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## Exploring agricultural vocational pedagogy in Uganda: students' experiences

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### ABSTRACT

Increasingly studies claim that building young people's vocational interest in agriculture, as a sector of meaningful employment, is a central dilemma of Africa's education and labour market systems. With Ugandan students' voices, this article examines some of the methodological dilemmas of agricultural education and training. The article draws from evidence generated through a qualitative case study of a public agricultural college. We undertook the study in line with our conceptual argument for mainstreaming young people's voices in the search for solutions to improve agricultural education practice. The study explored and analysed students' experiences and perceptions of the college's vocational pedagogy. Findings that uncover weak agricultural vocational pedagogy at the case study college are analysed and discussed to inform our recommendation for the embedding of craftsmanship virtues in vocational education practice to optimise students' achievement.

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### KEYWORDS

Vocational pedagogy; vocational education; agricultural education; Uganda; craftsmanship

## Introduction

Agriculture feeds and employs the world contributing one-third of the global domestic product in 2014 (World Bank, 2017). Amidst dwindling productivity, agriculture remains core to Africa's economic growth and poverty eradication agenda. It accounts for approximately 32% of the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) gross domestic product (GDP) (AGRA, 2015). In Uganda, the sector accounts for 24% of the national GDP and employs almost 60% of the country's youth labour force (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). While its critical relevance in the global economy is indisputable, agriculture's capacity to produce enough food and create more jobs that are decent is under threat owing largely to limited human resource capabilities (Elder & Rosas, 2015).

Developing and nurturing the urgently-needed, competent, young labour force to drive and sustain SSA's agriculture and food industry is an acknowledged development challenge (FAO, 2014). On the one hand, there are institutional and structural barriers to youth participation in agriculture. These include limited access to, possession and utilisation of productive resources, which combine with a range of social arrangements to

impact young people's contribution to agricultural productivity (Leavy & Smith, 2010). On the other hand, there are dispositional barriers that constrain motivation and initiative. The perception among families and development actors that young people are not in agriculture because they dislike the character and outlook of the sector is quite prevalent (Sumberg, Anyidoho, & Chasukwa, 2015). Our review of selected agriculture-based youth employment interventions in Uganda reveals the dominance of this perception narrative. For instance, in its internal working documents, a donor-supported consortium within the framework of the Youth Forward Initiative in Uganda (Overseas Development Institute, 2016) highlights the claims that youth dislike agriculture because the sector requires hard, manual labour, and is dirty.

Against the backdrop of this negative perception narrative, quite a sizeable number of young people in Uganda and elsewhere in SSA are still engaged in agriculture-based economic activities (Brooks, Zorya, Gautam, & Goyal, 2013). The majority of these are neither in education, employment nor training (NEET) but have to find their way into subsistence agriculture, because not working at all is no option (Kibwika, Okiror, & Birungi-Kyazze, 2010). There is a significant number of young people who still look for careers in the agriculture and food industry (Mukembo, Edwards, Ramsey, & Henneberry, 2015; Okiror & Otabong, 2015).

The perception rhetoric potentially legitimises defective programming assumptions in agriculture-based youth employment interventions. It is common for some youth development actors to suggest making agriculture fancy or *sexy* as one of the key strategies for tackling young people's lack of interest in the sector. Such assumptions can inevitably perpetuate tokenism and quick fixes, which further undermines efforts to enhance youth engagement in the sector (te Lintelo, 2012). We argue for the case of agriculture as a potential and distinct sector of career opportunities for young people. The long-term growth and development of the agricultural sector is secure once its human resource takes farming as a vocation and business. This resonates well with the prospects of young people making meaningful agricultural education-work transitions as a driver to putting the business of agriculture into the hands of professionals.

Our focus in interrogating institutionalised agricultural education is to avoid short-term frames of reference in addressing the sector's human capacity needs. We seek to mainstream young people's voices in the search for solutions to tackle agricultural education and labour market transition dilemmas. The necessity to consider the active role of young people in their education and work transitions is crucial and evidently legitimate given the rapid societal changes and transitions patterns (Atchoarena, 2000; Brooks, 2007; Elder & Rosas, 2015). This article focuses on the experiences and perceptions of students based on evidence from a qualitative case study of a Ugandan public agricultural college. It is organised in six main sections. The introduction precedes the section on the overview of agriculture education and training in SSA, followed by sections on vocational pedagogy and craftsmanship, method, findings and discussion.

## **Overview of agricultural education and training in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Across Sub-Saharan African (SSA), agricultural education is delivered through diverse forms with the family's role as well as the dominant subsistence farming practices still making a mark on young people's view of the sector (Callaway, 1963). We briefly discuss non-formal and formal agricultural education and training (AET) to contextualise the

article. This is not to negate informal agricultural education. Non-formal AET as introduced during the colonial regimes was delivered mainly by public institutions through short courses and demonstrations at farmers' training centres, farm institutes and other locations of choice by state actors (Wallace, 2007). Policy reforms in the last decades have brought on board diverse actors from the private and non-government sector to offer agricultural extension education for rural transformation and agricultural productivity (Davis, Ekboir, & Spielman, 2008).

While non-formal education programs within the mainstream agricultural extension interventions traditionally do not target young people (Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010), several youth-in-agriculture promotion schemes have been tried in the last decades. These include farm field and life schools in countries such as Mozambique; farmer training centres in Ethiopia; and rural promotion centres in Burkina Faso. Quite a number of studies have illuminated the limited achievements as well as the constraints encountered by such schemes in promoting long-term engagement of youth in agriculture (Davis et al., 2012; Taylor, Duveskog, & Friis-Hansen, 2012). The new wave of local and global interest in tackling youth employment in the early 2000s led to the establishment of several youth-oriented agricultural interventions across the region (International Labour Organisation, 2004).

Formal provision of agricultural education is generally at three post-primary education levels on completion of the primary (basic) education cycle (Vandenbosch, 2006). At secondary education level (organised under lower and upper in some countries), agriculture is offered as a subject to build students' interest and to prepare them for entry into the next level. In the majority of SSA countries, taking the subject of agriculture is optional, but compulsory in a few others. The next level of agricultural education is through vocational education and training (VET) pathways for secondary education completers.

VET pathways lead to certificate and diploma qualifications, and admission is based on the level of secondary education completed and the grades attained. Higher education (HE) is the third level, where successful secondary education completers can enrol for degree courses in different agricultural fields of study depending on their academic achievements. While HE is the dream education pathway for the majority of young people in SSA, VET is reported to be at the periphery of decision-making by families and public institutions. The struggling role and low performance of Africa's TVET has received significant policy and research for decades (African Union, 2007; Johanson & Adams, 2004).

### ***AET within VET pathways in Uganda***

The state of post-secondary AET is synonymous with the vocational education and training (VET) sub-sector though with variations associated with its specialised character. As widely acknowledged, VET is still constrained in terms of relevance, efficiency, access and quality despite several reform efforts in recent years (Jjuuko, 2012; Tukundane, Minnaert, Zeelen, & Kanyandago, 2015). Macroeconomic growth challenges and related structural weaknesses coincide with lopsided demographic and other social changes to constrain education and labour market reforms.

AET is confronted by the additional challenge of perceived low status of agricultural occupations, which are predominantly in the informal sector. The education ministry concedes in its ten-year TVET strategic plan that training for agri-business development and informal sector employment is insufficient, yet the two sectors are among the key ones in

Uganda's labour market (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2012). AET that leads to the award of diploma qualifications is the focus of this article. Pursuing this level of AET is considered to be a matter of second option or a last resort for the majority of students who hitherto fail to enter university for higher education (Tumuheki, 2017). This gives rise to pedagogical questions concerning the institutional preparedness of AET institutions to develop and nurture such students' vocational interests and occupational competence. We draw relevant, conceptual insights from the theory of vocational pedagogy and craftsmanship to interrogate the case study's vocational education practice using students' voices.

## Vocational pedagogy and craftsmanship

Optimising the interconnectedness of pedagogy and craftsmanship can yield multiple benefits for AET processes and outcomes. Since good pedagogy develops craftsmanship, educators with real craftsmanship can easily espouse good pedagogy (Berger, 2003; Lucas & Spencer, 2016). The enormous challenge to build motivated and qualified graduates who are required by the ever-changing world of work makes the interconnectedness of vocational pedagogy and craftsmanship a strategic element within the domains of education and work. The agricultural world of work needs workers who are not only able to do their job well but also love it. An AET system that is devoid of craftsmanship in its vocational pedagogy can hardly meet the sector's current and future labour demands. We argue for a craftsmanship-informed vocational pedagogy to develop the young craftsmen and women who possess the required knowledge, skills and attributes.

Craftsmanship can be understood as a skill, a state of mind, a composite of attributes or a way of life based on doing well whatever one does. Contemporary thought considers craftsmanship to be a skill beyond making something manually. It includes technical proficiency governed by deep cognitive engagement and doing (Chan, 2014; Sennett, 2008). As a mind-set and composite of attributes, craftsmanship is about the pleasure, pride, patience, integrity, sensibility, commitment and dedication that constitute and drive the desire for excellence in whatever a worker undertakes to do. As a way of life, it is also about personal identity derived from learning to become; and internalising the values, principles, roles, responsibilities and tacit knowledge associated with one's occupation and profession (Kunneman, 2013; Lucas & Spencer, 2016; Meal & Timmons, 2012). Craftsmanship names 'an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake' (Sennett, 2008, p. 9). Good work or quality-driven work as a value and principle is critical in all endeavours be they vocational occupations such as carpentry, farming, health care and engineering or in service sectors such as teaching, tourism, insurance and law. The proposition to include craftsmanship on the list of generic outcomes of vocational education is thus a plausible argument (Lucas, Spencer, & Claxton, 2012).

As Sennett (2008) argues, every one of us has the potential that allows us to become good craftsmen and women but motivation and aspiration as shaped by 'social conditions takes people along different paths in their lives' (p. 241). This perspective fits into an agreeable argument to take forward a bold proposition by several scholars such as Berger (2003) to construct meaningful vocational pedagogies for building craftsmanship among students. This also necessitates a craftsmanship-embedded vocational pedagogy, which embraces teaching and learning as a social practice. The notion of education as a social process presupposes an alternative conceptualisation of the purpose, process and outcome

of education (Dewey, 1963; Freire, 1972). The position of educators and students and the relationship between these principal actors as well as the entire educational setting ought to be conceived from a socio-cultural perspective.

It is imperative for educators to draw relevant ideas and concepts from social theories of learning that legitimise the tradition of linking education with every day social applications (Guile & Griffiths, 2001; Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to inform their pedagogical decisions and practices. Approaching pedagogy as a social practice beyond mere transmission of knowledge is to embed craftsmanship for optimising education processes and outcomes. With meaningful vocational pedagogy, teaching and learning encounters ought to unfold as mutual interactions and learning spaces for both educators and students. An operational definition of vocational pedagogy offered by Lucas et al. (2012) captures the centrality of art and craft in creating interactive learning spaces for developing working competence. The definition captures the centrality of competence, motivation and value systems of educators in creating meaningful learning experiences.

Educators operating within a framework of meaningful vocational pedagogy need to recognise learners' autonomy, and to promote their agency to take control of their learning trajectories (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2009; Rudd & Evans, 1998). Such good educators strive to create conducive learning spaces for students to feel good about themselves; and develop a positive self-concept (Smith & Yasukawa, 2017). They embrace critical pedagogy and problem-solving approaches to foster students' sense of self-control, critical awareness, power of imagination and overall motivation for learning (Freire, 1972).

Such approaches enhance students' human qualities and dispositions that they need to navigate their learning and career transitions (Osborne, Houston, & Toman, 2007). Meaningful vocational pedagogies within the framework of social learning uphold the superiority of cooperation over competition to enable students to unleash their potential and to optimise their participation in collaborative learning (Almajed, Skinner, Peterson, & Winning, 2016; Rué, 2016). Authoritarian educators who perpetuate domineering institutional culture and competition-driven assessment regimes stifle students' unlimited cooperation capacities as social beings (Sennett, 2008).

A meaningful vocational pedagogy as a social practice integrates a multiplicity of teaching-learning approaches that connect theoretical and cognitive learning with practice to enhance vocational interests, career maturity and working competence (Berger, 2003). Meaningful vocational pedagogies that build craftsmanship combine working and learning (Armatas & Papadopoulos, 2013; Streumer & Kho, 2006). They circumvent the dangers of separating the head and hand from the heart (Brühlmeier, 2010). A pedagogy that recognises the intimate connection between head, hand and heart resonates with Sennett's argument that separation results in poor understanding and expression of skills and performance (Sennett, 2008).

A meaningful vocational pedagogy should not be anchored in a traditional dichotomy of theory and practical sessions. Sennett's strong argument in respect to skills development is particularly relevant here:

... [i] all skills even the most abstract begin as bodily practice; ... [iii] technical understanding develops through the power of imagination ... (2008, p. 10)

Work-related learning approaches provide authentic and real-world experiences that should not alienate students from the realities of desired occupations and professional practice (Guile & Griffiths, 2001; Streumer & Kho, 2006). Creative ways of ensuring authentic learning

experiences range from transferring teaching from college or university campuses to workplaces. However, this ought not to be a rule because work-related learning activities through participatory learning techniques such as problem-based learning can effectively immerse students in active and authentic learning (Burke, Marks-Maran, Ooms, Webb, & Cooper, 2009). Further, re-orienting colleges and universities to operate as workplaces or enterprises can offer more real-life learning experiences than the ivory-tower mentality that characterises current education practice. For instance, an agricultural college can operate as a farm or an agribusiness enterprise. Similarly, a catering and hospitality institution can run as a hotel.

Off-campus, work-related learning methods and strategies such as work placements offer students opportunities to learn from within the industry. They connect students with practitioners and experts in their fields of study (Dockery, Koshy, & Stromback, 2005; Karmel & Misko, 2009; Onstenk & Blokhuis, 2007; Smith, Comyn, Kemmis, & Smith, 2009). Learning by doing and learning to become are core aspects of off-campus, work-related learning build students' craftsmanship through belonging to a community of practice which enhances their acquaintance with relevant workplace culture (Colley, James, Diment, & Tedder, 2003). As observed by Lave and Wenger (1991), we learn through belonging to something and in doing so, learn the practices, norms, values and understandings of the community to which we belong. Of course, it is imperative to recognise that one of the fundamental determinants of effective work-related learning is professional support provided by professionals and practitioners with the required art and craft for vocational pedagogy.

We use ideas and concepts gleaned from the formulations on vocational pedagogy and craftsmanship as discussed in this section to frame our analysis, interpretations and discussion of the students' experiences and perceptions. These in turn influence our recommendations and conclusions. We, however, need to clarify that we did not deliberately use the said theoretical lens during the data collection phase of the study.

## Methodology

The article draws on evidence from a qualitative case study of a public agricultural college that we conducted from February 2016 to September 2017. The case study approach is very useful in capturing the particularity and complexity of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995). The aim of the study was to understand how the case study college prepares its students for the agricultural world of work. We specifically explored and analysed the students' experiences and perceptions of the college vocational practice. This was useful in understanding the institutional and contextual factors that influence the lecturers' pedagogical practices.

We found the case study college relevant owing to its status as the only remaining public tertiary institution dedicated to post-secondary AET in the country. It is one of the experiment stations created in the early 1930s when Uganda was still under colonial administration. The college took on a training function of offering a two-year certificate course in Agriculture in the late 1960s. By 1990, the college had introduced diploma courses in both crop and animal science. With a workforce of more than 60 qualified lecturers appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture, the college offers more than five certificate and diploma programs in the fields of crop and animal science to over 1,600 students every year. The college projects itself as a leader in training frontline agricultural extension workers. It is one of the four national institutions which the Government plans



to transform into centres of excellence (COE) by 2020 through a World Bank-funded Project (World Bank, 2015).

We purposefully selected the students whose characteristics and profile we considered relevant to the research purpose (Creswell, 2003). We generated empirical data through four interactive workshops with 45 students. We complemented these interactive workshops with document reviews and individual, in-depth interviews with ten more students. We also made several interactive visits to the college.

We transcribed and organised the interview voices and the recordings of the interactive workshops using Microsoft office applications. Analysis of evidence followed an iterative, qualitative data analysis procedure, which involved making sense of data by ascertaining and noticing patterns and categories (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This was undertaken using atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software (Friese, 2014).

### **Findings: students' voices on vocational pedagogy**

We sought to understand how the case study college prepares its students for the world of work from the students' perspectives. The findings reveal quite a number of governance, institutional and organisational factors that influence the college's vocational education practice. We noticed that while some students were positive about the current situation, the majority had several concerns and were not satisfied. For the sake of this article, we focus on the experiences that highlight the challenges that confront the college's vocational education practice. We describe these experiences under four themes: theory and practice integration; work-related teaching strategies; lecture as the common teaching method; and integrity and competence of lecturers.

#### ***Theory and practice integration***

In the preamble to the 2010 AET curriculum document for diploma programme, Uganda's education ministry emphatically states that lack of practical training had been a major weakness of the national agricultural colleges for many years. The Ministry therefore requires AET to integrate theory and practice through such methods as demonstration and farm practice. However, according to the majority students, teaching at the case study college is characterised by *excessive theory*; a phrase they use to mean classroom instruction without a connection to reality.

A couple of students made revealing statements about the college's teaching practice. Namukasa<sup>1</sup> was direct: 'we do a lot [more] of theory than practicals'. Her course mate faulted the manner in which some lecturers conduct demonstrations.

The way practicals are given is not so appropriate in my course because a few people get hands on work ... [.] for example, one single animal is given for an experiment on castration to a class of 137 members (Namusisi, student).

Kobuzaale said that 'we study about flowers but we have never planted one though we meet them on trips and also during industrial training'. Semusu claimed:

For practical knowledge ... I am doing horticulture ... one of the outstanding jobs in my course is greenhouse management ... but I myself I have spent a whole year ... this is now another semester I do not have enough knowledge about greenhouse ... this is quite

challenging to us in case you are given a job as a greenhouse manager ... I will be abused ... I will be shaming this college ... I would request that administrators should renovate our greenhouse because we really need to get those practical [skills].

Other students offered similar testimonies. Bumanye stated that 'there is a lack of materials for practicals and assessments'. Similarly, Kulumba reported that 'lack of efficient practical opportunities to expose students is one of the huge challenges facing teaching'.

### ***Work-related teaching strategies***

Several students mentioned industrial training (work placements) and study visits as the most common strategies that the college employs to expose them to the world of work realities:

Through industrial training and study trips, like visiting the meat processing industries (Kavuma).

Trips to go and learn more skills and knowledge about different pests and diseases (Kato).

We visit places like Kibimba for rice irrigation and learn more skills from the different types of rice and how they are grown (Kintu).

We are taken for study trips; given plots to see how we can manage crops. ... do things practically to acquire skills and theory (Ojambo).

A high proportion of students questioned the effectiveness of these learning strategies owing to limited availability of financial and material resources exacerbated by inadequate supervision. For instance, one of the student leaders said that:

My course has a lot of knowledge gaps, but you find that we go only for one trip of which in that one trip we cannot learn each and everything ... things about vices, flowers, vegetables ... so I request that administrators should organise and trips should be more in our course (Student leader).

The majority of the students are unhappy about the design and management of work placements. For instance, they are concerned that the relationship between the college and host institutions is largely informal and undocumented. Some said that several stakeholders including the World Bank have recommended the idea of strengthening and formalising relationships with the workplace actors but all in vain. They decried the hassle that they go through to obtain work placements.

They mentioned some of the constraints and challenges that they encounter at inappropriate host institutions. Mukisa singled out a language barrier saying that 'most of the [host institution] workers are not educated' so they cannot communicate in English. While Musoke identified 'poor communication skills among the field supervisors', Ouma observed that most host institutions have a shortage of labour and hence 'we are over-worked'. Achegere raised the challenge of limited materials and resources at host institutions, which undermined exposure to relevant work activities. She claimed that 'we only did mulching of bananas most of the time'.

Voices alluding to limited preparation by the college were vivid. For instance, Ssuna denounced the delayed issuance of introductory letters, which further complicated their search for placements. Students expressed the wish for quality guidance and support before and during the internship period:

When it comes to internship, we really need your support ... we are new in the field and we do not know what to do ... help us to create direct links with host institutions. Tell us about what you expect of us in the internship (Nabiryeye).

The students' numbers are big which makes learning difficult. Often they get problems at host institutions and no one from the college follows up (Ntale).

They maintained that the college assigns many students per lecturer in different and distant locations, which leads to limited supervisor-student interaction. Okeke corroborated three of his colleagues in their complaint about the destructive supervision experience at some host institutions, describing it as 'harsh [and] unfriendly'. The students' rating of the assessment procedure for work placements was also negative.

### ***Lecture as the common teaching method***

According to all students, lecture is the common teaching-learning method at the case study college. The majority of students contend that the quality of lecturing is wanting and that it is mostly characterised by supply of handouts (lecture notes). Namulinde, a first-year, animal science student said: 'I do not like a certain course unit because the lecturer just converses and tells us to get the notes'. Other students were explicit in expressing their resentment of how some lecturers use the lecture method:

The course is generally good but a number of items which include how some lecturers conduct lectures can worry someone like me; this aspect even causes doubts in me of my capability of fully qualifying in that course (Akullo).

Kobuzaale felt that the lecturing strategy overloads them. She said that 'we are over packed hence we end up panicking and failing'. Akello claimed that 'some lecturers do not have the appropriate approach when lecturing'. Nalugonda said that 'some lecturers do not explain very well their handouts because they want to finish their handouts in one lecture'.

### ***Integrity and competence of educators***

The study sought to understand how students perceive the lecturers' conduct and practice. A small number of students spoke positively and highly of the lecturers' conduct. They pointed out how some of the lecturers were really hard-working, approachable and concerned with students' learning success. However, most of the students in this category were also quick to point out the weakness of other lecturers. For instance, according to Muwanguzi, 'the lecturers are generally good though some seem to be busy and rare during their lesson times'.

The majority of the students were explicit in their negative perception of the lecturers' conduct and practice. They mentioned all sorts of weaknesses ranging from absenteeism, tribalism, handouts trading (selling of lecture notes), poor teaching styles and academic fraud. For instance, Otto said that 'the course duration is good but some lecturers are lazy to start lecturing hence low coverage at the end of semester'. Taban-Nasur said that 'some lecturers do not come into our lecture room, as they are timetabled'. Nandutu made an alarming claim about lecturers' absenteeism when she asserted that 'some lecturers attend to students only once a semester'. Akello was categorical in describing some lecturers' conduct saying that they 'are irresponsible and lack etiquette, self-respect; others are unfair and tribalistic'.

Some students said they want some of their lecturers removed or retrained. Emojongo claimed that 'some lecturers have to be removed because they do not mark papers but give marks according to relationships'. Otto suggested that some of the lecturers have to go for teacher training courses.

## Discussion of findings

In general, there is limited evidence to suggest effective preparation of students for the agricultural world of work by the case study college. The challenges raised by the majority of the students are indicative of a weak vocational pedagogy. First, excessive classroom instruction and less practice violate ideal vocational pedagogy that connects the enterprise of teaching the head to think and imagine while preparing the hand to perform (Sennett, 2012). Moreover, the teaching of the heart to assimilate the values and ethics that define *doings* and *thinkings* needs to be undertaken in unison. Craftsmanship attributes and abilities could be built by a pedagogy that connects theory and practice (Berger, 2003).

Second, ineffective work experience strategies and defective work placements contradict the ideals of work-related learning approaches. Off-campus, work-related learning ought to develop the students' attributes; skills and competences as inspired by experienced farmers and experienced industry practitioners. Students' learning can be optimised by enhancing their participation in communities of practice at host institutions (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Weak work placements, which subordinate learning outcomes to mere workplace presence, erode the approach's potential to develop and nurture craftsmanship (Holdaway, Johnson, Ratsoy, & Friesen, 1994).

Third, teaching monologues characterised by poor use of the lecture method have no place in a vocational pedagogical regime that seeks to turn students and educators into co-partners in knowledge production and use. Agricultural educators and students as co-learners ought to operate within social spaces that promote learning as social participation (Wenger, 1998). Qualities and attributes of craftsmanship can be developed when the students' autonomy is guaranteed and their motivation to develop craftsmanship is nurtured (Sennett, 2008). Monologues contradict the essence of empowering teaching-learning approaches which aim at building the skills that students need to learn, not only to belong and become but also to work in the ever-changing life and work dynamics (Colley et al., 2003). Moreover, even the most effective lectures need to be supplemented by dialogic encounters (Russell-Buffalo & Stanford, 2014).

Fourth, the lecturers, whom students perceive to be below expectations in terms of competence and integrity, can hardly nurture a cordial student-educator relationship as required by effective vocational pedagogy. As emphasised by Lucas et al. (2012), the place of the educator in vocational pedagogy is critical because their decisions and practices greatly influence how much craftsmanship students can develop. When students feel that the educators are wanting in their conduct and performance, it affects trust and undermines opportunities for relationship building and interactive learning. Mutual interactions with and among students through effective communication are nurtured by the educator's good actions and work habits, and ethical conduct is crucial. This is what makes the

moral, technical, theoretical and pedagogical competence of educators the core of meaningful vocational pedagogy.

Overall, the challenge to embrace craftsmanship virtues in the teaching practices of lecturers at the case study college is testimony to the longstanding relegation of craftsmanship in the wake of neoliberalism. The superiority of quantity over quality and competition over cooperation that characterises our society has not spared agricultural education and training. The pressure for curriculum coverage and preparing students to pass examinations in Uganda and similar contexts is evident at the college. Amidst this pressure, educators have to find alternative income sources to supplement meagre salaries, which at times results in tension between personal will to be good lecturers and work environment dynamics (Meal & Timmons, 2012). This perhaps partly explains the conduct and performance of some educators which, according to the voices of the students, are indicative of some form of frustration and discouragement. As observed by Sennett (2008), we can infer that the educators' and the students' desire to pursue their roles well is significantly impaired by undue pressure, frustration and related social and institutional dynamics.

### **Concluding remarks**

With the students' evidence, we can firmly claim that worrying about young people's lack of interest in agriculture is indeed only one side of the coin. On the other side is the great concern about what happens to those in AET institutions and of course what awaits the new entrants. Indeed, while the students do have perception and motivation challenges, the missing craftsmanship in the agricultural educators' pedagogical practices constitutes a huge part of the other side of the coin. Institutional preparedness and willingness to support and nurture meaningful vocational pedagogy that prioritises students' interests and voices is critical in fostering youth agricultural education-work transitions.

We are aware that improving agricultural education practice requires systemic change to comprehensively deal with structural impediments to desired outcomes. However, we argue that educators can still make a difference when they navigate the confining structures to embrace a meaningful vocational pedagogical practice bolstered by craftsmanship virtues. Craftsmanship-embedded vocational pedagogy has the potential to deal effectively with students' perceptions and motivational challenges once educators strive to create and nurture conducive pedagogical conditions for better learning outcomes and transition to work.

### **Note**

1. *All names are pseudonyms.*

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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