

**Positioning Student Voice in Evaluation and Reform of Education in Uganda: The  
Contemporary Approach**

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### **Abstract**

Effective secondary school curriculum reform has been a challenge in Uganda for decades. This paper presents the findings of a study that describes the role of student voice in education particularly in curriculum evaluation and reform. A purposively drawn sample of 926 students from senior 4 and 6 and universities responded to a questionnaire on specific questions on their secondary school education experiences and the curriculum. Students were provided opportunity to express their views, suggestions and comments on secondary school curriculum relevance to their preparation for future careers and what needed change. Demographic information, perspectives and comments were reported in terms of frequencies and percentages in descriptive research design. The findings showed that students were aware of the inadequacies in the subjects they studied and what needed change, why and how. Some of the subjects studied were viewed as insufficient for today's needs. Students had constructive suggestions that supported change of secondary school curriculum. Their comments were useful and corroborated well with other stakeholders' views. Conclusions drawn suggest that if student voices are included in designing education and curriculum, more informed decisions can be made.

## **Positioning Student Voice in Evaluation and Reform of Education in Uganda: The Contemporary Approach**

Since becoming an independent country, Uganda has had a number of education reforms, the most important being Castle (1963) and Senteza-Kajubi (1989). These reforms however, have failed to create significant changes in secondary school education and its curriculum and thus have not met the needs of students in preparing for careers in contemporary realities. Alitinyelken (2010) linked the failure to education reforms being driven by political imperatives which had nothing to do with realities of classroom. On the other hand, Higgins and Rwanyange attributed it to three factors: national pragmatic economic considerations, little concern for social development and giving too much power to external agencies in setting the education agendas. Mvimbi (2011) has argued that post colonial education reforms have concentrated on capacity building of personnel and infrastructure construction rather than on overhauling education to improve its quality.

In contemporary global society, educational reforms have employed the perspectives of not only experts from the ministry of education but also the perspectives of stakeholders more closely associated with educational practice. One of these key groups are the students. There is emerging understanding and promotion of student voice globally, as also pointed out in a study by Holden & Clough (2005) This however, is not a common practice in Uganda.

Therefore the purpose of this paper is to address the role of student voice regarding education evaluation, reform and development in Uganda. The ideas presented in this paper are drawn from a larger study carried out on secondary school students.<sup>1</sup>

Three main points are developed:

- 1. How student voice was captured in the larger study*
- 2 How student voice was used to draw conclusions for secondary school curriculum reform and development in real life*
- 3. How student voice works for effective education curriculum evaluation, reform and development in the contemporary world.*

### **Student Voice**

It is important to begin by understanding what is meant by “student voice”, the key concept that this study uses. Imperatively, the concept of “voice” spans beyond the individual

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<sup>1</sup> It is thus more limited in scope than references on best practices as might be understood in other countries in specific and generalized writings. The study was done by Nakayiza Elizabeth for the award of a Doctor of Philosophy of Nkumba University in Uganda.

tone, words, consultation, the right to speak and being represented<sup>2</sup>. The existing studies, suggest that the definition of student voice occur on a spectrum from narrow to broad. Harper (2002) provides a narrower definition of student voice as giving students the ability to influence learning to include policies, programs, contexts and principles. In contrast, Fletcher (2005), Rogers (2005), Richardson (2001) all offer a much broader definition of student voice that includes the active opportunity for students to express their opinions, views, suggestions and make decisions regarding the planning, implementation and evaluation of their learning experiences. For example, Fletcher (2005) provides that student voice is the individual and collective perceptions, views, and suggestions of students within the context of learning and education milieu. This paper draws on the broader usage of student voice in contemporary view of education and curriculum evaluation, development, implementation and reform. In a nut shell, student voice is generally understood as an activity in the learning and education environment in which students exercise a degree of involvement, control, engagement in a reciprocal relationship with others and being able to communicate their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for creating something new and to participate in decision-making.

## Literature Review

Ever growing studies in education and curriculum reform show diverse practices and views on the importance of student voice in education and curriculum development, implementation and reform. Some studies suggest that learning and education reforms appeal to adult views, opinions and ideas rather than the students' views of what might be meaningful to them. For example, Rudduck & Flutter, (2000) observed in the common practice that "there is little attempt to discuss with students why changes to curriculum content and pedagogy is being made" (p.75). Oerlemans' (2007) also shows how students know so much about education agendas and how their learning happened but their voice is not always central in school curriculum reforms. Eisner (2001) cautions on the role of students in curriculum development and asks about the opportunities students have, "to formulate their own purposes and to design ways to achieve them" (p. 371). Jagersma & Parsons (2011) also raises a concern that "curriculum is constructed with the learners as its central focus and yet their voice is usually ignored or excluded from reform process" (p.114).

Globally, the major emphasis in reform is restructuring curriculum so that it can ably support the shifting learning environment, pedagogy, society and students' expectations as indicated in a study by Acedo, (2002) & Roelofs & Terwell, (1999). Education reforms globally seem to indicate that new curriculum is constructed having put the students at the fulcrum. There are studies in recent past which acknowledge and promote student voice, for instance, Fletcher (2005) emphasizes the value of student voice and concludes that: "Students are partners

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<sup>2</sup> Britzman, D. (1989). 'Who has the floor? Curriculum teaching and the English student teacher's struggle for voice', in Curriculum Inquiry, 19(2), 143-162 cited in <http://www.soundout.org/definition.html>

in school change; and students have to be virtually ensured this positive, powerful and productive future” p. 24. This study concurs with (Lensmire, 1998; Morgan, 2009; Wakefield & Pumfrey, 2009) and note that there is little concern and research on students being practically engaged in bigger education evaluation and reform processes. Wakefield & Pumfrey, (2009) observed that “students own views on how the school curriculum structure and content might be improved by teachers and the school, and also by the students’ own actions merit consideration when curriculum development is on the school agenda” (p. 63). Ruthven & Honnessy, 2003 p. 142) maintained that there is need to tune in to what students can tell about their experience and what they think will make a difference to their commitment to learning and in turn to their progress. But these statements seemed rhetoric and were left wanting. However, Lensmire, 1998 & Morgan, (2009) undoubtedly argue that there is hardly any research carried out which show that students are being consulted and practically engaged in reform processes. Crossley, Chisholm and Holmes, (2005); Kelly & Odan, (2011); Leiringer and Cardellina, (2011); Sayed, (2010) all recognise decentralised practices and community involvement, particularly teachers, students and parents’ participation in curriculum reforms. There is certainly increased interest in consulting students about teaching and learning which information teachers can usefully draw upon to inform their thinking and planning.

The literature on students’ perceptions and voice tends to focus on subject specific, for example, Mathematics, History, Geography and Science. It can be argued that in contemporary society, student voice needs to be viewed more broadly and critically in addressing broader issues of education and curriculum reforms. To educate contemporary students and help them be successful, understanding what they think and how they see reality is of great value to education and curriculum reform. The postmodern era and its globalization reference the world without stability, where knowledge is not fixed anymore but constantly changing (Doll, 1993; Knud, 2009; Kress, 2008; Koo Hok-chun, 2002; Piirto, 1999). The postmodern constructivism serves as a signal to use best practices in education and curriculum change that involve all education stakeholders including students.

## **Methods**

This particular section indicates how the student voice was captured in the larger study by focusing on the research design and methods used. A research design is the broad plan of action of how one intends to go about answering the research questions asked (Amin, 2005). In collecting field data, interpreting, analyzing and making inferences, the study used a mixed approach that included quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis consisted of frequencies and percentages of data of respondents’ perceptions, views and suggestions. In this case, the study is descriptive because the researcher sought to describe people’s views, comments and suggestions on the issue investigated. Qualitative analysis consisted of classifying and interpreting interviews.

Overall, the study is eclectic or a mixed research design. Proponents of mixed research design (Kidd, 2010; Reeves, 2006; Sil, 2000; Stockwell, 2008; Wright, 2007; Yan Xiao-yun, Zhon Zhi-yang and Dai Peixing, 2007) agree that this is one particular approach most capable of handling the complexity that is the hallmark of contemporary society and technology. For instance, Reeves (2006) contends that in an eclectic research the researcher selects and uses what is considered to be the most appropriate portions of several different theories, styles or methods to an issue or a problem. Eclecticism is a paradigm that is currently being used in the field of educational research. For example, Xiao-yun, Zhi-yang & Peixing (2007 p. 2) reported that “principled eclecticism” was being used by College English teachers in China and is found to be a satisfying paradigm by both the teachers and students. Also, Sil, (2000) one of the proponents of the philosophy of eclecticism in social research argue that, it “embodies fundamental principles, concepts and beliefs from several philosophies and theories that contemporary comparative social research can find to be useful tool for analysis” (p. 375). Sil further argues that, “environments where scholars engage in bitter battle over methodologies and epistemological theories...”, an eclectic approach is safe haven because it can “effectively balance or neutralize the tension, because of its capability to challenge, transcend, and partially integrate the insights generated by the contending paradigms in contemporary comparative analysis” (p. 381). Therefore, when a study embraces two or more theories, methods and or different tools in data collection, it is said to be eclectic or mixed research methods in its approach. Such an approach is open to borrowing the methods of other designs to collect information and solve a problem. A mixed methodology also highlight that the disadvantages of one method or theory are compensated for by the advantage of the other. In this study, a mixed methodology is preferred because it recognises that multiple perspectives and types of information are necessary to deal with practical problems that confront educators and teachers today.

### **Study Population and Sample.**

All individuals who attended secondary school in the country from 1962 to the present comprised the target population for this study. However, the number of people in Uganda who have studied up to the secondary school education level and the vast size of the country make it impossible to sample each and every one who attained secondary school education during this particular period. The researcher chose to draw the representative samples according to Amin (2005 p. 255), who recommends to sample from 0 to 20 percentage of the population.

Therefore, out of the population of 340,000, the percentage of 0.5 was sampled. This gave the overall sample of 1,700 participants that is using a formula of  $0.5\% \text{ by } 340,000 = 1,700$ . The same formula was applied in each case of the population sample or was used to determine the rest of the samples including that of students.

Data was drawn from two districts with diverse secondary schools from each of the following four regions of the country - Great North, Central, East, and Western regions of Uganda. In total, eight districts were sampled across the country. The two districts per region were selected based on convenience and easy accessibility through travel and availability of people for personal contact, accommodation and research assistants. The choice of the districts was also based on the need to diversify the population and the samples to become as representative of the whole country as possible.

In each of the two districts chosen per region, cluster sampling was used to draw samples from both rural and urban settings. This enabled the researcher to establish more reliable results that was extrapolated and generalized on the rest of the population. Cluster sampling was preferred because various categories of the population were handled as clusters or subsets of the entire population sample. All the clusters or the population subsets constituted the sample. Study samples were taken from different categories of people representing the selected samples and from which generalization of the findings to the entire population was made. Purposive sampling was preferred in each cluster sample because the researcher wanted to use own judgement regarding the participants from whom information would be collected. Stratified sampling was also used because it takes into considerations the heterogeneous nature of the study population. The researcher aimed at being as objective and as gender sensitive as possible. Therefore, the study stratified the respondents by sex, age, social status; qualifications, education level attained location and experiences.

The researcher was interested in samples from the following categories of people: the students who included former students in the categories of the professionals, self employed and those who were not yet employed; senior four and senior six students, university students. Then samples were drawn from current secondary school teacher and former secondary school teachers, curriculum experts, education officers in the Ministry of Education and Sports, school stakeholders such as educated parents and religious denominational leader and employers. These categories of the population constituted the cluster samples. The University samples of current students and the curriculum experts were drawn from seven Universities samples across the country. The purpose of getting these samples for the study was to get these people's voice and perceptions on the secondary school curriculum as they experienced it.

*However, the target population in this paper are the current students who had completed or were about to complete four years of secondary school education. A total of 154 university students, 365 senior six and 407 senior four students participated in the study making a total of 926 students.*

### **Data Collection, Processing and Analysis**

In the context of this paper, the researcher is interested in samples from the following categories of student clusters: the senior four, senior six and university students. These students had long enough experiences from which to share their views, comments and suggestions. The university samples of students were drawn from universities located in each of the four regions

sampled. The purpose of getting University students' samples for the study was to get their voice on the secondary school curriculum as they experienced it, how they evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. The closed ended and open ended questionnaire was used in each category of the students. The data from the questionnaire was tabulated in line with generated themes to establish frequencies, calculated percentages and to derive patterns of inclination in student voice

### **Presentation of Findings**

In this section, this paper shows how the student voice was used to draw conclusions for secondary school curriculum evaluation, reform and development in real life. Students responded to several questions of which the following data was generated.

#### **Ordinary and Advanced Secondary School Education subjects**

*Student Subjects in O' Level.* Table 1 indicates trends in what secondary school students studied. The compulsory subjects and subject combinations for the A' level students suggest that by the time students have done senior four; the majority have studied Mathematics, Biology, English History, Geography, CRE/IRE, Commerce, Chemistry, Physics and Agriculture. Although several other subjects are prescribed in the syllabus, very few students selected or studied them. The subjects least chosen by students are the languages and those subjects that are more practical and vocational skills oriented, and include: Metal and Wood work, Food and Nutrition, Computer Science, Accounts and Technical Drawing.

**Table 1*****Subjects by O and A' Level Students (n= 926)***

Subject name	University students (frequencies) n=154	S. 6 students (frequencies) n=365	S. 4 students (frequencies) n=407	Totals no of students n=926
Mathematics	154	365	407	926
English	154	365	407	926
Biology	154	365	407	926
History	134	100	407CS	641
Geography	133	101	407CS	641
CRE/IRE	117	272	306	695
Commerce	109	263	247	619
Chemistry	106	101	407CS	614
Physics	104	101	407CS	612
Agriculture	62	190	208	460
Eng. Literature	25	20	19	64
Art / Craft	23	78	87	188
Political Education	20	19	00	39
P. of Accounts	18	37	29	84
Luganda	09	20	51	80
French	07	04	09	20
Entrepreneurship	04	05	15	24
Kiswahili	03	06	08	17
Health Science	03	10	00	13
Computer Science	03	05	41	49
Office Practice	02	03	00	05
German	02	00	00	02
Latin	02	02	00	04
Technical Drawing	02	05	18	25
Food and Nutrition	02	05	03	10
Clothing /Textile	01	00	00	01
Arabic	01	00	00	01
Book keeping	01	00	00	01
Additional Math	00	01	02	03
Home Economics	00	01	00	01
Wood work	00	01	02	03
Metal work	00	00	01	01

Note. CS stands for Compulsory Subjects since 2006

***Student Subjects in A' Level.*** Results of this study show that the students those who had done upper secondary or the A level, (n = 519) restricted their choices of subjects to prescribed subject combinations by the Ministry of Education. The study findings further

indicate that the majority of the students took History, Economics and Geography. Nearly every student who studied arts related subjects took History and Economics. Some students studied Luganda, one of Uganda's indigenous languages. However, there are no indications of students in the samples who studied foreign languages, for example, Arabic and French, subjects as indicated from the samples represented in **Table 2**

**Table 2**

***Current Students Principal Subjects at (UACE) or the A' Level***

<b>Arts students</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Science students</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>
History, Economics and Geography	165	Physics, Economics and Mathematics	47
History, Economics and Divinity	86	Mathematics, Economics and Geography	44
History, Economics and Luganda	30	Physics, Chemistry and Biology	35
Divinity, Economics and Geography	29	Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics	25
History, Economics and Islam	06	Biology, Chemistry and Agriculture	07
History, Divinity and Geography	10	Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics	16
Luganda, Economics and Geography	08	Biology, Agriculture and Geography	02
History, Economics and Kiswahili	04	Physics, Agriculture and Mathematics	01
English Literature, History and Divinity	03	Luganda, Agriculture and Biology	01
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>341</b>		<b>178</b>

Note. Samples of Current Students in 2011 regarding their A level subjects. (n=519)

## **Discussion of the Demographics of Subjects**

From the study findings, for example as presented in Tables 1 & 2 it can be suggested that Uganda's secondary school curriculum as described in the subjects each participant studied is a fixed body of knowledge. It fits the description of a "one size fits all model" discussed in chapter five under the section on classic education models. This kind of curriculum embodies classic concepts, tendencies and rationale of education. The key elements in this system include, for example, standardization of subjects to be studied and centralization of the entire curriculum which ensured a common and consistent knowledge of what every student should study or know. It can be contended that the practice of having students learning the same kind of knowledge may seem outdated an issue that is also discussed in (Wright, 2007). When the data as presented is compared with the findings in chapter five, it can be argued that the new generation of young people today need different knowledge and diversification. They need new and diverse skills in dealing with the challenges of postmodernism today.

Closely associated with the Secondary school subjects both at O' and A' levels is the number of compulsory subjects. This practice however, does not allow students to expand their knowledge to study other subjects. In the data, fewer students learned Physical education, Home Economics, Music and Fine Arts. It was indicated in the questionnaire that most of the teachers, former and current, had offered similar subjects. If critically analysed, these data cause an argument that too much subjects control, centralization and standardisation of knowledge can lead to mass production of labour force without diverse skills and it can limit access to employment avenues. This can be a setback in terms of national development.

The comparative study and analysis of what the O' and A level students learned suggest a closed end system. Altinyelken (2010) argued that: "centrally developed curriculum materials are not flexible with regard to local differences and diversity" (p. 225). Even though it is not the intention of this study to advocate a purely decentralised curriculum system, it is important to point out that the Ugandan system of education at Secondary school level is losing direction because it is too centralised and which needs a restructure to fit the new era of info-knowledge economy that is characterised by new knowledge and research. Britz, Lor, Coetseo and Bester (2006) warned that too much confinements of the outdated curriculum model and content may lead to students not being able to "shop around for intellectual capital to invent and produce new knowledge" (p. 25). It can therefore be argued that Ugandan students might be disadvantaged and handicapped by the system of education.

The demographic data presented below are useful in that they help to understand better student perceptions and voice in the proceeding sections. The students gave their views, comments and suggestions on the relevance of the Secondary school curriculum and how it prepared students for future careers in today's realities. Among the key ideas in this section is the pointing out of the need for student voice in curriculum management. .

### **Current Students' Perceptions**

From the view point of current students this study found out that, students were well aware of the relationship between schooling and future careers. For them, the best jobs or employment go to those with advanced higher education and who had performed well in national examinations. This is how they prepared for future careers. The study indicates that they became aware early in their Secondary school studies what they wanted to attain as future careers. These findings based on students perceptions agree with what Vengeler (2000) also said that in spite of what the teachers do, “ students are clear about their own preferences and their own values” (p. 37). This view was also supported by Siann, Lightbody, Nicholson, Tait & Walsh (1998) who carried out a similar study on Secondary school and career aspirations of Chinese students and came to similar findings.

The students were asked on what they based their decision to opt for particular non-compulsory subjects at ‘O’ level or career tracking subject combinations at ‘A’ level. All (100%) of the students responded to the question. Their responses were summarised and tallied into two categories expressed as follows:

The majority, (42%) of the students, based their career tracking decisions on the prospects of their career aspirations. Then, (35%) of students chose subjects which they performed better, and which in their thinking; they were able to continue doing them well at next levels. The fact is, in Uganda’s education system, very good points and grades offer higher possibilities of getting selected for a public university after senior six and therefore being given a good course for future and to qualify for government sponsorship; or being selected by very good government Secondary schools in case of students who have completed senior four. Knight (2000) warns that “critical pedagogy condemns a hierarchical track system. It encourages all students equally to aspire to the best jobs” (p. 204), and in this case, based on their abilities and interests. Therefore, the reasons of those who said that they based their decisions on the prospects of their career and those who considered their own capabilities were closely related.

**Table 3*****Reasons for Students' Subjects Studied. N= 926***

<b>Student Reasons</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>%</b>
Did not make any decision, all subjects were compulsory	117	13
Selected subjects based on personal interests	64	7
Did not have clear interests and preferences	21	2
Mixed desires, expectations	11	1

Note: Students' responses

The students were aware of the curriculum possibilities and limitations in view of their future careers. There were (13%) students who said that they did not have options because all the subjects at school were compulsory. Only a small number (7%) of the students chose subjects freely based on their personal interests. Twenty-one (2%) students chose subjects without any clear interests. Eleven (1%) students had varied reasons individually which ranged from wanting subjects that would give a “good combination at ‘A’ level”; “family influence”; “guided by the school teachers” to “wanting to fill in gaps in order to get the required number of subjects”. The aforementioned responses show that to a certain extent students experienced difficulties during the selection process when deciding on subjects. This was because their individual interests clashed with curriculum bureaucracies and standards. The curriculum policy made students compromise their actual interests.

The study also found out that while many students felt satisfied with their chosen Secondary school subjects, the government policy on subject combinations and other factors limited their freedom of choice during selection of subjects. The other factors reported included, for example, academic standards imposed by schools, lack of popularity of some subjects where only a few students offered those subjects. It was also found out that students chose subjects that they liked, those that were oriented towards the careers they wanted or chose, any subject when students lacked options from which to choose.

The study indicated that the environmental location of the school significantly impacted on the students' future career and curriculum subject selections and their perception of labour market. For example, students who were sampled in rural areas reported the impact of poor school learning environment on their preparation for future careers. This was described in

terms of " limited subjects offered", "lack of instructional materials", and "lack of teachers" while students who were sampled in schools located in urban centres did not express these concerns. The rural area setting and the poor socioeconomic status of the schools contributed negatively concerning students future careers preparations. This can be confirmed the more in relation to Knight (2000) regarding students preparations for future careers and school learning environment in the following words:

A good part of school life is devoted to establishing a ranking of competence but competence is too narrowly and arbitrarily defined in schools. Intellectual competence is often only tangentially related to academic performance and is often confused with docility. Competence cannot be limited to what students have done but should be geared to what they are encouraged to believe they can do. (p. 216)

Knight (2000) further said that, "in an optimum learning environment all activities are organised for immediate and future utility" (p. 218). Essentially, when students have a strong vision for their future careers, they achieve more. However, the comparative study of S. 4, S. 6 and University students' perceptions suggested that students' issues relating to subject selection and future careers altered substantially over time as they moved from one academic level to another. It also showed that students became increasingly aware of their career choices and stabilised or affirmed what they wanted as their career pathways while at the University.

#### **Senior Four Students' Pursuits of Future Careers.**

The Senior 4 students were asked to name their desired future careers. The study found out that these students aspired for careers which were majorly related to the compulsory subjects they studied, namely, the Sciences, History and subjects which most students chose as optional such as Commerce and Agriculture. Table 4 shows the selection patterns of Senior 4 students of their pursuits of future careers. This analysis is based on S. 4 samples of students, that is, what they said were the subjects they offered, and how they envisaged their future careers.

**Table 4*****Current Senior Four Future Career Aspirations***

<b>Science related</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>History related</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>%</b>
Doctor / Clinical Officer	107	29	Lawyer	44	12
Civil Engineer	62	17	Civil Administration	05	1.4
Nurse	48	13.1	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(49)</b>	<b>13</b>
Mechanical Engineer	05	1.4			
Architect	04	1	<b>Commerce/Entrepreneur</b>		
Computer Technician	02	0.5	Accountant	28	7.6
Pharmacist	01	0.2	Businessman/woman	12	3.2
Industrial Chemists	01	0.2	Banker	04	1
<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(44)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>			<b>Fine Art</b>		
Agricultural Officer	13	3.5	Industrial designer	12	3.2
Forest Officer	03	0.8	<b>Overall Sub-totals</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>28.7</b>
<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(16)</b>	<b>4.4</b>			
			<b>Grand totals</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Language Related</b>					
Journalist	11	3			
Radio presenter	03	0.8			
<b>Overall Sub-totals</b>	<b>(14)</b>	<b>4</b>			
	<b>260</b>	<b>71.2</b>			

Note: Career pursuits of S. 4 Students samples in 2011 (n= 365) of (407)

Table 4 shows that a total of n=365 (90%) of the Senior 4 students responded to this particular question item and also shows that the majority of students' samples had already established their vision of the desired career in future. There were (63%) of students who indicated their future careers in the science subjects domain or terrain which they took as compulsory subjects. The majority among the students who viewed their future prospects in sciences wanted to become doctors, (29%) and or Civil Engineers, (17%). There were students who saw their future in the compulsory History and wanted to become lawyers or administrators (13%). Among the subjects from which students selected for additional subjects or optional or electives after the compulsory ones were Commerce, Entrepreneurship, Agriculture, language such as Luganda and Fine Art. Commerce made students dream of becoming business women and men, accountants and Bankers (12%). Agriculture offered one opportunity to become white collared agricultural officers or forest officers (4.4%) and languages were gateways of becoming journalists and radio news presenters (4%). Generally, students' samples indicate that most students aspired for white collar jobs. However, there were (12%) of the students who wanted careers including teacher, security officer, Uganda's People Defence Force (UPDF) soldier, pilot, hairdresser, secretary and a social worker.

### **Senior Six Students' Pursuits of Future Careers**

Table 5 shows that Senior 6 students had restricted subject combinations and that the majority of the Arts students offered History, Economics and Geography. While those in Senior 4 level indicated that they wanted to become doctors, there were shifts in career pursuit with senior six students who were sampled.

**Table 5***Senior Six Pursuits of Future Career*

<b>Economics related careers</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Science related careers</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>%</b>
Accountant	55	16	Doctor	28	8.2
Businessman/woman	38	11	Civil Engineer	26	7.6
Banker	11	3.2	Statistician	07	2
Human Resource Manager	04.....	1.2	Pilot	02	0.6
Economist	03	0.9	Pharmacist	02	0.6
Procurement Officer	01	0.2	Computer Scientist	01	0.2
<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(112)</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(66)</b>	<b>19.2</b>
<b>History related careers</b>			<b>Geography related careers</b>		
Lawyer	71	20.7	Urban Planner	05	1.5
Teacher	31	9	Environment managers	02	0.6
Public Administration	05	1.5	Air hostess	01	0.2
<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(107)</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>(8)</b>	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Language related careers</b>			<b>Agriculture</b>		
Journalist	32	9.4	Agricultural Officer	12	3.5
<b>Fine Art Related Career</b>					
Designer	05	1.5			
<b>Grand Totals</b>					

Note. Career Pursuits of S. 6 Students in 2011 (n = 342) of (n=365)

Out of 365 Senior 6 students, (94%) of them pursued their future careers based on their A' Level subject combinations. The majority of senior six students, wanted to become lawyers numbering (21%) and or accountants (16%). This could have been due to the fact that many were majoring in History and Economics respectively. The students' popular career terrain shifted from the Sciences to Economics and Entrepreneurship by (33%) of the students and History to (31%). A few students (7%) whose future career aspirations were still unclear indicated that they wanted to become priests, secretaries, presidents and counsellors.

### University Students on Future Careers

University students (n = 154) were asked to recall and name their career dreams while they were still Secondary school students. These students were sampled from different faculties of six different universities in Uganda, two being public and the rest private universities. Even though the sorts of careers which they wanted were diverse, they can be categorised as follows in Table 6

**Table 6**

#### *University Students on Pursuit of Careers*

Category	No. of students	Category	No. of students
Teaching Career	40	Engineer	05
Managerial jobs / careers	23	Magistrate/Lawyer	04
Community development	20	Agriculturalist	03
Medical Career	17	Statistician/Planner	01
Business Administration	14	Demographer	01
Computer Science	13	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>154</b>
Accountant	13		

Note. Career Pursuits of University Students samples in 2011

This Table 6 suggests that students' future career pursuits kept on changing as one moved from one level of education to another. The trend indicates that by the time one reached

University, the desired career in O' level had significantly changed. This phenomenon was attributed to standardised examinations and selection process based on performance. However, the university students were more inclined to report what they were pursuing for future careers now rather than what they had pursued while still in secondary schools.

A number of University students (88%) claimed that compulsory subjects compromised their future career interests and derailed them from their original career tracks. The rest (12%) of the University students seemed to think that Secondary school curriculum prepared them to reach their desired goal. However, one of those who had taken Geography during secondary schools reported thus,

Learning about irrigation in the Canadian Prairies did not have immediate application to my needs and what I am studying now. The land at home is quite different from that of the Prairies.

One other University student saw the content of Fine Art and Technical Drawing as having little relevance to what one does in real life situation today. This student said, “

Fine Art and Technical Drawing which I studied have nothing to do with what I am learning now. It wasted time for me while in secondary school.

The study findings in the study show that students' pursuit of career was largely determined by the subjects one studied, the compulsory subjects and the prescribed subject combinations at A' level. The students' responses also indicated, for example, that if a student studied commerce at senior four and economics in senior six, pursued business related careers. The findings indicated that the future careers were fixed and a student had to fit in the system rather than the system fitting him or her interests. However, the study overall also shows that despite the fact that some subjects were made compulsory, students were allowed to choose what they could add on to their compulsory ones. At A level, students were allowed to choose own combinations based on their capabilities, preference & performance.

### **Findings of Students' Voice on the Existing Curriculum**

The central focus in this section was to gather student voices on the curriculum as they pursued their future careers. Seventy seven percent of the student participants responded to questions whether the subjects they studied were relevant to their pursuit of future career. More students (57%) said “No” indicating that the curriculum was not relevant, while (43%) said “Yes”. These students gave reasons in support of their responses which are summarised in Table

7

**Table 7*****Student Responses on the Relevance of School Subjects to Future career Pursuits***

<b>Students Reasons for “Yes” response to item “do you feel that all subjects taught to you in your secondary school are necessary for your future career?”</b>	<b>Frequencies (n=307)</b>	<b>%</b>
The compulsory and non-compulsory subjects broadened personal general knowledge. It is important to become widely exposed to various knowledge before specializing in particular career	160	52
The decision for enrolling in particular subjects was made after realising personal potentials and from having studied a variety of subjects. It was important to get prepared with many subjects for more options in case one had to change careers.	135	44
Took the right combination of subjects that is relevant to my future career pursuit	12	04
<b>Students Reasons for “No” response to item 14 “do you feel that all subjects taught to you in your secondary school are necessary for your future career?”</b>	<b>(n= 408)</b>	
Some of the subjects studied are not relevant to my future careers pursuits and aspirations. There is no interconnectedness among all the subjects studied and personal future career pursuit	168	41
Took many subjects and yet needed only a few in order to prepare for future careers well	18	4
Not able to perform well in some subjects. This significantly diminished my overall performance and chances for being selected for good government schools to pursue better future career prospects and for better career attainability.	29	7
The additional subjects were chosen by teachers in order to increase the required number of subjects per student. Not all subjects are necessary for my future.	8	2
Only sciences were /are needed in personally wanted career field	29	7
Compulsory art subjects such as history and Christian Religious Education are irrelevant to what is needed in future career.	6	1
Some subjects and topics are hard.	6	1
Some subjects are not practical for today’s employment needs	119	29
The content of some subjects is irrelevant to current situation, outdated, not interrelated, too theoretical, for example some topics of Christian Religious Education and History	24	6
Some subjects and their content are a waste of my time.	1	0.2

Note. Data generated from S. 4 and S. 6 Students’ views, perceptions and comments in 2011 (n = 715)

**Students' on Curriculum Delivery Methods.** Students were asked to specify the classroom teaching/instructional methods commonly used by their secondary school teachers. Students described instructional methods used which continue to show that they were basically teacher centred and based on Socratic rhetoric of question and answers method. There was a close relationship among all the students' perceptions of the teaching methods as summarized below in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Current Students' on Curriculum Delivery Methods*

<b>Methods of Teaching as Perceived by Students</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>%</b>
Talk and Chalk	844	91%
Regular tests, Exercises and Assignments	801	87%
Question and answers	721	78%
Dictation of Notes and Explanation	96	10%
Discussion Seminars with other schools	77	8%
Reading and discussing past examination papers	71	8%
Demonstration and Observation	55	6%
Lecture Method	28	3%
Group discussion	23	2%

Note. Responses from Current Students samples regarding Teachers' teaching approaches, 2011  
( $n=926$ )

Based on students' responses, the study confirmed that teachers used teacher centred methods, sort of "stand and deliver" mode of teaching and taught to test not for general knowledge acquisition and imparting skills and values. For instance, the commonly used methods as reported by (91%) students were "talk and chalk" and (87%) of the students reported "tests, exercises and assignments". There were (78%) students who reported "questions and answers". The findings affirmed that the instructional methods used were teacher-centred and no longer appropriate for the current realities. Students were asked whether they learned any skills

for future career from the methods of teaching used by the teachers. The following Table 9 show the skills reported:

**Table 9**

***Students' Learned Skills from the Methods Teachers used***

Skills Learned as Perceived by Students	Frequencies	%
To be creative	220	24
Writing with speed	137	15
Personal research skills	84	9
Listening, reading and thinking	82	9
Public speaking and communication through seminars	70	8
Interpersonal and Intrapersonal skills	51	6
Memorising	48	5
Questioning techniques	48	5
Using personal free time profitably	19	2

Note. Current Students samples and their responses regarding skills, 2011 ( $n=926$ )

The findings from the students who responded showed a lack of manipulative skills being taught, for example, most were bookish skills like writing with speed, research skills, listening, reading and memorising. Such skills could not prepare students well for future careers in the current realities where many generic and practical skills are needed. Hence, many students advocated for curriculum reforms where their voice should be considered in the process. This was to give answer to the final question in the questionnaire which is as discussed below.

**Students' Voice on curriculum Reforms**

Students were asked to suggest the curriculum reforms or changes they wished to happen in their former or current respective schools. The students repeatedly made the following comments as presented in Table 10

**Table 10*****Student Comment on Needed Reforms***

<b>Students Comments on the question: If you were given a chance, what changes would you make in the secondary school curriculum?</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>%</b>
Students should have fewer compulsory subjects and increase core or elective subjects that allow them to specialise in subjects pertinent with their interests and capabilities.	562	61
School subjects need to be practical to local situations and real life rather than focus on the UNEB examination requirements.	412	44
Assessment exams should not be used to promote competition among schools.	402	43
All the text books should include up-to-date and accurate information and should make these texts available to all students in the country.	166	18
Computer literacy courses and information technology should be available and emphasized in schools.	92	10
Schools need to broaden options for studying foreign languages to include Spanish and other local languages such as Runyakitala and Luo.	56	6
Students should be required to study at least one technical oriented subject in order to develop entrepreneur skills and to make sciences and business subjects a priority.	49	5
Schools need to be updated in various areas including science laboratories and equipment, sports and athletics education and other co-curricular activities that are non- compulsory.	35	4
Schools need to introduce new ways to learn, for example, using computer and power point, and other virtual learning technologies.	33	4
Some subjects such as Entrepreneurship, Commerce and Principles of Economics need to be combined into one subject.	17	2
Schools need to: recruit well trained teachers.		
School should teach topics in parenting, family planning, HIV/AIDS and ecological issues.	13	1
	06	0.6

Note. Data generated from samples of Students regarding their views, comments and suggestions i.e. in 2011 ( $n= 926$ )

## **Interpretation and Discussion of Student Voice**

In their suggestions regarding the reforms or changes they wished to have happened in Secondary school curriculum, students continued showing values of their voice. Most students looked for an increase in elective subjects and fewer compulsory subjects. Students also expressed the need for subjects to be practical and grounded in real life. Other students' comments ranged from curriculum needing to address societal needs (44% of students); to be congruent with students' interests and abilities (61%); to introduce information technology (10%); to reduce compulsory subjects (61%) and to recruiting well trained teachers (1%). A full description of the students comments regarding needed changes are presented in Table 26.

. The findings of the study bring forward the fact of a relationship between the subjects and the future career attainment. Secondary school students showed that the pursuit of future careers was largely determined by the subjects that one studied. The University students, on the other hand, seemed to indicate what had become their stabilised specialization for future careers rather than what they had studied and wanted as future careers while they were still in Secondary schools. There was a big difference between what the senior four students aspired to attain and the senior six students. These findings also seem to suggest that students' career aspirations were determined by the curriculum which largely restricted or confined them to specific career tracks which were tagged with compulsory and specific subjects. For instance, the S. 6 career track subject combinations were clear as to what career direction a student would pursue when taking such subject combinations as per the education system and curriculum model.

In various responses, the national examinations were indicated as parameters or blueprint that finally determined what one became and did in future. The examinations' influence was shown clearly through changes in students' career orientations / aspirations after senior four and after senior six. Students' pursuit of future career was consistently modified by one's ability to pass the national examinations to move to the next educational level. Students also reported the general selection exercise by the school head teachers and Joint Academic Board (JAB), who do the selection nationally that it was a key factor in determining one's future career. There were clear indicators of shifts in career orientations noted when students joined 'A' level and the University. This shift in the career orientations can be interpreted to mean a real dilemma of the secondary school curriculum content. This dilemma is linked to the curriculum model currently used in Uganda which is centralised, bureaucratic and influenced by external control. The study shows that students jumped on bandwagon of career tracks that were outside their original interests simply to fill in the gap after failing to find meaningful subjects of preference.

The students' responses also indicated that if a student studied Commerce at senior four and Economics in senior six, pursued business-related careers. It can be interpreted as well that one's failure to pass the Sciences was a door opened to seeing one's future career prospects in the Art subjects like History. There were 71 senior six students who wanted to become lawyers; 55 wanted Accountancy and 38 Business Management. At the University level, the

career shifting saw some preferring managerial jobs where 23 of the students wanted such jobs, community development-related careers (20) and teaching (40). None of the senior four students indicated interest in some of these careers even though they had begun their career tracking in senior three. The study findings from students' perceptions can be interpreted to mean that students aspired for careers that would win for them white collar jobs such as doctor, lawyer, teaching, banker, accountant and managerial work. This practice is imbedded in the colonial education legacy. The practical and hands-on careers were least considered or they were not mentioned at all.

The critical analysis of students' responses also indicate that students did not adhere to subjects that addressed the most needed skills for contemporary national and social development, for example, Environment Management, Computer Science, Pharmacist, Urban Planning, Architect, Agriculture, Industrial Design, Economist, Demography, and Procurement. This finding was also emphasized by former teachers and current teachers. The curriculum made the Ugandan youth in Secondary schools incapacitated and not able to contribute more effectively to national socio-economic development. Based on students' perceptions, the findings of this study highlighted a number of issues related to secondary school curricular content and students' preparation of future careers in Uganda. Students' career aspirations were heavily weighted upon and negatively influenced by the curriculum model in use, that top down approach. Critical theorists such as Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) claimed: "We all are empowered and we are all underpowered, in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use our abilities" (p. 283). . What these critical theorists are concerned about is establishing empowerment of students as the marginalised people in the education system.

It is imperative to argue that the current Secondary curricular content does not meet the purpose of education particularly in the globalized and postmodern era which favours individual development, personal needs and interests, as well as learners-centred designs. Both students and teachers have to become producers of knowledge rather than passive receptors of the pre-planned and privileged knowledge of others, (Freire, 1970). The curricular texts as indicated from students' responses are inadequate. They evoke negative stereotypes of certain structured knowledge and information, individual social identities and social relations.

At the individual levels, students linked their future careers to particular subjects taken and the meritocracy associated with examinations. They did not consider their own manipulative skills acquisition, talents, competencies and personal interests. They also linked their career choices to the texts of compulsory subjects and subject combinations. The contemporary global realities did not seem to have had much influence on students' learning experiences and future career prospects. The underlying reasons for this could be: the curricular content was restrictive; the methods of teaching were poor and basically theoretical; foreign languages were not emphasized and modern information and technological education was non-existent. Foreign and local languages; and modern information technology education were among the most neglected curricular content. Even though the majority of the students said that the subjects which they

took were related to their future careers and helped to broaden their knowledge, it was all cognitive and their frame of reference was confined.

## **Student Voice for Effective Education Curriculum Evaluation, Reform and Development**

This last section discusses how student voice works for effective education curriculum evaluation, reform and development in the contemporary world. This entire study was situated in the field of critical theory with the intention of utilising Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy as a method and framework. Critical theory's fundamental principle gives voice to those formally in the margins. It is a forerunner of needed curriculum reforms that focus on student voices and other stakeholders' voices as presented in this chapter. Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy appeals to a curriculum perspective that orients students towards their freedom, enabling them to assume personal responsibility for their future careers rather than having someone else tell them what they should do, how and why. In critical pedagogy, reference to curriculum reform is usually made from a more liberal position of the postmodern age in which we are presently living. According to Vengeler (2000) "there are no longer any fixed values, knowledge in the current societal realities. The traditional ideologies lost their coherence and significance", (p. 39). Therefore in order to provide effective curriculum evaluation, reform and development the education experts and stakeholders need to pay attention to:

### **(a) Student Interests and Choices**

The term "interest" as understood in the study is where the student makes decisions about what to study based on what he/she is interested in. Student voice is enhanced by participation and involvements, a process that create favourable conditions to enable students define their future aspirations or destinies. There were evidences in student comments that they wanted to have their interests respected. Sixty one percent of students wanted fewer compulsory subjects and increase of core or elective subjects to allow them choose subjects that are pertinent with personal interests and capabilities. This not being the case in the current curriculum as practiced in Uganda, the students perspectives brings in focus what Rudduck and Flutter, (2000) observed that adults gave their views of what they thought might be meaningful to students. When education is approached from this stance, it can be disempowering students to learn skills like problem solving, creativity and critical thinking. Everything is seen from the eyes of the adults and in this case students' interests and choices are not met.

The argument of this study however is, to provide students with greater freedom to study what they have reasons to value in view of their future. Sen (1999) proponent of *Capabilities theory* defined freedom as: "the expansion of the capabilities of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value" (p.54). This is in line with contemporary thinking which all educators need to embrace and uphold. Education and particularly the school curriculum should aim at expanding students' freedoms and capabilities to lead lives they value being and have personal reasons to value; and to do things they value doing. It is the students who are directly

involved in the learning processes, who should be at the centre of education and who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what subjects should be chosen; not the education experts at the central level, or the adults alone. Several other studies support this argument (Cochrane, 1999; Evans, 2002; Lines and Muir, 2004; Sen, 1999; Stevenson, 1998). Education and its curriculum need to be perceived and evaluated from students' perspectives. These views suggest that students today are not passively absorbing everything they encounter and learn without thinking about them. There is need for educational paradigm shift in order to orient secondary school curriculum with new signs of the time. This fact needs acknowledgement and to be brought to full consciousness in the entire education spectrum and enterprise.

### **(b) Compulsory Subjects Issues**

The findings of the study indicate that students' future careers were influenced by external forces rather than the students themselves. The students pursuits of future career were determined by the compulsory subjects studied. These compulsory subjects was fixed and or determined by the Ministry of Education without input from students. Arguably, the system of compulsory subjects is non-dialogical and non-participatory, a trend that put the students at the receiving end. Students' pursuits of future career do not arise from needs at hand. It can be noted that these compulsory subjects as reported in student data, do not promote students' academic freedom which is so necessary in making decisions for future career based on one's talents and capabilities. The findings in the study agree with Siann, et al (1998) who also found out in a study of how Chinese students selected subjects for their future careers. The Chinese students also tended to make choices from a narrow viewpoint due to the influence of compulsory subjects that they offered. The argument in this paper is that students need to be given greater freedom to select subjects that they want to study. Compulsory subjects need to be minimal in their numbers.

### **(c) Information Technology**

The student voice regarding education and curriculum reform appeals to the postmodern complexity and the changing face of the world particularly of the young people today. The general observation shows that the digital migration and the World Wide Web and global communications networks are expanding the youth options for life. Students have more access to realities far afield from their classrooms and schools. This reality facilitates students' broader and deeper understanding of the world, most importantly, the terrains of their new knowledge or epistemology. All the more imperative then is the need for curriculum experts and the ministry of education to provide opportunity for students' voice to be heard and to dialogue about curriculum initiatives, evaluation and reforms.

The fact is, technology is creating a radically new world as students utilize uncontrollably Face book, Twitter, YouTube, digital cameras and mobile phones, DSTV, iPods, other modern technologies and various Internet websites such as Google. Today many students engage in the

world of knowledge through social networking sites, mobile cell phones, and Wikipedia and podcast sprees. With Internet cafés located in nearly every trading centre and village, and mobile phones in their hands, many Ugandan students are already engaged in visiting various websites, online libraries, businesses, amusement and entertainment sites, all the time constructing, reconstructing and recording their observations in faculties of their minds and exchanging conversations of various kinds with friends from near and far. In Table 29, fourteen percent of students said that schools need to introduce new ways of learning, for example, using computer and power point, and other virtual learning technologies. This demonstrates the need of the new generation of students in the current realities which curriculum experts cannot ignore in education reform anymore. The study indicated that students were more informed and knew what they wanted in the curriculum as part of their preparation for future careers. The students' voice regarding what needed to change concurred with Oerlemans (2007) who also recognised that students are real experts about what they want as they prepare for their future careers. In the same line, Alitinyelken (2010) also said that students are in better position to provide realities of classrooms and the pattern of how they think about what to learn and their future careers.

#### **(d) Skilling Students for Contemporary Realities**

Multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue are no longer a choice but part of one's life even in the classrooms. Students need multiple skills for the contemporary intercultural and multicultural realities. However, the students' demographic data indicated low levels of students learning Vocational and Language subjects in the syllabus. In reality, many students did not study those subjects that would have given them the skills for self-employment and which would have helped them have options from diversified career fields. The students were aware of the anomalies in the curriculum. Some made the following comment: "Students should be required to study at least one Technical oriented subject in order to develop entrepreneurship skills. Sciences and Business subjects need to be made a priority". Six percent of the students also said, "Schools need to broaden options for studying foreign languages to include for example, Spanish and local languages such as Runyakitara and Luo. The implication observed in students' voice was that language studies was a choice rather than a curriculum requirement. And yet, in the globalised world today, where communication and interactions are at stake, such languages are a necessary requirement.

#### **Conclusion**

In summary, the biggest gap the study identified is that students' voice is generally situated to focus on specific subjects like History, Math, Science, and little care is taken to situate this voice in general study of education and curriculum reform. Moreover in Uganda, education reforms have been lacking student voice. This study therefore is important because it addresses this need in the broader field of education and curriculum evaluation and reform rather than the narrower spectrum of individual and specific subjects. This study is also central to the

understanding of how Secondary school students think and plan for their future careers. The students' interests, natural talents and freedom, need to give priority to be nurtured. To educate is to empower students to have freedom of mind and to become responsible for self and other. . It is this kind of freedom of mind that enables students to make right choices to be able to lead a life in future most desirable to them and to contribute more effectively towards societal development. Such an issue is pertinent in preparing students for future careers or the world of work today.

The layout of this paper shows the necessity of voice and how it has been utilized in a study of Secondary school students' preparation for future careers in quest for contemporary approach to education and curriculum reform and development. The findings of the study thus far indicate that this approach is effective and if adopted in education reforms, has potential for providing relevant Secondary school education programs for the contemporary realities.

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