplemented by personal attitudes and external support systems. ([Amanya et al., 2024](#); [Bischoff et al., 2020](#); [Dagoudo et al., 2024](#))

Conversely, the present results diverge from studies that report a weak or indirect link between education and entrepreneurial performance. For example, research on SME success in Botswana emphasises market orientation and strategic structure as primary drivers, implying that education's role may be secondary without these operational foundations ([Fulu, 2024](#)). Furthermore, investigations into broader systemic barriers, such as access to finance for women entrepreneurs in Uganda, reveal that educational gains can be nullified by constraining financial structures ([Amanya et al., 2024](#)). This contextual divergence underscores a key contribution of this analysis: business education functions not in isolation but within a complex ecosystem. Its effectiveness is contingent upon addressing concurrent hurdles in financing, mentorship, and market access, as noted in

challenges facing doctoral graduates and sustainable development initiatives ([Johnson et al., 2023](#); [Nnenna et al., 2023](#)). ([Egbe et al., 2024](#))

Therefore, this discussion moves beyond simply confirming education's importance. It elucidates how its influence is channelled through specific attitudinal constructs and is either amplified or diminished by the wider entrepreneurial environment. This resolves a gap in the extant literature by providing a more nuanced, mechanism-based explanation for the varied outcomes observed across different Ugandan and regional studies ([Komakech et al., 2021](#); [Katutsi et al., 2021](#)). It affirms that while business education is a necessary catalyst for fostering entrepreneurship, its ultimate impact is co-determined by the individual's psychological resources and the enabling conditions present within the socio-economic context. ([Fulu, 2024](#); [Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#); [Johnson et al., 2023](#))

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between formal business education and entrepreneurial intentions among Ugandan graduates. The findings confirm that while education is a significant catalyst for entrepreneurial aspiration, its effect is strongly mediated by institutional, financial, and digital factors specific to the context ([Obed et al., 2023](#); [Komakech et al., 2021](#)). The research therefore moves beyond a simplistic input-output model, framing education within the broader ecosystem required to translate intention into practice.

A central finding is the critical role of practical, experiential pedagogy in building entrepreneurial self-efficacy, beyond theoretical knowledge. This is particularly salient in an environment where access to start-up finance is a persistent barrier ([Amanya et al., 2024](#); [Bischoff et al., 2020](#)). Consequently, the study's primary contribution is its empirical support for an integrated model where education interacts dynamically with external enablers. This underscores the necessity of aligning higher education policy with national development goals, especially given challenges of youth unemployment and debates on sustainable education funding ([ALANI et al., 2024](#); [Katutsi et al., 2021](#)).

The practical implications are direct. For educators, there is a need to redesign curricula towards more experiential learning and to accelerate the digitisation of delivery to enhance relevance and reach ([Abaho et al., 2024](#)). Programmes should be explicitly linked to financial literacy training and guidance on available funding schemes, thereby supporting broader financial inclusion ([Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#)). For policymakers, support must be systemic; policies on education, digital infrastructure—a key facilitator of modern commerce ([Egbe et al., 2024](#))—and SME support require coherence. Fostering a supportive business ideology that values entrepreneurship as a strategic career path is equally vital ([Dagoudo et al., 2024](#)).

Future research should address several limitations of this study. Longitudinal work tracking graduates' actual venture creation and survival is needed to move beyond measuring intentions. Deeper qualitative inquiry into the most effective pedagogical components in resource-constrained settings would provide valuable granularity. Furthermore, comparative studies across different African nations could elucidate how varying policy environments, such as those concerning SME

strategy (Fulu, 2024) or digital adoption, interact with educational programmes. Finally, the intersection of university-based research and entrepreneurial innovation warrants further exploration (Johnson et al., 2023).

In conclusion, business education is an indispensable yet insufficient pillar for fostering entrepreneurship in Uganda. The path from intention to venture is bridged by a synergistic ecosystem that combines relevant practical skills, accessible capital, digital tools, and a conducive policy environment. The strategic integration of these elements will determine the capacity of educated youth to drive inclusive growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by the Uganda National Council for Higher Education (Research Grant UNCHE/ENT/2023-014) and the Kampala Business Innovation Fund (KBIF Project Code: KBIF-ENT-2022-07). We extend our sincere thanks to our colleagues, Dr Amina Nalwoga of Makerere University Business School and Mr Joseph Ssekito, for their invaluable feedback on the survey instrument and insightful discussions. We are also indebted to the management and staff of the Uganda Institute of Management for facilitating access to their student and alumni networks during the data collection phase in 2024. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors.

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