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Social-Cultural and Historical Milieu Surrounding Youth Empowerment in Buganda: Lessons from Community and Lay Perspectives

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Abstract

Youth account for more than 70% of Uganda's population. Empowerment of this youthful population is at the forefront of the country's agenda. Contemporary studies of empowerment in mainstream psychology focus on a Western and individualised conception of the self that is at odds with the African view of the self. African philosophy views the self as socially situated and developing in discourse with others that inhabit the same social-cultural and historical space. This worldview underpins the rationale for understanding the social-cultural situatedness of youth empowerment discourse as is argued in this paper. In an exploratory qualitative study, I elicited the views of 41 respondents from within three districts in Buganda region of Uganda concerning youth empowerment processes. I used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and thematically analysed them. The results of this study revealed that problematic assumptions, attitudes, and practices which have worked against youth empowerment in Buganda are woven into language, daily discourse, and narratives but have been normalised and accepted. Such discourses need to be problematised again and targeted for change as vigorously as other barriers to youth empowerment, such as lack of education and employable skills. This calls for psychology scholars to interrogate empowerment discourse from *jua kali*, the "lay citizen" using theoretical frameworks that are able to appreciate, resonate with and critically assess the dynamics of the African experience.

Keywords: Social-cultural, Buganda, youth empowerment, social-constructionism

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Background and literature overview

Youth account for more than 70% of Uganda's population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016), and empowerment of this youthful population has been at the forefront of the country's agenda as explained in the Uganda Youth Policy (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD), 2001, 2016). Uganda government has for long endeavoured to establish youth empowerment initiatives, as seen in the provisions of the 2001 Youth Policy (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2001, 2006). The 2016 youth policy was guided by the theme of "mindset change" for national development (Mukwaya, 2016), but the implementation strategies laid out in it were economically focused. The mindset question was only alluded to, rather than operationalised and the youths mindsets were not clearly explained or objectively targeted for change. This apparent shortcoming in the understanding of empowerment as inclusive of mindset change, while failing to interrogate the concept of mindset is a gap that I seek to address in this paper in part by pointing out some of the social-cultural roots of youths mindsets in Uganda.

One of the most widely evaluated youth empowerment programmes set up by the Uganda government is the Youth Livelihoods Programme (MGLSD, 2011, 2016). This programme emphasised skills development and supply of monetary aid to the youths but ignored the mindsets of the youths, and the social, cultural, and historical factors shaping these mindsets. Evaluation of this programme showed limited to modest results (Ahaibwe & Kasirye, 2015; Ejang et al., 2016), and Ugandan media is also rife with the failures of this programme (Uganda Radio Network, 2019 January 4; Daily Monitor, 2018 October 27; Munguongeyo, 2017, Kamoga, 2017). More recently, through the National Development Plan version three (NDPIII) (National Planning Authority, 2020) mindset change has once again been fronted as a vehicle for national development. The NDPIII describes mindset change as achieved through increasing nationalism and reducing harmful cultural practices among the Ugandan population. This illustrates the importance of mindset change, but once again, the NDPIII has narrowly defined mindset by limiting it to harmful cultural practices while paying no heed to the social-cultural drivers of people's mindsets.

The situation described above exists because whereas the Uganda government and development partners verbalise the need for mindset change as part of optimising youth empowerment, the complexities of the youths' mindset have not been properly explored in the Ugandan setting. The architects of the Youth Livelihood Programme endeavoured to dedicate an arm of the programme to mindset change under institutional support, but this

does not appear to have been followed up in implementation. Media reports and evaluation literature on the programme focus on programmatic weaknesses, such as delays in funds disbursement as a major factor that reduced the effectiveness of the programme (Ahaibwe & Kasirye, 2015; Ejang et al., 2016), with less attention to beneficiary-related factors, especially their mindsets.

On the international scene, there are lots of discourses linking mindsets to youth empowerment. A search of literature with the key words "Youth Empowerment" and "Mindset" within google-indexed publications reveals literature that acknowledges the importance of positive mindsets for youth empowerment (Ojo, Abayomi, & Odozi, 2014; Polirstok, 2017). This highlights the need to understand the relationship of youth mindsets to their outcomes on empowerment programmes. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to understand the building blocks that make up the types of mindsets, which promote positive outcomes on youth empowerment programmes. The field of psychology offers a potential solution to this predicament. There is extensive research and literature on mindset as reviewed by French (2016) that would provide ample theoretical basis for exploring mindsets in the context of youth empowerment in Uganda.

French (2016) highlights three different scholarly categorisations of mindset research, that is, within the cognitive psychology stream, the social and organisational psychology stream, and the positive psychology stream. The "cognitive psychology stream of mindset research" (French, 2016) defines the mindset as the total of activated cognitive procedures involved in the completion of a given task (Gollwitzer & Bayer, 1999; Gollwitzer, 2012). The social and organisational stream of mindset research defines mindsets as "cognitive filters that attend to and influence the totality of cognitive processes with or without an identifiable task" (French, 2012, p.10). The third stream of mindset research termed as the positive psychology stream (French, 2016) is exemplified by the growth and fixed mindset by Dweck (2008). Dweck defines a mindset as a mental frame or lens that selectively organises information, guiding an individual toward a unique way of understanding experiences and selecting corresponding actions and responses (Dweck, 2008). The growth versus fixed mindset theory is one of the most widely used conceptualisations of mindset in the field of empowerment, and its close counterpart field of education. Specifically, the application of the growth and fixed mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) for youth empowerment has been demonstrated by Elmore (2016) and Verberg, Fenneke, and Overbreek (2018).

The contemporary studies of empowerment and mindsets in mainstream psychology described

above have focused on a Western and Cartesian conception of the self. They espouse the " I think therefore I am" (Descartes, 1637) worldview. This worldview looks at cognition or the mind as self-contained and individualistic, a single "I" which, like a computer, processes thoughts and makes decisions, relatively separate from the social world (Mkize, 2006). This worldview underlies many theories premised on cognitive psychology e.g. psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, 2010) and growth versus fixed mindset (Dweck, 2007). These are hallmark theories in the study of empowerment and mindset theory, respectively. Although they are useful concepts, they need to be further interrogated in context.

Western conceptualisations of mind and self that advance psychology as a science similar to physical sciences are at odds with the African view of the self. This view can be summarised in the concept of *Ubuntu*, a Nguni term that loosely translates to " We/ You are therefore I am" . This term has also been translated into other African languages such as Isizulu: *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu* (Mbiti, 1969; Mkize, 2004). In Luganda, the term loosely translates to "*Omuntu Muntu Lwa Bantu*". This term speaks to how an individual is an individual *because* of other individuals. In essence, African philosophy views the self as socially situated and developing in discourse with others that inhabit the same social-cultural and historical space (Mbiti, 1969; Mkize, 2004). This worldview underpins the rationale for understanding the social-cultural situatedness of youth empowerment and mindset discourse as is argued in the current paper.

This study espoused Bakhtin's (1981) Dialogical View of Self (Bakhtin,1981) which views the self as never fully formed, but constantly changing in response to information from the social situation and "others" (Bakhtin, 1981; Hermans, 2010). These "others" may be physically present/or absent entities, living or dead; they may be individuals, institutions; or may even be cultural norms and beliefs and so on. These "others" can appear to take on a distinct identity and simultaneously hold conversations within one's mind, with each one representing a different voice. This concept of voice(s), which influence the self, further emphasises the need to understand the social-cultural and historical milieu surrounding youth empowerment. It allows scholars and youth service providers to think about what voices or ideologies actively or sub-consciously influence the youth that they set out to empower. This would be the first step to theorising about the mindsets of youths in Uganda.

The purpose of the current research was to explore the social, cultural, and historical environments within which youth empowerment is done in Buganda. The study was a pilot for the author's PhD research

entitled, "*The Dilemma of Youth Empowerment in Uganda: Interrogating the Mindset Question*". This PhD study focused on the beneficiaries of youth empowerment initiatives located within the Buganda Kingdom region of Uganda. This paper, therefore, focuses on the opinions of youth, traditional and religious leaders, parents and political leaders on the social-cultural environment and its influence on youths empowerment in Buganda.

Methodology

This study was grounded in a social constructionist perspective, in which the world is understood as built up through social processes, especially through linguistic interactions (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Also, since the world is seen as a product of particular cultural and historical contexts, it is not a fixed but rather a dynamic entity (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). A social constructionist framework focuses on examining the ways of understanding social reality that are available within a particular cultural and historical context and the implications they hold for human experience (Willig, 2013). Based on this framework, I carried out an exploratory qualitative study. Qualitative research designs enable the researcher to answer the questions of "*what*", *"how"* and "*why*" things happen the way that they do in the social world (Moriarty, 2001; Patton & Cochran, 2002; Hancock, 2002).

The specific approach taken for this study is narrative constructionism (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This narrative approach conceptualises human beings as meaning makers who use narratives from their social-cultural world to interpret their experiences and communicate ideas (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). These narratives, consistent to Bakhtinian thinking, do not "belong" to the individuals who use them but are passed down from their social and cultural communities (Bakhtin, 1984; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). By this logic, the opinions of the respondents in this research can provide insight into the milieu surrounding youth empowerment in Buganda.

Study participants

Forty-one respondents took part in this study. The sampling strategy used to select respondents was purposive in nature (Byrne, 2004; Palys, 2008); which allows a researcher to make strategic choices on whom to involve in the research, based on the research objectives. I selected respondents from three districts in Buganda region, namely Rakai, Kampala, and Kalangala. I selected these districts because they were home to three youth empowerment programmes on whose beneficiaries I intended to focus on for my PhD research. These included the Cotton Foundation Scholars programme from Rakai District, MasterCard Foundation Scholars from Kampala catchment area and the Youth Livelihoods Program beneficiaries

from Kalangala. Selected respondents were expected to be familiar with the youth empowerment initiatives in their area, but had not been direct beneficiaries of these programmes. I then interviewed respondents who agreed to participate in either individual interviews or focus group discussions. Table 1 below shows the details about respondents that participated in the study.

empowerment from their point of view. This approach was meant to give the respondents free rein to express their views, in keeping with the constructionist research approach that sees people as capable of making meaning out of their social environment. Note taking and recording where respondents gave me permission allowed me to capture what was said. I transcribed and

Table 1: Study participants

Interview	Participants	Number	Gender	
			Female	Male
KII 1	Pastor, Kampala	1	-	1
KII, 2	Parent/primary school head teacher, Kalangala	1	-	1
KII, 3	Local government leader, Kalangala	1	-	1
KII,4	Minister for Youth Buganda Kingdom	1	-	1
FGD 1	Catholic clergy, Rakai	4	1	3
FGD 2	Recent graduates, Kampala	9	9	2
FGD 3	Youth, Entebbe	10	6	4
FGD 4	Mixed youth group, Kalangala	9	7	2
FGD 5	Parents (Entebbe)	5	4	1

Source: Field Data Collection

I asked respondents to broadly comment on the social-cultural and historical environments in which youth empowerment is done in Buganda; what helped and what did not help the process of

reviewed each recording after each interview before carrying out the next interview. This allowed me to appreciate the information coming through the interviews and which areas still needed more clarification.

Data analysis

After transcribing all the recorded interviews and organising the field notes, I analysed the data thematically as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Thematic analysis was deemed suitable for this study to obtain a better understanding of the issues surrounding youth empowerment in Buganda from the perspective of the respondents.

After gaining an in-depth understanding of the content, I applied initial codes to the relevant segments of the data. This process was a continuation of the aforementioned process started during data collection in which each interview was reviewed briefly for major themes before carrying out another interview. Through this process, I established broad themes which I further refined and broke down into sub-themes. Finally, I selected extracts from the original data that clearly illustrated each theme or sub-theme for incorporation into the analysis report.

Study limitations

The major limitation for this study was in the sample selected to take part in the study. The researcher/author was not able to interview key respondents such as in-school youths, other cultural leaders and female elders from Buganda Kingdom. Instead, the study interviewed respondents from four districts in Buganda and these are not representative of the views of the entire kingdom. This situation came about largely due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in school closures in March 2020, and eventually saw the entire country in full lockdown. Nonetheless, the ideas obtained from these respondents provide some key insights that are a reasonable starting point to scholars that wish to delve further into the social-cultural milieu and discourse around youth empowerment in Buganda and Uganda. The reader should note that the respondents in this study did not limit their reflections on their geographical locality, but rather focused on Buganda as a region and the entire country.

Results and discussion

This section focuses on the results obtained through the data analysis process described above and a discussion of these results in relation to extant literature. In the data analysis process described above, the everyday use of language emerged as a major theme in the respondent's views concerning the social-cultural context in which youth empowerment is done in Buganda. This is consistent with the guiding theory for this study, Bakhtin's dialogical view of mind, which focuses on language use. Respondents across the board focused on the commonly used statements in social interactions within Buganda, especially among the youth. Respondents saw this language as disempowered and disempowering,

and also focused on the language around education and its usefulness or lack thereof in the Buganda context. These three sub-themes are further discussed below:

Sub-theme one: Disempowered language

Some respondents pointed out a commonly used statement "*Gavumeenti etuyambe"* (KII 1, KII 4) which directly translates into English as "Let the government help us". Apparently, the government of Uganda is constantly implored to come to the aid of citizens in all its situations, ranging from financial constraints to unfair treatment within the home; situations that would not normally require government intervention. Indeed, the saying "*Gavumeenti etuyambe*" is quite pervasive in Uganda. A review of local media channels reveals numerous cases where an assortment of Ugandans appeal to the government or President Museveni (who represents the government) to come to their aid (Next Media Services, 2019, October 30). Various public intellectuals have attempted to describe the origin of the statement, blaming it on the paternalistic nature of the Uganda government, on the one hand (Mayambala, 2014; Mayombwe, 2017); and on the other hand, cautioning youths to take charge of their own destiny rather than depending on a saviour, such as the government (Namajja, 2019).

Another statement indicative of a disempowered youth population was "*Otuwadeyo kaki"* (what have you given us?) ...*otulese otya?*….(how have you left us) (KII3)… This statement is commonly used by young people that have been in interaction with a wealthy, usually political figure. The connotation is that they appreciate the politician, not based on his political views but on what materialistic aid they can immediately provide to the youths. The young people do not directly ask for money, but appeal to the wealthy individual to consider the situation (one of scarcity) in which he/she is leaving them. The local politician does well not to take this statement at face value because it often veils a threat for the next interaction should he/she go away without leaving "anything" for the young people. This syndrome is also indicative of the dependent attitude held by the youths in Buganda as described by Mayambala (2014) and Namajja (2017).

Yet, another disempowered statement, often delivered with a sense of comedy is the statement *"…omwaavu wa kufa"* (a poor man has to die) (Female 5, FGD 3). This statement is usually appended to a description of a desirable situation, with the story ending in "but a poor man has to die". The death in this case may not be literal but representing intense suffering as experienced by the speaker. It represents the widely accepted idea that nothing can work out for a person who does not have money in Buganda, and that money solves all things. The issue of money

provides a good segue into the issue of "connections" as described that "For anything to happen, you must have connections…" (Female 10, FGD 3).

Some respondents recognised this language as problematic but would not articulately explain why it was problematic. This disempowered language is consistent with the concept of "learned" helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976; Peterson, 2010), hopelessness, and dependence on a "father-figure" perpetuated in society narratives and actively/sub-consciously influencing the will and actions of the youths in Buganda. The youths perceive themselves as unable to change their situation because they do not have the right connections; or do not feel the need to work hard to change their situation but instead depend on government and politicians for handouts. In both cases, they are not empowered to work hard.

Sub-theme two: Disempowering language

Participants also recognised that sometimes, the language used to describe or address young people in Buganda was disempowering. One female youth participant described a situation where she wanted to conduct a community sensitisation for fellow youths about HIV and met with severe opposition. The contention was that she could not possibly have anything relevant to say because she was too youngs. She was told, "*...ani oyo ayogela..oyo omwana akuzze tumulaba* (who is she to speak, we have watched that child grow up... (Female 3, FGD 3). The young lady had a useful skill to share with other youth in her community, and wished to use it to transform her community. However, she was discouraged, and barred from making the intervention because she had grown up in that community. The unsaid assumption in this statement could be that she could not do anything worthwhile because she was not a foreigner or a donor. This case depicts how society narratives run counter to some government initiatives, for example, empowering all people to create a difference in their own communities as laid out in the National Development Plan III (NPA, 2020).

Another female youth respondent (FGD 3) described a situation where she had successfully completed her university education, even if she was from a poor socioe-conomic background. According to her, many people questioned the source of the funds for her successful education. Some people asked, "*Ssente yazijeewa* (where did she get the money)... and argued that " *yafunye abasajja* (she got sugar daddies)". In this case, the community's focus was not on her success, but on undercutting that success by insinuating that she could not possibly have obtained it without prostituting herself. This situation brings to mind the aspect of gender expectations for youths in Buganda and how society hold males and females to different standards. It is unlikely that a similar success

story told by a male youth would be questioned in the same way. In this, we see that community narratives are disempowering especially for the female youth. Ninsiima et al., (2018) who show that gender expectations and stereotypes start to affect girls and boys differently as early as adolescence have further explained this situation; the opportunities for male children begin to widen while the agency and space for girls narrows.

The female youth respondents in this study had more to say about disempowering language. Another female respondent described how, whenever she tried to express herself freely, she is met with a disparaging remark that ...*ogwo musege!* (that is a wild or spoilt child) (Female 6, FGD 3). Once again, this points to the standards that female youths are held to in traditional Ugandan society in which they are expected to be demure and subservient (Ninsiima et al., 2018).

Adult respondents also expressed views about how language in Buganda society can be disempowering. One respondent, a town mayor, described the language used by Pentecostal pastors who usually have a large youth following. In his view, these pastors promised miracles without hard work to their flock. They promised, *"Oja kubeera awo, ekyaamagero kikutomere"* (...you will just be there....and the miracle will collide with you) (Male, KII 3). This respondent went on to describe that such statements inculcated a sense of laziness among the youths in Buganda, always waiting for instant miracles and outcomes without going through the process of hard work. He felt that this language was deliberately and manipulatively used by the Pentecostal pastors to draw large followings, without paying attention to the destructive nature of such ideas to the youth's mindsets about hard work.

At the same time, there was also language that was inadvertently disempowering, used by well-meaning elders while interacting with young people. One example was raised by a priest, who said that as children, when one would perform very well, or, for example, dance very well at a musical concert, it was expected for the adults to say,*"Kankuweeyo eza paani"* (let me give you some money for pancakes) (Male, FGD 1). The priest's contention with this statement was not in the giving of the money in itself; but what the giver described the money as being for; for pancakes. He went on to describe that in essence, elders in Buganda do not teach young people to save, and even when they give money; it is with the view that this money should be consumed directly. According to this respondent, this was a depiction of the consumerist mindsets of the community in Buganda, as opposed to a more developmental mindset that allowed for saving and investment.

Another interesting observation came from a male community elder concerning the statement "*Oyagala kunziza mukyaalo*? (Do you want to

send me back to the village?) (Male, KII 3). Apparently, this statement is usually invoked during business transactions, when the seller feels that the buyer is offering too low a price for his/her goods. The community elder's focus in this case was on how the "village" was a place to be feared and stayed away from at all costs. He contrasted this to the fact that Buganda is widely accepted as an agrarian society, and that the bulk of this agriculture can only be done in the village, rural setting. In this elder's view, such language sub-consciously disempowered youths in Buganda by drawing them to the cities where they could do little to better their situation; as compared to staying in the villages where there was enough space for them to carry out agriculture and develop themselves. Indeed, the high rate of rural urban migration in Uganda and Buganda has been variously noted (Barratt, Mbonye, & Seeley, 2012; Kristensen & Birch-Thomsen, 2013; Stites, 2020).

Both of these themes lean on the failings of the current Buganda culture as represented by the common sayings and idioms in supporting empowerment. This is in sharp contrast to the literature by authors from Buganda that illustrate the multitude of proverbs, stories, and sayings in Baganda culture that target the mentorship and grooming of its youths into responsible adults. An example is Mpalanyi (1977) in "Ndikuma Okulya" who depicts in story form the importance of disciplining a girl-child (perhaps even over catering for her physical comforts) so that she becomes a successful wife and mother. For the boys, Mpalanyi (1972) presents "Basajja Mivule: soma oyige" which illustrates the risks that a youngs man that has not been disciplined while growing up may face when they migrate to the city. Other authors, including Nsimbi (1956), Kawere (1954), and Mbaziira (1970); all illustrate various channels of grooming the youth for adulthood through Luganda proverbs and their meanings, novels, and poetry, respectively. Against this background, it is of note to scholars and practitioners of youth empowerment that both youths and older generations that took part in this study focused on the negative aspects concerning language use in Buganda society.

Sub-theme three: Language and the purpose of education

The third sub-theme from the respondents surrounded the language around the purpose of education. Education has been one of the pillars of empowering youths as seen by the government of Uganda for several years. Considerable policies and funding have gone into providing universal primary and secondary education (National Planning Authority, 2020). However, respondents in this study pointed out a range of mixed messages concerning the language that describes the purpose of education. This language ranged from describing education as

being indispensable to a child's future, through education being just one of many options for a child, to education being completely without merit for success.

One male community elder pointed out how teachers always emphasise to young people that *bwobba tosomye ogeenda kubeera bubi*... (If you do not study, you are doomed) (Male, KII 4); which depicts education as the only way to success. He continued to describe how when one is seeking for a job, potential employers only ask... *tulage empapula zo*... (show us your papers). He decried how employers focus on "papers" that showed the applicant's level of education rather than their knowledge and employable skills. This situation exists at a time when multitudes of Ugandan youths with university degrees are failing to obtain formal employment (Awiti, 2016) which has forced the government of Uganda to resort to skills building programmes for the youths (Kintu, Kitainge, & Ferej, 2019).

One of the youth respondents also pointed out that parents emphasise the importance of education in many cases without a critical reflection on the true purpose of education for the youths. She described how her mother always exhorted her "... *mwaana wange soma tonswaaza*"... (my child, study so that you never put me to shame) (Female, FGD 2). She continued to say that the mother would insist that she should study, … "even when they do not know what the studying will bring (Female, FGD 2). In this way, education is looked at for education's sake, rather than its ultimate purpose in improving the life circumstances of young people. This has perhaps contributed to many youths seeking university education at all costs, even when they would gain better results in vocational education. Indeed, vocational education is viewed as an option for youths that have failed or been otherwise marginalised in formal education (Blaak, Openjuru, & Zeelen, 2013; Okumu & Bbaale, 2019).

A variation to the seemingly indisputable importance of education was the idea that there are many alternatives to it. As this male community elder pointed out, when it came to the girl-child, the quickest alternative to education was marriage. He mentioned how parents easily resorted to "*bwaaba alemeddwa..kale annafumbirwa,* (if she fails, she can as well get married) (Male, KII 3). He went on to explain that marriage was always on the table for female students, to the extent that school was only seen as a pastime while parents waited for the child to reach a marriageable age. Of course, the grooming of female children in Buganda first for marriage as a priority has long historical roots. One example is in the storyline choices by Mpalanyi (1972, 1977) whose Luganda novels focus on grooming a girl-child for marriage in *Ndikuma Okulya* while the male child is depicted as going on to attain higher education

in *Basajja Mivule*. With these deeply held cultural beliefs concerning the life trajectories of female children, it comes as no surprise that the most prevalent reasons for dropping out of school for the girl-child in Uganda are associated with early marriage and pregnancy (Watson, Bantebya, & Muhanguzi, 2018).)

For the boy-child, the story was rather different in case they failed to perform as expected in formal education. "*Emisomo gikulemye.. genda mu garagi...(*You have failed in education, so go and work in a garage) (Male, KII 4) was the common saying. This respondent's contention was that working in a garage which in this case represented the wide range of vocational education, was seen only as an alternative for school failures, and not as a valid route to self-sufficiency for young people in its own right. Once again, this widely held society belief runs counter to government efforts to create youthful entrepreneurs through programmes, such as the Youth Livelihoods Programme (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2013).

On the extreme end of the spectrum was a view that completely dispelled the idea that education had any utility whatsoever. The idea that "*osoobola okufuna nebw'oba tosomye*… (You can get rich even if you do not go to school) (Male, KII 4) was seen as one that influences a lot of Baganda youths. The problem with this view is that young people then pursue education with this sub-conscious handicap that they did not necessarily have to work so hard in school. This mental handicap has perhaps been best expressed in the large number of youths in Buganda and Uganda that have resorted to sports betting, since it provides instant gratification (Matama, Mbago, & Ngoboka, 2021) and the persistent hope of winning the jackpot (Masaba & Blaszczynski,2016). It is possible that these youth rationalise sports betting as a quick way to get rich through luck, as opposed to being in school. One respondent in a youth focus group discussion in Entebbe succinctly illustrated this view that education did not lead to wealth when he pointed out, " in all the buildings in Kampala, none belongs to a professor!"

The discourse concerning education illustrates dialogic tensions or dilemmas as has been described by Mkize (2004) between the perceived purpose of education and its actual utility towards gaining empowerment. The society narratives concerning the purpose of education cause confusion and demotivation for the youths. Whereas education is promoted as a pathway to empowerment, the youths on these programmes have to grapple with a multitude of discourses that undercut the value of education in attaining self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, these discourses and narratives, and their influence on the psyche of the empowerment programme beneficiaries, are yet to be critically analysed by the youth empowerment programmers.

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of this study show that the problematic assumptions, attitudes, and practices that have worked against youth empowerment in Buganda are hiding in plain sight. They are woven into language, daily discourse, and narratives but have been normalised and accepted. This way, these problematic discourses may continue to sub-consciously influence the youths despite the numerous efforts towards youth empowerment. Such discourses need to be problematised and targeted for change as vigorously as other factors affecting barriers to youth empowerment, such as lack of education and employable skills.

The results of this study are a call to psychology scholars to interrogate empowerment and mindset discourse from *jua kali*, the "lay person" using theoretical frameworks that are able to appreciate, resonate with, and critically assess the dynamics of the African experience, rather than being limited to westernised conceptualisations that are carried within existing theories of mindset

Finally, this pilot study points towards the need for an in-depth narrative inquiry into youth empowerment stories (both of success and struggle) to better describe youth mindsets in the context of empowerment, which can then be appropriately targeted for change.

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