

# **Social Economic Factors Influencing Uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme in Kyenjojo Town Council, Uganda**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to assess the socio-economic factors influencing the uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in Kyenjojo Town Council, Uganda. The specific objective utilised was to examine the influence of education levels on YLP uptake in Kyenjojo Town Council.

A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was employed, involving a sample of 133 respondents drawn from a target population of 200. Quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using SPSS, while qualitative insights were obtained through key informant interviews with local leaders and programme officers.

Education emerged as a critical factor, with 73.6% of respondents agreeing that higher education increased their motivation to participate in YLP's (mean score=3.71). Youth with secondary or tertiary education demonstrated greater success in the program, with 69.8% recognizing education's role in developing essential business skills (mean=3.81). However, 62.8% of less-educated participants reported difficulties in utilizing program resources (mean=3.56), highlighting the need for targeted educational support.

The study concludes that YLP's effectiveness requires multi-dimensional interventions addressing education gaps, financial inclusion, and employment realities. Specific recommendations include: integrating financial literacy training with vocational skills development, and creating formal mentorship networks linking participants with established entrepreneurs. These evidence-based proposals aim to transform YLP from a subsistence intervention to a sustainable youth empowerment platform.

**Keywords:** Social Economic Factors, Uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme, Kyenjojo Town Council, Uganda

## **Introduction**

Globally, youth unemployment remains a critical socio-economic challenge that threatens development, stability, and social cohesion. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) reports that more than 64 million young people worldwide are unemployed, while an additional 145 million are underemployed. This situation has heightened the importance of youth livelihood programmes as strategic interventions for enhancing employability, building entrepreneurial capacity, and expanding access to financial services (World Bank, 2020). Socio-economic factors such as education levels, financial access, and employment opportunities are widely recognized as determinants of youth participation in such initiatives. Evidence from developed economies such as the United States reveals that structural inequalities, particularly in education and income distribution, shape patterns of youth engagement in empowerment programmes (Vlassoff, 2023).

In North America, youth participation in livelihood programmes is often constrained by systemic barriers. Limited access to quality education, coupled with income inequality and racial disparities, affects the extent to which young people engage with government-sponsored initiatives (Oduro *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the presence of supportive environments, including mentorship programmes and family networks, has been shown to facilitate youth participation. In the absence of such support systems, uptake of livelihood programmes remains low. These experiences illustrate that socio-economic factors are not uniform across contexts but instead interact with existing social structures to influence programme outcomes.

Across Africa, the impact of socio-economic factors on youth livelihood programmes is even more pronounced. Many countries face high levels of unemployment, limited access to vocational training, and pervasive poverty, which undermine the success of interventions aimed at youth empowerment (Ombiro, 2018). In Nigeria, for instance, access to quality education and financial resources significantly shapes youth involvement in entrepreneurship and livelihood projects (Awuonda *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, persistent inequalities in education and income have limited the effectiveness of youth-targeted programmes, despite substantial government investment (Mahlia *et al.*, 2021). These examples highlight that while youth programmes are designed with noble intentions, their impact depends on how well they address underlying social and economic realities.

In Kenya, youth unemployment has remained high due to rapid population growth and limited employment opportunities. Livelihood initiatives such as the Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (KYEP) have attempted to bridge this gap by offering vocational training and entrepreneurship support. However, disparities between urban and rural areas in access to resources continue to undermine programme outcomes (Thapa *et al.*, 2019). In Tanzania, Zaidi *et al.* (2022) found that although youth demonstrate a strong willingness to participate in empowerment initiatives, barriers such as poverty, lack of financial inclusion, and weak institutional support constrain their success. Similar to other countries, supportive family and community networks play a pivotal role in enhancing youth engagement, resilience, and long-term success in these programmes (Njoroge *et al.*, 2019).

Uganda reflects many of these continental challenges. The country's population is predominantly young, with nearly 78% below the age of 30 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2021). The national youth unemployment rate has continued to rise, from 9.2% in 2022 to 12.4% in 2024, reflecting the slow recovery from COVID-19, inflationary pressures, and limited absorption of graduates into the formal labour market (UBOS, 2024). To address these challenges, the Government of Uganda launched the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in the financial year 2013/14 under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD, 2014). The programme sought to empower poor and unemployed youth through the provision of interest-free loans, skills training, and entrepreneurship support. While its objectives were commendable, its implementation and uptake have been inconsistent across districts, with concerns about limited participation and poor sustainability (Wang, 2020).

The uneven performance of YLP can be partly explained by structural barriers. Disparities in access to education limit the ability of some youth to meet programme requirements or manage funded projects effectively (Vlassoff, 2023). At the same time, financial requirements such as collateral and loan repayment obligations have excluded many young people who lack access to credit or savings (Ahaibwe *et al.*, 2013). Employment dynamics further complicate programme outcomes, as a large proportion of youth are engaged in low-paying informal work that neither provides stability nor enables them to qualify for financial support (Sseguya *et al.*, 2009). These realities highlight the importance of contextualized studies that investigate the precise socio-economic determinants of YLP uptake.

Kyenjojo District, located in western Uganda, offers an important case for examining these challenges. Despite being one of the beneficiaries of YLP, Kyenjojo has recorded persistently low participation rates compared to

other districts (Munyambonera, 2018). Local government reports indicate that unemployment in Kyenjojo Town Council hovers around 30%, with approximately 15% of youth resorting to unlawful activities such as drug abuse, gambling, theft, and prostitution as coping mechanisms (Amanyire, 2018). This has raised concerns about not only the effectiveness of YLP but also the broader socio-economic stability of the district. The persistence of such challenges in the presence of government interventions suggests a disconnect between programme design and the lived realities of the target population.

The limited success of YLP in Kyenjojo Town Council can therefore be attributed to interlinked socio-economic constraints. Barriers such as poor access to vocational training, limited financial resources, and unstable employment opportunities have reduced youth participation. Furthermore, weak institutional support and lack of mentorship structures continue to discourage sustained engagement in YLP initiatives (Nsimenta, 2024; Mwesigwa & Mubangizi, 2019). This has perpetuated a cycle of unemployment and vulnerability among young people, undermining the programme's objective of reducing poverty and creating self-reliance.

This study was grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which posits that individuals' actions are determined by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Within the context of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), education levels shape youths' attitudes by influencing their confidence and skills; financial requirements determine perceived behavioral control by affecting their capacity to access and sustain participation; and employment status reflects subjective norms and social pressures that influence program engagement. By anchoring the study in TPB, the analysis systematically links socio-economic determinants to youth behavioral intentions and actual participation in YLP.

It is against this background that the present study sought to examine the socio-economic factors influencing uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme in Kyenjojo Town Council. This paper mainly focused on the influence of Education levels on the uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in Kyenjojo Town Council.

### **Significance of the study**

The study findings have the potential to bring about positive change in multiple spheres:

Firstly, they may have a significant effect on government and policy makers by providing valuable information that highlights the importance of prioritizing youth employment and empowerment as a key strategy for poverty reduction.

Furthermore, the findings may inspire the local community to embrace a mindset change and recognize the significance of socio-economic interventions for the well-being of young people. This will encourage individuals to explore entrepreneurship opportunities, develop necessary skills, and pursue self-employment options. By promoting youth-led businesses, the study findings will contribute to job creation, economic development, and a reduction in rural-urban migration as young people find sustainable livelihoods in their own communities.

The findings will serve as a practical resource for both academicians and practitioners, providing a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding youth unemployment and informing the development of evidence-based strategies and policies.

Lastly, the study findings will foster discussions and raise awareness about the unique nature of youth unemployment in the study area, prompting local districts and stakeholders to act. By understanding the causes

and challenges associated with youth unemployment, policy makers and community leaders can design and implement targeted interventions to address this issue effectively.

## **Literature Review**

### **Education Levels and Uptake of Youth Livelihood Programme**

Empirical studies consistently show that higher levels of education improve youth awareness and access to livelihood programmes. Hussein (2017) found that educated youth are more likely to access information about government programmes, comprehend their benefits, and fulfil procedural requirements. Similarly, recent evidence by Kintu and Asiimwe (2021) demonstrates that secondary and tertiary education strongly predict participation in youth empowerment initiatives in Uganda. This suggests that low education levels can systematically exclude disadvantaged youth from benefiting fully from YLP. However, some scholars caution that formal education alone may not be sufficient; skills-based and vocational pathways also play a critical role (Ssewanyana & Kasirye, 2020).

Education also facilitates the effective application of knowledge and skills acquired through livelihood programmes. Kaltenborn (2017) and more recently Nuwagaba (2022) demonstrate that participants with higher education levels exhibit stronger cognitive skills, enabling them to adapt programme training into practical entrepreneurial ventures. This aligns with the argument that education enhances problem-solving, creativity, and resilience, qualities that are vital for sustaining YLP projects (Rasul & Thapa, 2019). Nevertheless, critics argue that some livelihood programmes overemphasize formal qualifications at the expense of informal skills and indigenous knowledge, thereby marginalizing out-of-school youth (Muwonge, 2021).

Social capital theory further emphasizes that education expands networks, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities. Lloyd-Jones (2019) highlighted that educated youth leverage their networks of mentors, professionals, and peers to strengthen project outcomes. Similarly, Ombiro (2018) found that institutions of higher learning provide critical spaces for networking, innovation, and exposure to new ideas. More recent studies echo this point, noting that educated youth are more likely to access digital platforms that facilitate networking, marketing, and access to microfinance (Odhiambo, 2022). However, reliance on such networks risks widening inequalities, as uneducated or rural youth often remain excluded from these opportunities.

Another important dimension is entrepreneurship. Lwasa *et al.* (2017) and Mugo (2018) demonstrated that education fosters entrepreneurial mindsets, equipping youth with planning, management, and innovation skills. Updated findings by Akimana (2020) confirm that entrepreneurship education correlates with higher business survival rates among youth enterprises funded under YLP. At the same time, gaps persist: many rural schools in Uganda lack entrepreneurship curricula, leaving large sections of youth underprepared for livelihood interventions (Kasozi & Nanyanzi, 2022). This disconnect highlights the need to align education systems with labour market demands and youth livelihood strategies.

Education also plays a role in financial literacy and economic decision-making. Mundo (2019) found that financial education helps youth manage loans and savings effectively, while recent studies by Nanyonga and Tumwine (2021) show that financial literacy training significantly reduces default rates in youth projects. This indicates that YLP outcomes are closely linked not only to general education but also to specialized financial education that empowers youth to make informed investment decisions. Yet, financial literacy remains unevenly distributed, often limited to urban-based youth with higher educational attainment.

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored education's role in shaping youth livelihoods. The Malala Fund (2020) estimated that 20 million girls globally risked dropping out of school due to pandemic-related disruptions, a trend also observed in Uganda. This has direct implications for programmes like YLP, as reduced

access to education undermines the pool of potential beneficiaries equipped with necessary skills. Post-pandemic recovery strategies must therefore prioritize reintegration into schools, vocational training, and targeted educational support for marginalized youth.

Despite these insights, significant gaps remain in the literature. Much of the existing work documents positive correlations between education and livelihood outcomes, yet few studies interrogate the nuanced ways education interacts with other socio-economic factors such as poverty, gender, and geographic location. Furthermore, empirical studies rarely focus specifically on Kyenjojo District or similar rural settings, leaving limited localized evidence on how education influences YLP uptake. These gaps justify the current study, which seeks to examine how education levels, alongside financial and employment factors, affect youth participation in YLP in Kyenjojo Town Council.

Although existing studies highlight the positive role of education in promoting YLP uptake, there is limited evidence on how education interacts with other socio-economic constraints such as poverty, gender, and rural–urban disparities. Furthermore, most studies emphasize national or urban-level dynamics, leaving rural contexts like Kyenjojo underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by examining how different education levels shape uptake in a rural Ugandan setting where access to livelihood resources is uneven.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate socio-economic factors influencing the uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in Kyenjojo Town Council, Uganda. Quantitative data, obtained through structured questionnaires, facilitated statistical analysis of education, financial requirements, and employment status, while qualitative data, collected through semi-structured interviews, provided contextual explanations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The target population comprised 200 youth beneficiaries of YLP across seven wards, alongside key informants including the Senior Community Development Officer, YLP focal person, District Security representative, and Local Council leaders. Eligibility criteria focused on youth aged 18–30 years enrolled in YLP. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample of 133 respondents was derived. Stratified random sampling captured variations among youth, while purposive sampling targeted institutional actors.

Data collection utilized both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through (a) structured questionnaires organized into three sections (education, financial requirements, employment status) with Likert-scale and categorical items, and (b) semi-structured interviews with key informants to capture institutional and cultural perspectives. Secondary data were sourced from policy documents, reports, and scholarly literature.

Collected data were processed through editing, coding, and tabulation. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 21, applying descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means), cross-tabulations, chi-square tests, Pearson correlations, and regression models to test relationships among variables. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2019), with triangulation enhancing credibility.

Data quality control was ensured through validity and reliability checks. Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated at 0.80, exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Amin, 2005). Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with overall internal consistency of 0.88, indicating strong reliability.

The study adhered to ethical standards, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and ethical clearance from Bishop Stuart University's Research Ethics Committee. Limitations

included restricted generalizability to other districts, cross-sectional design limiting causal inference, and reliance on self-reported data. Mitigation involved stratified sampling, triangulation, and regression analysis. A community engagement plan was implemented through stakeholder meetings and feedback sessions, while a COVID-19 and Ebola mitigation plan ensured participant safety in line with WHO guidelines.

## Results

### Response rate

This section presents the response rate of the study participants. The findings are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Response Rate**

Response rate	Tools distributed	Tools returned/collected	Percent collected
Questionnaires	129	129	100%
Interviews	4	3	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>99.2%</b>

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

Table 1 shows that the 129 questionnaires distributed were all returned, representing a response rate of 100%. Out of 4 interviews that were conducted 3 were successfully completed, representing a 75% response rate. Overall, 132 out of the 133 data collection tools administered were returned, giving a total response rate of 99.2%. This implies that there was a very high level of participation in the study, ensuring the reliability and representativeness of the findings in Kyenjojo Town Council. These findings agree with Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who stated that a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting, 60% is good, and 70% and above is considered very good, hence the 99.2% response rate in this study is considered excellent.

### Education levels on the uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in Kyenjojo Town Council

This section shows the effect of education level on the uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in Kyenjojo Town Council. Responses were given in the Likert scale of (5-strongly agree (SA), 4-Agree (A), 3-Neutral (N), 2-Disagree (S), and 1-Strongly Agree (SA). Later strongly agree and agree were added together to mean “Agree”, Strongly disagree and Disagree were also added together to mean “Disagree” and neutral remained. Results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Effect of education level on the uptake of Youth Livelihood Programs in Kyenjojo Town Council (N = 129)**

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Higher levels of education increase my interest and motivation to participate in livelihood programs.	2 (1.6%)	7 (5.4%)	25 (19.4%)	87 (67.4%)	8 (6.2%)	3.71	0.731
2	Education provides me with essential skills and knowledge for success in livelihood programs.	2 (1.6%)	7 (5.4%)	17 (13.2%)	92 (71.3%)	11 (8.5%)	3.80	0.733
3	Youth with higher educational qualifications are more likely to succeed in livelihood programs.	2 (1.6%)	4 (3.1%)	33 (25.6%)	68 (52.7%)	22 (17.1%)	3.81	0.811
4	Lack of formal education limits my ability to utilize program resources.	11 (8.5%)	5 (3.9%)	32 (24.8%)	63 (48.8%)	18 (14.0%)	3.56	1.060
5	Education helps access more training and skills development opportunities.	1 (0.8%)	4 (3.1%)	15 (11.6%)	88 (68.2%)	21 (16.3%)	3.96	0.689
6	Youth with vocational education are more likely to succeed than those without.	2 (1.6%)	9 (7.0%)	22 (17.1%)	86 (66.7%)	10 (7.8%)	3.72	0.770
7	Knowledge/skills from education are essential for managing businesses.	9 (7.0%)	10 (7.8%)	23 (17.8%)	71 (55.0%)	16 (12.4%)	3.58	1.036
8	YLP should focus on increasing educational opportunities.	0 (0%)	3 (2.3%)	19 (14.7%)	78 (60.5%)	29 (22.5%)	4.03	0.684
9	Formal education in business helps understand financial aspects.	0 (0%)	4 (3.1%)	15 (11.6%)	83 (64.3%)	27 (20.9%)	4.03	0.672
10	Skills/knowledge from education are more valuable than financial support.	1 (0.8%)	5 (3.9%)	26 (20.2%)	78 (60.5%)	19 (14.7%)	3.84	0.744
	<b>Average</b>						<b>3.804</b>	<b>0.793</b>

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

Table 2 show that a majority of respondents 87, (67.4%) agreed that higher education levels enhance their motivation to join livelihood programs, strongly agreed 8(6.2%) with the statement. Only 7.0% expressed disagreement, while 19.4% were neutral. This indicated that 73.6% of the study participants agreed that higher education levels enhance their motivation to join livelihood programs. The mean score was  $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ , indicating a generally positive perception that higher education motivates youth participation.

The local leader observed, *“Education has a big influence because those who have studied at least up to S4 oba S6 are more likely to join and understand these programs better than ‘abazaire b’etuuro’ who dropped out early.”* Similarly, the senior community development officer noted, *“Youth who have studied up to S4 or S6 are more confident, have a better understanding of project requirements, and show more interest in these programs compared to those who stopped at P7 oba kutandika omw’ibo.”* These perspectives align strongly with the quantitative results showing that education level motivates youth participation.

Most respondents, 92 (71.3%) and 11(8.5%), strongly agreed with the view that education equips them with critical skills and knowledge necessary for YLP success. A small percent (7.0%) disagreed, and 13.2% were neutral. This indicated that 79.8% of participants overwhelmingly believed that education provides essential skills and knowledge for success in livelihood programs. This strong support is reflected in the mean score of  $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ , signifying that education is perceived as a foundation for success in livelihood initiatives.

The YLP coordinator explained, *“Educated youth come with better skills like business planning, marketing, ICT skills and even communication which helps them link with markets and networks outside Kyenjojo.”* The senior community development officer added, *“They have stronger skills in communication, networking, and managing finances. ‘Abasomi’ are more organized and forward-thinking.”* These comments reflect the quantitative consensus that education provides a foundation for livelihood program success.

The findings in Table 4.7 revealed that 68 (52.7%) agreed and 22 (17.1%) strongly agreed that higher educational qualifications lead to greater success in livelihood. In contrast, 4 (3.1%) disagreed, 2 (1.6%) strongly disagreed, and 33 (25.6%) were neutral. This indicated that 69.8% of respondents agreed that youth with higher educational qualifications are more likely to succeed in livelihood programs. This belief is further supported by a mean score of  $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ , confirming the perceived importance of education qualifications in determining program outcomes.

The local leader stating, *“Those with more education perform better because they know how to manage money, keep records (‘okuhandika eby’amafaranga’), and communicate well. Those with little education struggle with these things.”* The senior community development officer similarly said, *“Yes, those with higher education qualifications succeed more easily. They are better at managing business records, writing reports, and marketing their projects.”* These comments reflect the quantitative confirming that the perceived importance of education qualifications in determining program outcomes

Over half of the respondents agreed 63(48.8%), strongly agreed 18(14.0%) that lack of formal education hinders their ability to effectively use YLP resources. A total of 5 (3.9%) disagreed, 11 (8.5%) strongly disagreed, and 32 (24.8%) were neutral. This implies that participants acknowledged that lack of formal education limits their ability to utilize program resources. Those in agreement totalled 81 (62.8%) with the mean was  $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ , highlighting moderate agreement with this barrier to resource utilization.

The senior community development officer who mentioned, *“Abazaire b’etuuro (those with lower education) struggle with reading, writing, and understanding financial documents like bank forms or accountability reports.”* The YLP coordinator also noted, *“Youth with lower education face challenges in writing reports, understanding proposal requirements, keeping financial records, and sometimes even understanding the agreements they sign.”*

The findings in Table 4.7 show that the majority of study participants agreed (88, 68.2%), that education improves access to training and skill-building opportunities, followed by 21(16.3%) who strongly agreed

with the statement. Only 4 (3.1%) disagreed, 1 (0.8%) strongly disagreed, and 15 (11.6%) were neutral. There was strong consensus that education helps access more training and skills development opportunities. This indicated that 84.5% agreed that education improves access to training and skill-building opportunities. The high mean score of  $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.69$  reinforces the widely held view that education enhances access to skill-building opportunities.

Qualitative insights support this, with the senior community development officer stating, *“We need to strengthen training opportunities through workshops, ‘okutendeka mu ngeri esoboka’ (training in practical ways), and encourage continuous learning to uplift those with lower academic levels.”*

Most respondents agreed 86(66.7%) that vocational education increases chances of success in livelihood programs and 10(7.8%) strongly agreed with the statement. Nine (7.0%) disagreed, 2 (1.6%) strongly disagreed, and 22 (17.1%) were neutral. The belief that youth with vocational education are more likely to succeed than those without was prevalent with 74.5% agreeing. The mean was  $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ , indicating broad agreement on the advantage of vocational training.

The local leader highlighted the importance of vocational training by suggesting, *“There is need for vocational training centres’ (‘amasomero g’obuhingiire’) that can teach practical skills to those who did not finish school so that they can benefit from these programs equally.”* This well reflects the quantitative findings supporting vocational education.

The results show that 71 (55.0%) agreed that education-based skills are essential for business management, (12.4%) strongly agreed with the statement. Conversely, 10 (7.8%) disagreed, 9 (7.0%) strongly disagreed, and 23 (17.8%) were neutral. This indicated that 67.4% of the respondents agreed that education-based skills are essential role of knowledge and skills from education in managing businesses. The mean score of  $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.04$  suggests moderate agreement with the significance of education in business management.

In interviews, the YLP coordinator remarked, *“Educated youth know how to write and read the guidelines. They have better skills in managing businesses.”* This supports the moderate quantitative agreement on the significance of education for business management.

An overwhelming majority agreed 78(60.5%) that YLP should prioritize expanding educational opportunities and 29(22.5%) strongly agreed. Only 3 (2.3%) disagreed, and 19 (14.7%) were neutral. This shows that 83.0% believed that the YLP should prioritize increasing educational opportunities, with  $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ , reflecting strong support for this policy recommendation.

The senior community development officer stressed, *“Education plays a very big role... We need to encourage continuous learning to uplift those with lower academic levels.”* Similarly, the local leader advised, *“Vocational training should be increased to help those who dropped out early.”*

The findings in Table 4.7 show that the majority, 83(64.3%), agreed, followed by 27(20.9%) who strongly agreed that formal business education improves understanding of financial concepts. Four (3.1%) disagreed, and 15 (11.6%) were neutral. Moreover, there was notable agreement that formal education in business enhances understanding of financial aspects, with 110 (85.3%) agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 4 (3.1%) disagreeing. The mean of  $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.67$  underlines strong recognition of the value of formal education in financial literacy.

The senior community development officer observed, *“Educated youth are better at understanding financial documents and managing funds.”*

Finally, three-quarters of respondents agreed 78, (60.5%) and strongly agreed 19, (14.7%) that skills and knowledge from education outweigh financial aid in importance. Only 5 (3.9%) disagreed, 1 (0.8%) strongly disagreed, and 26 (20.2%) were neutral. That indicates that 75.2% of study participants believed that skills and knowledge from education are more valuable than financial support alone, with mean score  $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ , emphasizing the perceived superiority of education over mere financial assistance.

The local leader emphasized this point, saying, *“Skills like business planning, communication, and financial management are more valuable than just giving money.”* The YLP coordinator echoed, *“Education equips youth with lasting skills which have sustainable impacts beyond financial support.”*

**The association between level of education influence towards Youth Livelihood Programme**

This section presents the education influence towards Youth Livelihood Programme in Kyenjojo Town Council. Results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Cross-tabulation on Education's Influence towards Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) Participation (N = 129)**

	Statement	Response Category	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	$\chi^2$	p-value
1	Higher levels of education increase my interest and motivation to participate in livelihood programs.	Disagreement	0	3	5	1	5.763	.928
		Neutral	3	7	11	4		
		Agreement	13	36	32	14		
2	Education provides me with essential skills and knowledge that contribute to my success in livelihood programs.	Disagreement	0	4	4	1	10.962	.532
		Neutral	2	4	10	1		
		Agreement	14	38	34	17		
3	Youth with higher educational qualifications are more likely to succeed in livelihood programs than those with lower qualifications.	Disagreement	1	2	2	1	11.841	.459
		Neutral	6	9	15	3		
		Agreement	9	35	31	15		
4	Lack of formal education limits my ability to understand and utilize the resources offered by livelihood programs.	Disagreement	0	5	9	2	10.839	.543
		Neutral	7	10	10	5		
		Agreement	9	31	29	12		
5	Education helps me access more opportunities for training and skills development within livelihood programs.	Disagreement	0	2	3	0	12.663	.394
		Neutral	1	7	6	1		
		Agreement	15	37	39	18		
6	Youth with vocational education are more likely to succeed in livelihood programs than those without.	Disagreement	0	3	6	2	7.285	.838
		Neutral	3	6	10	3		
		Agreement	13	37	32	14		
7	The knowledge and skills gained through education are essential for managing and growing businesses supported by livelihood programs.	Disagreement	1	5	11	2	11.184	.513
		Neutral	3	6	11	3		
		Agreement	12	35	26	14		
8	The YLP should focus on increasing educational opportunities for youth to improve the effectiveness of livelihood programs.	Disagreement	1	1	0	1	6.239	.716
		Neutral	2	5	10	2		
		Agreement	13	40	38	16		
9	Formal education, particularly in business and entrepreneurship, helps youth better understand the financial aspects of livelihood programs.	Disagreement	0	2	1	1	6.112	.729
		Neutral	2	3	7	3		
		Agreement	14	41	40	15		
10	The skills and knowledge gained from education are more valuable than financial support in ensuring the success of youth in livelihood programs.	Disagreement	0	2	3	1	8.239	.766
		Neutral	4	11	8	3		
		Agreement	12	33	37	15		

The results in Table 3 revealed no significant association between the highest level of education and perceptions of education's influence on Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) participation, as all chi-square tests were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). For instance, agreement that higher education increases motivation to participate was reported by 13 respondents with no education, 36 with primary, 32 with secondary, and 14 with tertiary education,  $\chi^2(12) = 5.76$ ,  $p = 0.928$ . Similarly, the view that education provides essential skills for success was supported by 14 with no education, 38 with primary, 34 with secondary, and 17 with tertiary education,  $\chi^2(12) = 10.96$ ,  $p = 0.532$ . Across all statements, agreement was consistently high across education levels, and p-values ranged from 0.394 to 0.928, indicating no statistically significant relationships. These findings suggest that perceptions of education's role in YLP are generally shared regardless of educational attainment.

### Qualitative insights revealed three themes from key informants regarding education and YLP participation:

**Limited literacy as a barrier:** The SCDO noted that “many youth groups fail to draft viable business proposals because of low literacy levels.”

**Value of vocational training:** The YLP focal person emphasized that practical skills training improves project survival.

**Exclusion of out-of-school youth:** Local leaders observed that those without formal schooling often felt alienated from programme processes.

These themes reinforced the quantitative finding that higher education enhances uptake, while low literacy excludes many youth.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Education levels on the uptake and success of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) in Kyenjojo Town Council.**

The findings of this study present compelling and consistent evidence supporting the critical role of education in influencing youth participation, engagement, and success in the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) within Kyenjojo Town Council. The data strongly suggest that education does not merely serve as a background characteristic but is a decisive factor in shaping youths' decisions and capabilities to participate in livelihood interventions. The results show that a significant proportion of respondents, specifically 73.6%, agreed that higher education levels increase their interest and motivation to actively participate in livelihood programs. This perception is further validated by a mean score of  $M = 3.71$  ( $SD = 0.73$ ), demonstrating a strong positive consensus. These findings mirror the assertions of Hussein (2017), who emphasized that education broadens youth perspectives, enhances critical thinking, and cultivates interest in structured livelihood opportunities. Education, in this regard, acts as a catalyst for increased youth engagement by enabling individuals to recognize, appreciate, and pursue the benefits offered by programs such as YLP.

Furthermore, the study revealed an overwhelming consensus among participants concerning the role of education in equipping youth with essential skills necessary for success in livelihood programs. Specifically, 79.8% of respondents agreed that education provides vital skills and knowledge necessary for success, underscored by a robust mean score of  $M = 3.80$  ( $SD = 0.73$ ). This finding corroborates the work of Kaltenborn (2017), who argued that education enhances individuals' capacity for critical application of knowledge, practical business acumen, and problem-solving skills which are indispensable in the context of entrepreneurial and livelihood programs. The evidence from this study reinforces the notion that education transcends academic attainment; it is foundational to fostering entrepreneurial competencies, enhancing adaptability, and promoting resilience among young people engaged in programs aimed at economic empowerment.

The perception that higher educational attainment increases the likelihood of success in livelihood programs was affirmed by 69.8% of respondents. These findings are congruent with the arguments advanced by Lwasa et al. (2017), who highlighted that education equips young individuals with the necessary entrepreneurial mindset, strategic thinking, and operational competencies required for the successful management of businesses and other income-generating ventures. Education not only imparts technical skills but also cultivates soft skills such as leadership, communication, and negotiation, which are pivotal for navigating complex business environments and ensuring sustainability of youth-led enterprises.

In addition, the study established that a significant proportion of respondents, 62.8% ( $n = 81$ ), agreed that a lack of formal education limits their capacity to fully utilize program resources and opportunities. This was contrasted by 12.4% ( $n = 16$ ) who disagreed, and 24.8% ( $n = 32$ ) who remained neutral. The mean score of  $M = 3.56$  ( $SD = 1.06$ ) suggests a moderate but noteworthy concern among the youth regarding the barriers posed by low educational attainment. This finding is in alignment with McDowell (2017), who emphasized that education enhances individuals' abilities to navigate institutional procedures, comprehend program guidelines, and strategically leverage available resources. The evidence presented here underscores the reality that without adequate education, many youth are disadvantaged in accessing, interpreting, and applying information critical for optimizing benefits from livelihood programs such as YLP.

Moreover, a resounding 84.5% of respondents agreed that education enhances access to further training and skills development opportunities within livelihood programs. This sentiment was reflected in a notably high mean of  $M = 3.96$  ( $SD = 0.69$ ). These findings are consistent with existing literature, particularly the works of Rasul and Thapa (2019), which stress that education opens pathways to continuous learning and career development opportunities. Education is perceived as a vital enabler of lifelong learning and professional advancement, equipping young people not only with entry-level skills but also with the capacity for continuous innovation, self-improvement, and adaptability to emerging economic trends and technological changes.

The perception that vocational education directly enhances success in livelihood programs was also strongly supported, with 74.5% agreeing. This aligns with the views of Mugo (2018), who underscored the significance of vocational and technical training in fostering hands-on skills, industry-specific competencies, and entrepreneurial capacities that directly translate into employment and business opportunities. The youth's recognition of vocational education's value signals a broader understanding of the diverse educational pathways that contribute to livelihood success beyond conventional academic routes. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority, 83.0%, agreed that the YLP should prioritize increasing educational opportunities for youth to improve program outcomes and sustainability. This is strongly supported by a mean score of  $M = 4.03$  ( $SD = 0.68$ ). This aligns with Ombiro (2018), who advocated for the integration of educational components within economic empowerment programs as a strategy for enhancing youth participation, retention, and impact. These findings affirm the need for policymakers to embed education and continuous learning opportunities into the YLP framework to achieve more sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Moreover, 85.3% ( $n = 110$ ) of respondents strongly affirmed that formal education, particularly in business and entrepreneurship, enhances youth understanding of financial management within livelihood programs. This perception is mirrored in a mean score of  $M = 4.03$  ( $SD = 0.67$ ), reflecting strong consensus on the value of formal education in fostering financial competence. These results are consistent with Mundo (2019), who emphasized the indispensable role of education in equipping young entrepreneurs with the skills necessary for budgeting, investment, and prudent financial decision-making.

Despite these overwhelmingly positive perceptions, the chi-square tests conducted revealed no statistically significant association between education level and perceptions of education's influence on YLP participation ( $p > 0.05$ ). For example, agreement that higher education increases motivation to participate was consistently distributed across education levels: 13 respondents without education, 36 with primary, 32 with secondary, and 14 with tertiary education ( $\chi^2(12) = 5.763$ ,  $p = 0.928$ ). Similarly, perceptions regarding education's role in providing essential skills exhibited no significant variance across education levels ( $\chi^2(12) = 10.962$ ,  $p = 0.532$ ). Across all measured statements, p-values ranged from 0.394 to 0.928, indicating a uniform perception across education levels. These findings echo Lloyd-Jones (2019), who argued that while education is universally recognized as vital for livelihood success, the belief in its importance transcends formal qualifications and is broadly shared among youth.

Furthermore, the qualitative data gathered through interviews with key informants, including the local leader, Senior Community Development Officer, and YLP Coordinator, revealed a shared view that education plays a pivotal role in shaping youth attitudes, participation, and outcomes in livelihood programs. Specifically, youths who have attained at least Senior Four (S4) or Senior Six (S6) are reported to exhibit greater confidence, better comprehension of program guidelines, and enhanced participation in program activities such as proposal writing and fund management. These findings mirror the observations by Hussein (2017) and Kaltenborn (2017), which found that higher education levels correlate with increased program awareness, better application of skills, and improved entrepreneurial success.

The narratives from the interviews further illuminate how educated youths possess vital skills such as communication, financial management, ICT proficiency, and business planning. These competencies enable them to navigate program requirements effectively, manage funds responsibly, and expand their market opportunities beyond Kyenjojo. This resonates with the assertions by Lwasa et al. (2017), who

emphasized that education enhances entrepreneurial mindsets and equips individuals with necessary business management skills. On the other hand, youths with lower educational attainment face significant challenges, including difficulties in understanding business concepts, managing records, writing reports, and grasping contractual agreements. These limitations contribute to their low participation rates and poor performance in YLP projects, aligning with the literature that links low education levels to restricted access to resources and reduced program success (Hussein, 2017; Kaltenborn, 2017).

Moreover, the study findings highlight a pressing need for tailored interventions to bridge the educational gaps that hinder youth participation in livelihood programs. Both the local leaders and the YLP officials advocate for the establishment of vocational training centres and continuous skills development initiatives. Such interventions would provide practical skills to those who did not complete formal education, thereby enhancing their ability to benefit from YLP. This recommendation is in line with the reviewed literature, which calls for inclusive educational strategies to ensure equal opportunities for all youth, regardless of their educational background (Lwasa et al., 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2019; Mugo, 2018). Ultimately, the findings confirm that education remains a cornerstone for empowering youth to successfully engage in and benefit from livelihood programs like YLP.

These findings extend prior literature: Kintu & Asimwe, 2021; Nuwagaba, 2022, by providing localized evidence from Kyenjojo Town Council, a rural setting that has been largely absent in previous studies. While earlier research emphasized the positive effect of education on programme participation, my study shows that limited access to secondary and tertiary education in rural councils further deepens inequalities in YLP uptake. This contributes to the debate by highlighting that structural barriers in rural areas amplify the exclusionary effects of low education, suggesting the need for differentiated interventions at the district level.

## **Conclusions**

The study concludes that education significantly enhances youth interest, participation, and success in the YLP. A majority of respondents agreed that higher education equips youth with essential skills, such as communication, financial literacy, and business management, which are critical for effectively utilizing YLP resources. The overall average mean ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) demonstrates strong consensus on education's positive influence. However, cross-tabulation results revealed no statistically significant association between education level and perceptions of YLP, suggesting that while beliefs are generally consistent across all education levels, the actual impact of education manifests more clearly in program performance and comprehension, as confirmed by qualitative interviews.

Qualitative findings further support this by highlighting that youth with higher education, especially those who reached S4 or S6, are more confident, better organized, and more skilled in areas such as record keeping, proposal writing, and accessing external markets. In contrast, youth with lower education face significant barriers, including poor literacy, lack of business knowledge, and reduced confidence in applying for or managing YLP projects.

## **Recommendations**

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of education in shaping the uptake of the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP). It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, working closely with the Ministry of Education, integrates financial literacy and entrepreneurship modules into secondary and vocational school curricula. This would equip learners with essential skills prior to their entry into YLP. In addition, local governments should organize regular capacity-building workshops for youth with lower education levels, focusing on practical skills such as record keeping, proposal writing, and project management. Such interventions would make the programme more accessible to disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, partnerships between YLP coordinators and tertiary

institutions should be strengthened to provide mentorship and advisory support, thereby increasing the success rate of funded projects.

#### **List of Abbreviations**

**CVI** – Content Validity Index

**ILO** – International Labour Organization

**MGLSD** – Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

**SCDO** – Senior Community Development Officer

**SPSS** – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

**TPB** – Theory of Planned Behavior

**UBOS** – Uganda Bureau of Statistics

**WHO** – World Health Organization

**YLP** – Youth Livelihood Programme

#### **Declarations**

##### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

To uphold ethical considerations during the study, ethical clearance was obtained from Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee (BSU-REC-2025-534). An introductory letter from the Directorate of Graduate Studies, Research, and Innovations of Bishop Stuart University was provided to authorize the field study. Further permission was sought from the administration and leadership of Kyenjojo District Local Government and Kyenjojo Town Council to conduct the research within their jurisdiction.

Local Council leaders and the Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO) played a role in introducing the researcher to youth groups and program officials. All study participants gave written informed consent before participation. For participants, consent forms were provided with clear explanations of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, benefits, potential risks, the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, and measures for minimizing discomfort.

Confidentiality and privacy of respondents were maintained by anonymizing personal identifiers and ensuring secure storage of all research data. Only aggregated findings were reported to prevent traceability to individual participants. These measures ensured that participation was based on fully informed decisions and that the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice were upheld throughout the research process

##### **Consent for publication**

Not applicable

##### **Availability of data and materials**

Every piece of information required for this manuscript has been included. The corresponding author can be contacted if any clarifications are required.

##### **Competing interests**

The authors have no competing interests

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##### **Authors' contributions**

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