



# YOUNG AFRICANS SPEAK:

## VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THE TRANSITION TO WORK

FROM GHANA, KENYA AND UGANDA

Authors:  
**Laté LAWSON**  
**Antony MBITHI**  
**Pauline ESSAH**

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## ABOUT THIS DATA REPORT

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Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) prepared this report using data collected for audience analysis in three focus countries: Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda. The information in this report reinforces ESSA's baseline knowledge of education systems and stakeholders in the focus countries, while also informing future research and actions.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Dr Lucy Heady and Professor Michel Carton (NORRAG) for improving this work. We appreciate Gemma Munday (former Communications Manager), Dr Samuel Asare, and Samuel Agyapong for their contribution at diverse stages of the data collection process. We would like to express our appreciation to ESSA's communication team for their help in preparing this report.

### Disclaimer

The views expressed herein reflect the perspective of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of ESSA or its Board.

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# ABOUT ESSA



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Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) is a charity founded in 2016. ESSA's vision is high-quality education that enables young people in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve their ambitions and strengthens society. ESSA's mission starts with universities and colleges. Driven by the needs of young people, we join up with leaders (e.g. educators, funders, policymakers, businesses) and provide them with the data and evidence they need to make good decisions and improve the system. ESSA offers:

- a strong African team and board based in Africa and Europe, blending experience in research, mapping, knowledge management, advocacy and communication;
- a unique position in African tertiary education via a proven record of accomplishment in researching important educational issues in sub-Saharan Africa, and delivering practical and innovative solutions;
- well-established research and dissemination partners and networks for tertiary education (e.g. the [Ghana Tertiary Education Commission](#), [All-Africa Students Union](#), [Decent Jobs for Youth](#), the [Association of African Universities](#), the [Inter-University Council for East Africa](#), [Zizi Afrique Foundation](#), [UNESCO](#), [UNHCR](#), [Université Felix Houphouet-Boigny](#), the [University of Cape Coast](#), and [Quilt.AI](#), among others); and,
- strong values that guide everything we do. We are evidence-driven, solutions-focused, we strengthen trust, and we are always learning.

For further information, please contact

**Dr Pauline Essah** at [pauline@essa-africa.org](mailto:pauline@essa-africa.org) or

**Dr Laté Lawson** at [late@essa-africa.org](mailto:late@essa-africa.org).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**Quality data is the most important asset for informed decision-making.** To build an understanding of how education stakeholders perceive issues related to the educational system in their respective countries, Education Sub Saharan Africa commissioned data collection activities in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. The data collection focused on higher education students, recent graduates, faculty members and education decision-makers. **This paper explores the data and sheds light on the views of students and recent graduates on access to higher education and its quality, as well as on the school-to-work transition in the three countries under consideration.**

- **More than 70% of students and graduates reported relying on “support from parents and guardians.”** Financing options such as student loans and government scholarships are available in the three countries considered. This does not eradicate barriers and financial constraints faced by young students to access higher education, as most students and recent graduates (around 70%) mentioned financial constraints as the main barrier in choosing where to study. **Finally, although most students (90%) consider scholarships helpful, access to scholarships is quite low - Ghana (10%), Kenya (20%) and Uganda (28%).**
- Quality of education has been assessed through the lenses of department staffing, faculty-student interactions, technical IT support, quality of teaching and course content. **While recent graduates and faculty members reported that in their universities, colleges and TVET centres the course content and the quality of teaching are good,**
- **the quality of research facilities is more questionable across all three countries.** Considering the quality of the educational system in preparing young people to meet the needs of society, most students, graduates and faculty members (52% in Ghana, 53% in Kenya and 45% in Uganda) rated the educational system as good. Despite this, they identified ICT training as a subject that requires improvement.
- School-to-work transition and related issues were explored focusing on recent graduates. **Graduates consider that computer science and IT training, and vocational training (TVET) are the most useful for finding employment. Also, for 46%, 62% and 54% of recent graduates from Ghana, Kenya and Uganda respectively, their education or training is “very useful” for finding a job.** Finally, in terms of career ambitions, most students and graduates indicate that the level of education and network drive their career ambitions.

The policy implications of this report include a need for an equitable scholarship policy targeting students in need, more emphasis on entrepreneurship and practical training, and investment in infrastructure, research facility and capacity. The survey data revealed big challenges facing the higher education system in the three countries under consideration. This requires further research and deserves urgent attention from education decision-makers, in particular questions related to the school-to-work transition and the attractiveness of studying abroad deserve further investigation.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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**The World Bank (2021)** identifies higher education as instrumental in fostering economic growth, reducing poverty, and boosting shared prosperity. It is also essential to ensure social stability and youth empowerment. Educators, policymakers and funders need evidence about the challenges facing the higher education system as well as the good practices as perceived by education stakeholders such as students, graduates and faculty members. Such evidence will promote the realisation of the economic growth and well-being, and for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). **This report uses data collected in 2021 in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda to reflect the views of students, recent graduates and faculty members on access to education, quality of education, transition to work, as well as research environment in African higher education institutions.**

Existing literature (e.g. **Sarrico & Rosa, 2014; Jungblut et al., 2015**), highlights difficulties of assessing the quality, performance, and challenges of the education system as it involves many stakeholders across multiple levels of responsibility. Yet, the literature also acknowledges the importance of stakeholders' perspectives, including students. In the same vein, **Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) led a data collection process targeting African higher education stakeholders to strengthen its background knowledge of the education system in its target countries.** ESSA commissioned IPSOS-Ghana in 2021 to conduct the data collection in three focus countries: Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda. The present document explores the data.

**The contributions of this report are threefold:**

- i. Using primary data, this document reflects the perspectives of students, graduates and faculty members about access to and the quality of tertiary education in their respective countries;
- ii. It partly informs decision-makers about the main challenges faced by students, graduates and faculty members, in addition to suggestions for improvement made by these stakeholders;
- iii. By collating the views of different stakeholders in the higher education ecosystem, this work enhances ESSA's understanding of how students, graduates and faculty members assess the issues we work on. It also helped identify some knowledge gaps, motivating further investigations. For instance, data suggests that since scholarships are performance-based, they are awarded to some students who may not need them while disadvantaged students may not even have any scholarship opportunity. Also, for a significant proportion of graduates, the education they received is of little use (and not useful) for finding a job. Finally, most students reported their plans to study abroad. These examples motivate further investigations on "who gets a scholarship?" "the usefulness of education for finding a job" and "why do most African students plan to study abroad?"

The rest of this document is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the sample used for the data collection. Section 3 presents the results of analysing the data using graphical illustrations. In Section 4, we draw a conclusion and some policy recommendations.

<sup>1</sup>Ipsos Group S.A. is a multinational market research and consulting firm with headquarters in Paris, France.





# 2. DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

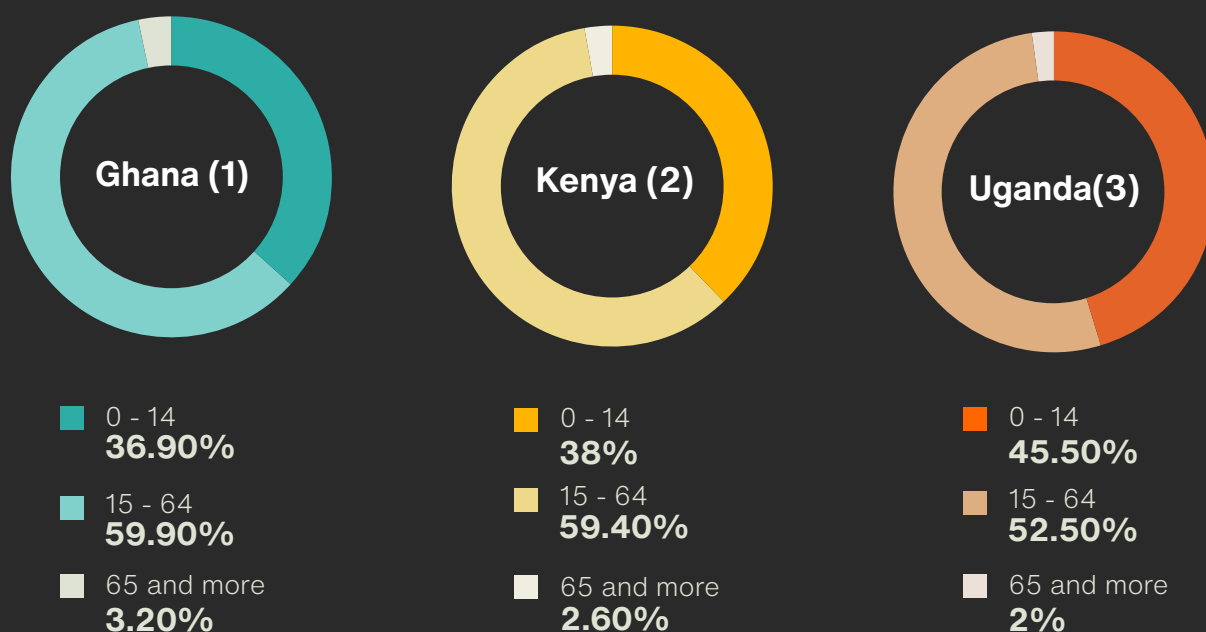
## 2.1. THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE DATA COLLECTION

To provide insights into access to education, quality of education and young graduates' transition from school to work in sub-Saharan Africa, we consider three focus countries: Ghana, Kenya and Uganda.

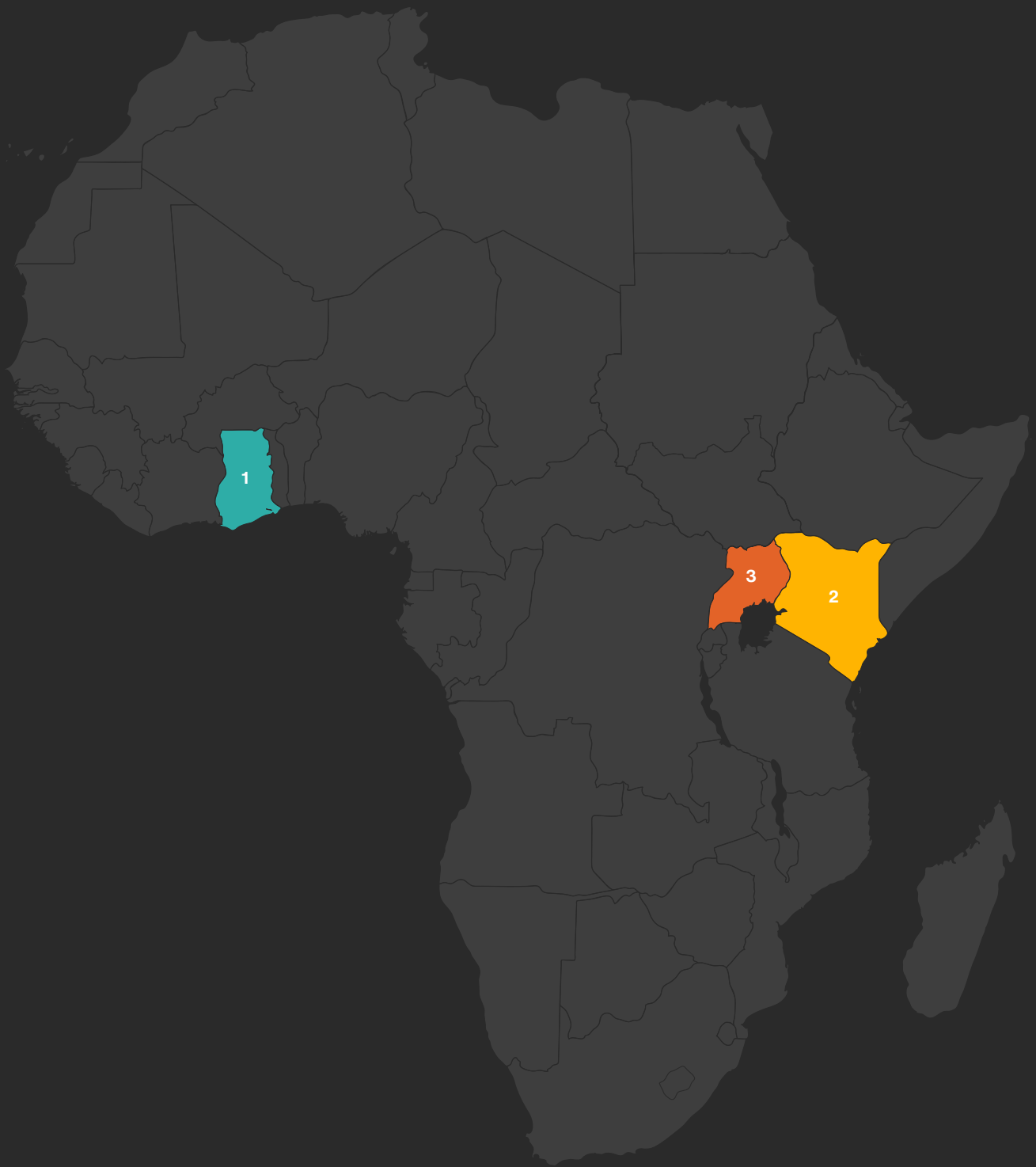
Figure 1 displays the geographical location of the three countries considered. Also, we propose a population dashboard which reports their population composition by age groups. This shows that young people, aged between 0 and 14 years old, account for around 40% of the populations in the three countries considered.

In what follows, we describe the sample size used to collect data and respondents' profiles by focus country.

**Fig. 1. Countries considered for the audience analysis**





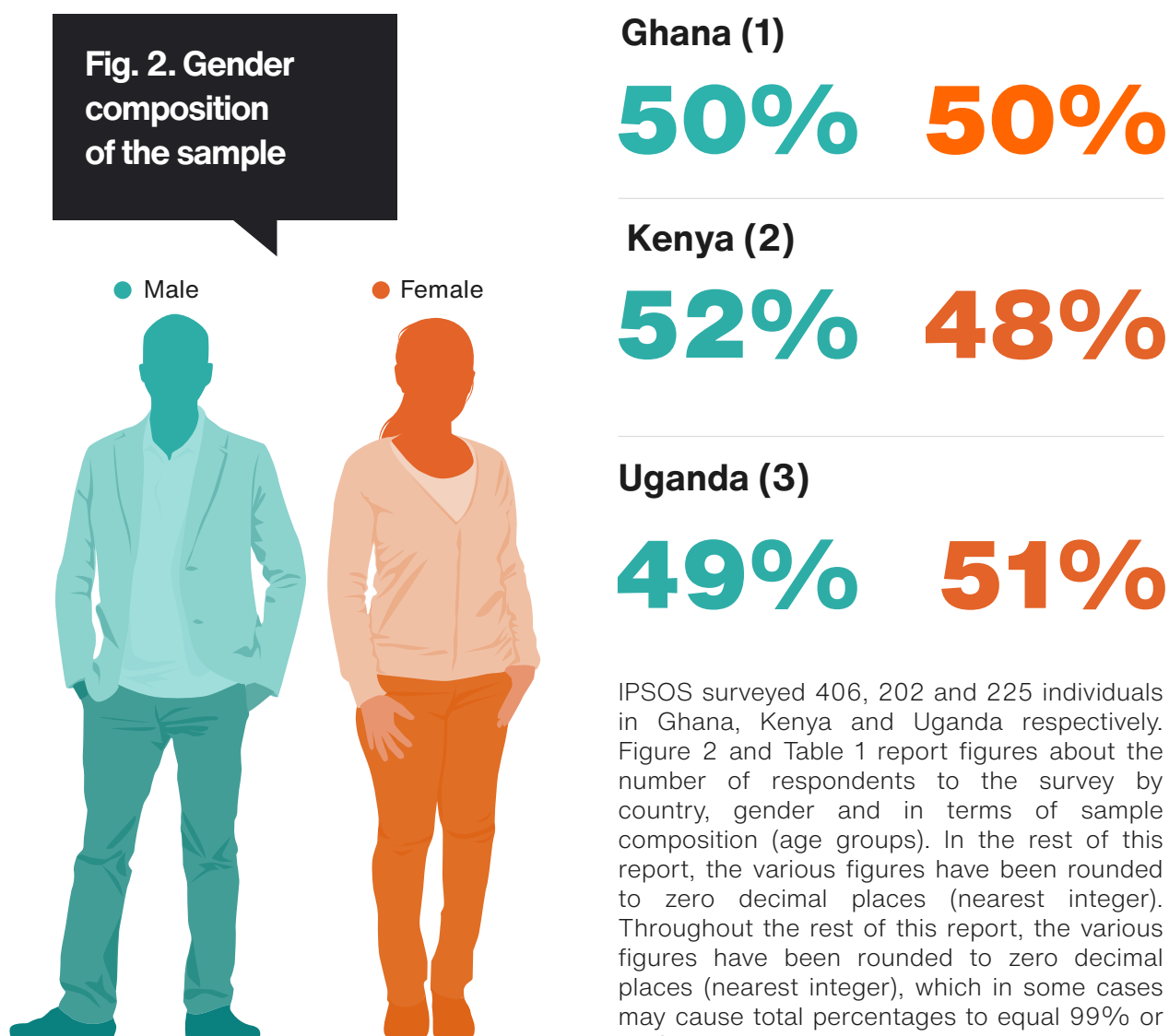


## 2.2. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

As mentioned before, our audience analysis focused on the perspectives of students and recent graduates in three SSA countries: Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. Regarding sample size, ESSA and IPSOS adopted a non-probabilistic approach and agreed on the minimal number of responses and gender ratio by country.













Participants were considered and surveyed in several cities, namely Accra and Tamale (in Ghana), Nairobi and Mombasa (in Kenya) and Kampala (in Uganda).

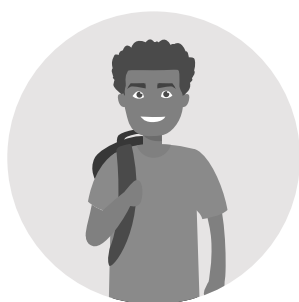
**Fig. 2. Gender composition of the sample**



<sup>2</sup> ESSA and IPSOS have agreed on the number of participants by country depending on the feasibility of data collection during COVID-19 lockdown as well as on budget constraints.

**Tab. 1. Sample description by country**

Country		Country		Country	
<b>Ghana</b>		<b>Kenya</b>		<b>Uganda</b>	
Total participants	<b>406</b>	Total participants	<b>202</b>	Total participants	<b>225</b>
 Students	<b>50%</b>	 Students	<b>50%</b>	 Students	<b>44%</b>
 Recent graduates	<b>30%</b>	 Recent graduates	<b>30%</b>	 Recent graduates	<b>38%</b>
 Faculty members	<b>20%</b>	 Faculty members	<b>20%</b>	 Faculty members	<b>18%</b>



Country / Age	18 to 29 years	30 to 39 years	40 years and above
<b>Ghana</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Kenya</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Uganda</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>5%</b>

Concerning age composition, almost 90% of our sample was constituted by young people aged between 18 and 39. In addition to the survey, we conducted in-depth interviews among education decision-makers – 10 in Ghana, 5 in Uganda and 5 in Kenya. However, this document presents the survey data.

# 3. EXPLORING THE DATA

This document aims to offer insights into young people and education stakeholders' understanding and perspectives on access to quality higher education and the transition to work in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. To achieve this, we assessed the survey data by using descriptive statistics.

## 3.1. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Access to education refers to how institutions and policy norms provide equal and equitable educational opportunities. From the perspective of post-secondary students, this can be assessed, among others, through access to information about universities and colleges, challenges surrounding access to higher education, challenges in the educational system, and funding opportunities. Our data collection covers most of these aspects.

### → INFORMATION ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION AND CHOICE

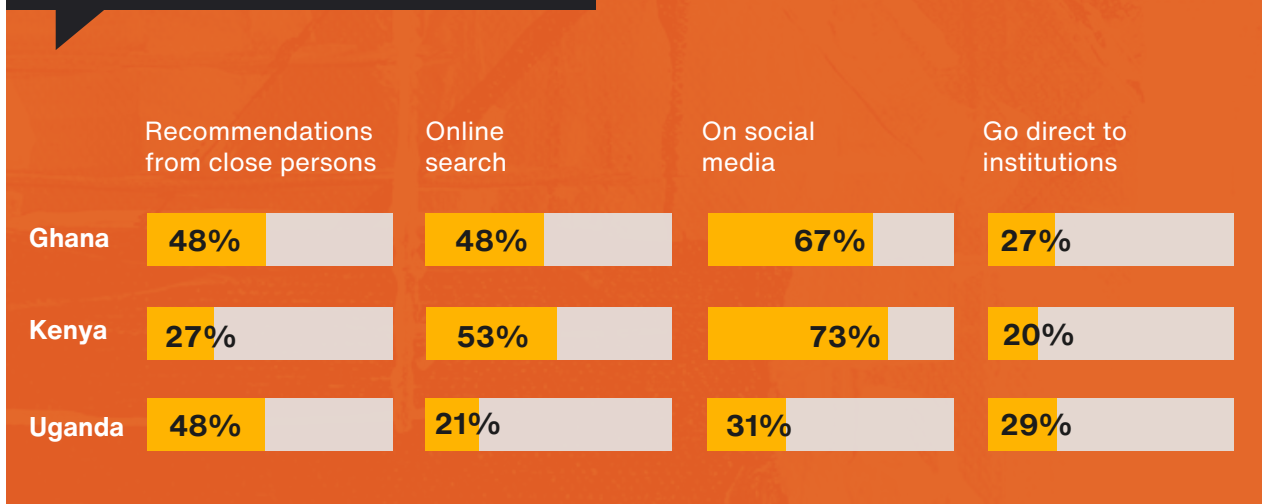
Observing data as displayed in Figure 3, the main channels used by students and recent graduates to find information about universities, colleges or TVET centres are “social media”, “recommendations from close persons”, as well as “online search”. In the three countries considered, a small proportion of students go to HEIs for information about educational opportunities. Regarding the choice of HEIs (Figure 4), few students based their choices on the “image of the university” and the “guidance from secondary school”. Most students across the three countries (i.e., 44% to 59%) reported that their choice is based on advice from family members and friends.





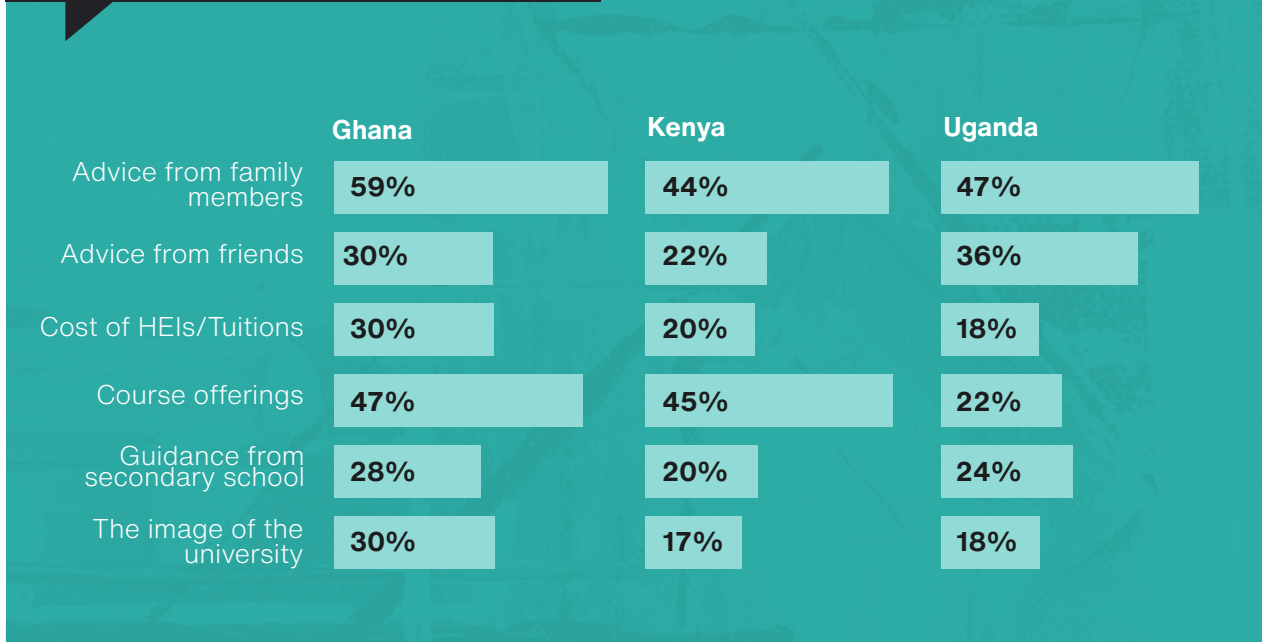


**Fig. 3. Where do you find out information about university or college or TVET?**



**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

**Fig. 4. How did you choose which university or college or TVET to go to? Based on**

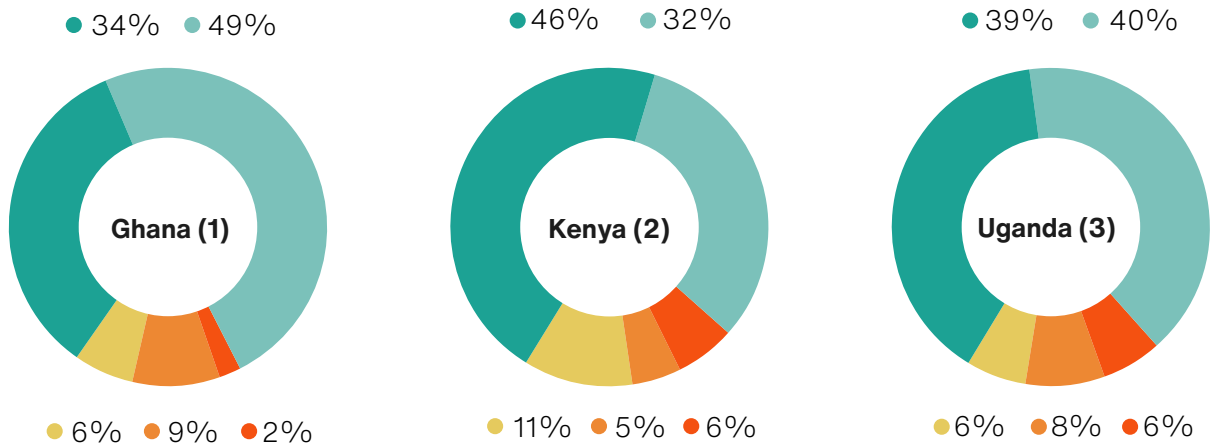
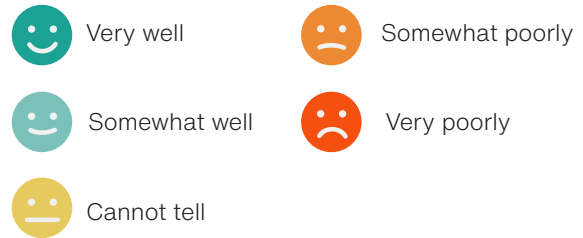


**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

## → MOTIVATION AND PREPAREDNESS

Access to higher education is subject to successful completion of secondary education. Before asking young Africans students their motivation and challenges to accessing higher education, we probed to understand their preparedness. In so doing, across the three countries, not less than 80% of students and recent graduates agreed that secondary school education prepared students well for tertiary education (Figure 5).

**Fig. 5. How did secondary school education prepare you for university or college or TVET?**



**Note:** Base is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

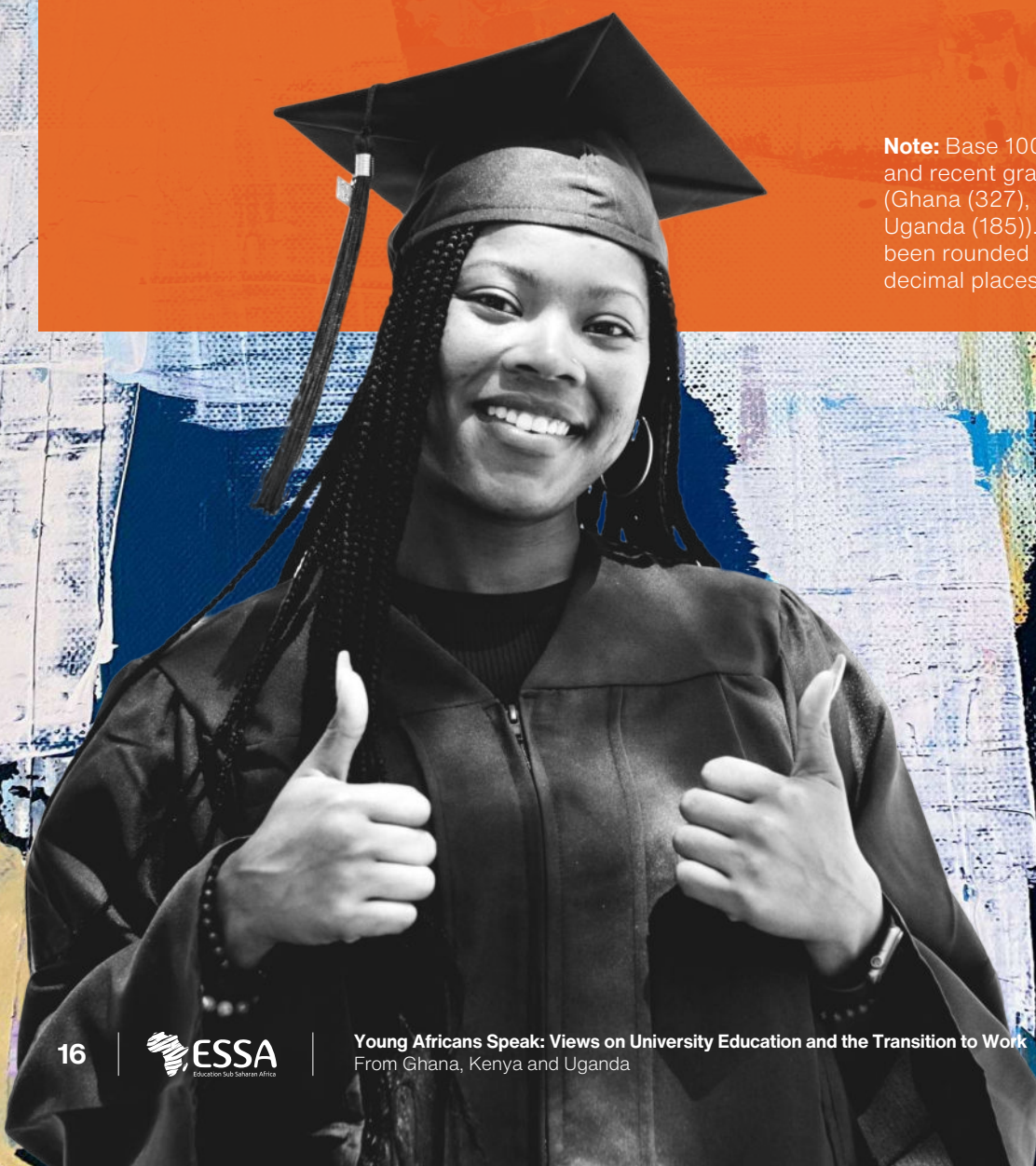
Regarding motivation for going to university or college (Figure 6), most respondents reported that it is the need to **“increase knowledge”** that drives them to undertake tertiary education. This is followed by the chances of having **“better career opportunities”** and **“make more money”** in Ghana. In Kenya and Uganda, students and recent graduates mentioned the desire to **“get life skills”** and have **“better career opportunities”** as their main motivation for pursuing higher education.



**Fig. 6. What are your motivations for going to university or college – beyond employment?**

	Better career opportunities	Entrepreneurship drive	Increase knowledge	Life skills	Make more money
Ghana	<b>69%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>39%</b>
Kenya	<b>45%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>31%</b>
Uganda	<b>41%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>32%</b>

**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

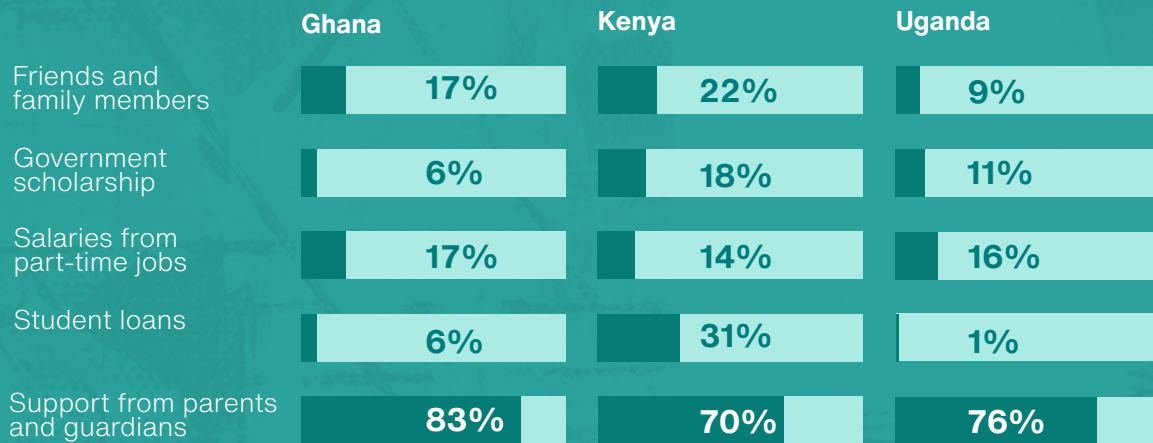




## → FINANCE AND CHALLENGES TO ACCESS EDUCATION

Prevalent models of education financing in SSA imply that higher education is paid for either by the taxpayer (free) or individual students and their families (fees and loans), as noted by **Oketch (2016)**. Our audience analysis also collected data on the different education finance options used by students in the three African countries considered.

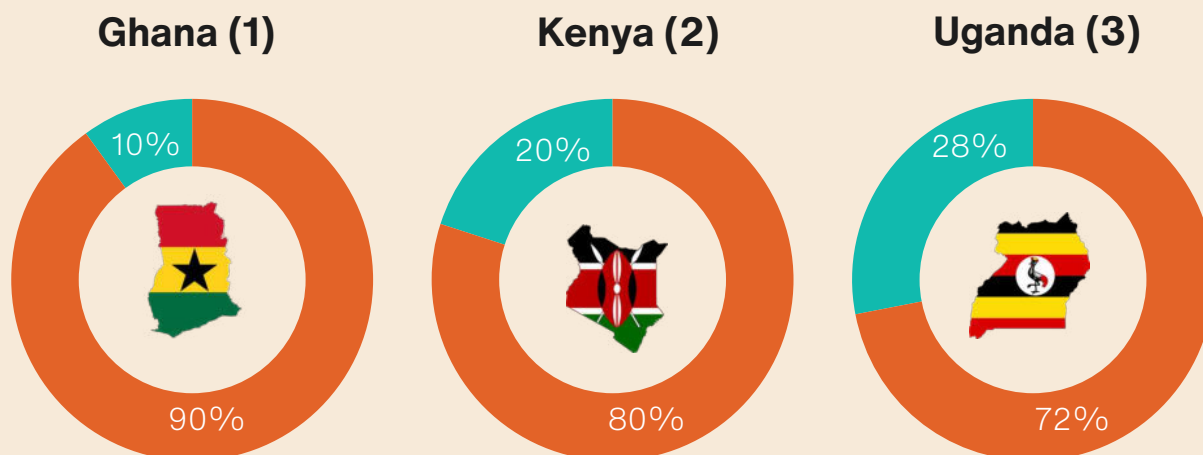
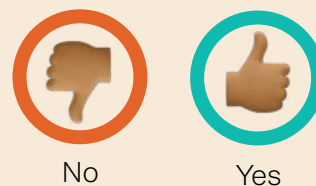
**Fig. 7. How do/did you finance your university or college or TVET education?**



**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.



**Fig. 8. Have you ever had an educational scholarship?**



**Note:** Base is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185))

Observing Figure 7, the financing of tertiary education is from “support from parents and guardians”. In Ghana, this is followed by support from “friends and family members” and “salaries from part-time jobs”, in Kenya by “student loans” and “support from friends and family members” and in Uganda by “salaries from part-time jobs” and “government scholarship.”

Regarding scholarship, although most students see scholarship programmes as helpful, the scholarship success rate was quite low across the three countries. In answering the question about whether students and recent graduates had ever had a scholarship, at either the secondary or tertiary levels, only a few respondents had a scholarship. The tallies indicated 10% in Ghana, 20% in Kenya, and 28% in Uganda (Figure 8). Given these figures, we can expect that most students face financial constraints to access tertiary education.



**Fig. 9. What are some of the barriers to choosing where to study?**



	Ghana	Kenya	Uganda
Financial constraint	65%	75%	74%
Inadequate facilities	43%	15%	34%
Poor infrastructure	44%	18%	18%
Quality of course and its relevance	42%	33%	22%

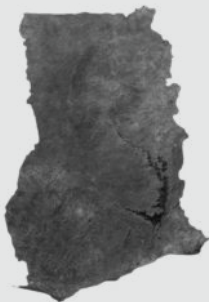
**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

In addition to challenges inherent to the educational system itself, students may face barriers to access education. We also probed to comprehend the latter during our audience analysis. Financial constraints are a major block to accessing tertiary education across the three African countries. Most respondents indicated that financial constraints drive their choice of where to study. In relation to Figure 7 about financing options, this last observation indicates that although several options are made available, they do not eradicate financial constraints faced by young students when choosing where to study.

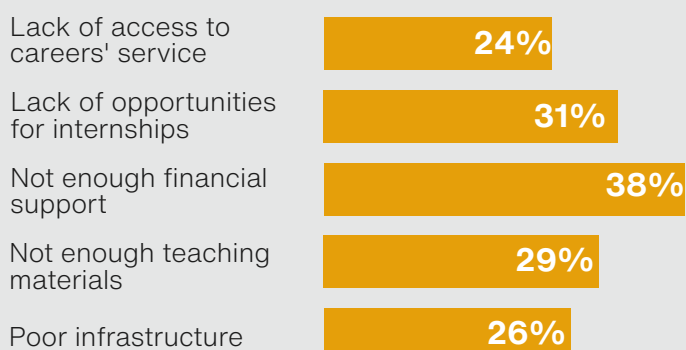
Among the top four barriers, students and recent graduates also listed inadequate facilities, poor infrastructure, lack of relevance of the course (Figure 9). Challenges inherent to the educational system, as reported by students and recent graduates, are displayed in Figure 10. Among others, more Ghanaian students identified educational infrastructure as a key challenge, while inadequate financial support is seen by more Kenyan and Ugandan students as a challenge to the educational system in their country. Other key concerns centre around inadequate teaching materials and lack of opportunities for internships (Figure 10).

**Fig. 10. What are some of the challenges you have observed with the educational system in this country?**

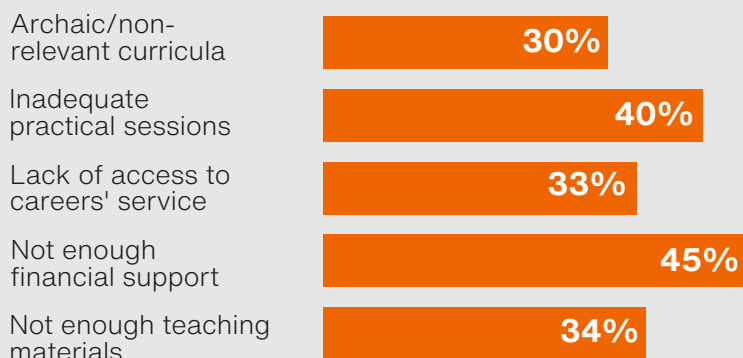
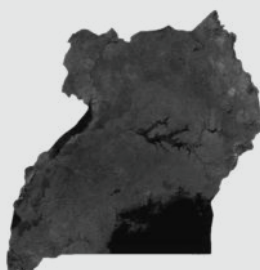
### Ghana



### Kenya



### Uganda



**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.



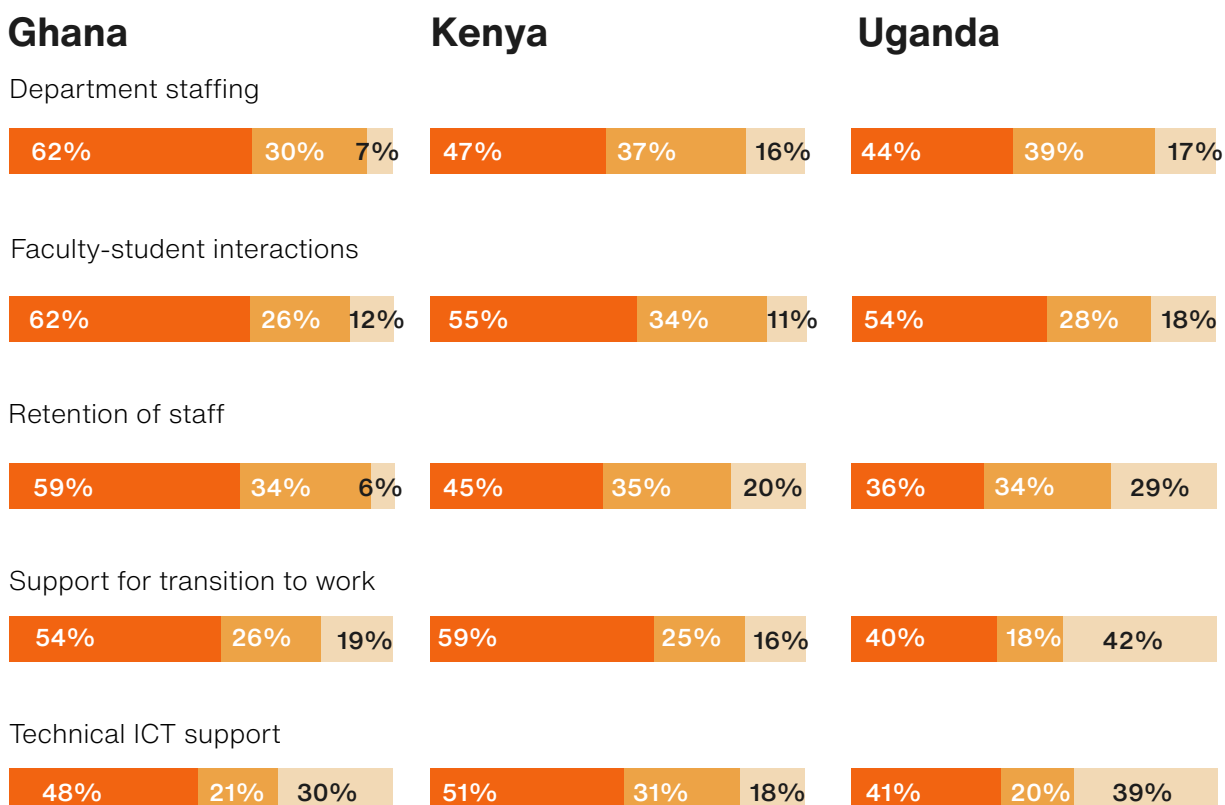
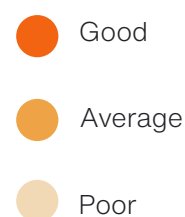
## 3.2. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

While it is important to increase access to education for all, especially in developing countries, the goal of education is to teach life skills and transfer knowledge (Roser et al., 2013). Regarding quality in education, it includes, among others, learners and their health, learning environment, the relevance of curricula and materials, teaching approaches, as well as outcomes. The complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept of quality education make it challenging to apprehend (UNICEF, 2000).

Our data collection process considered this complexity and used different survey questions to understand the quality of education from different perspectives and stakeholders.

### → RATING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

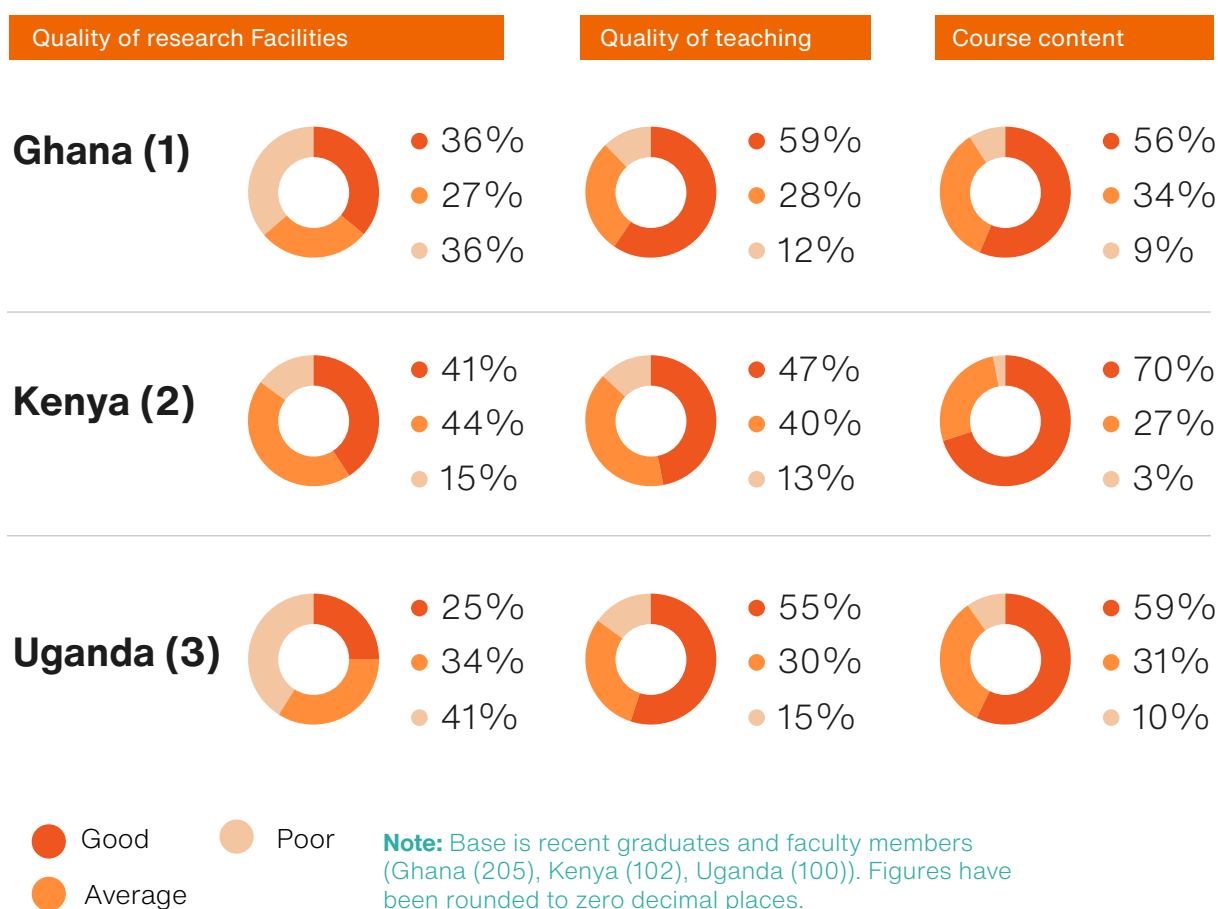
**Fig. 11. How do you feel about the following in your university or TVET and its effect on the quality of delivery?**



**Note:** Base is recent graduates and faculty members (Ghana (205), Kenya (102), Uganda (100)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

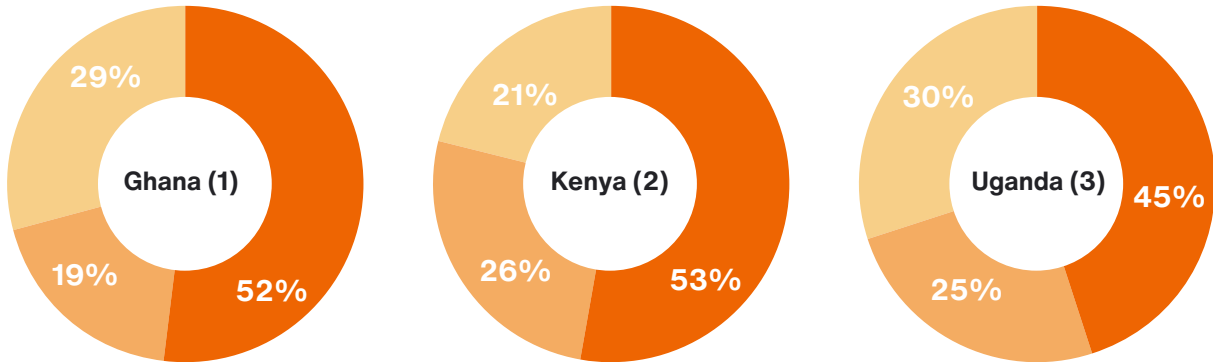
Observing the data (Figure 11), most graduates and faculty members from Ghana, Kenya and Uganda who responded to our survey felt positive about department staffing, faculty-student interactions, retention of staff and technical IT support in their universities. It should be noted that although poor infrastructure and teaching materials have been listed among the challenges of the educational system (Figure 10), the human element (department staff, teacher-student interactions) is considered of quality. Yet, regarding the transition from school-to-work, most participants from Uganda (42%) found the support to be poor, compared to Ghana (19%) and Kenya (16%).

**Fig. 12. How do young students feel about our universities and colleges or TVET?**



In Figure 12, graduates and faculty members reported that in their higher education institutions and TVET centres, course contents and the quality of teaching are good. However, for 36%, 15% and 41% of participants from Ghana, Kenya and Uganda respectively, the quality of research facilities of their universities, colleges or TVET centres are quite poor. Moreover, for an overall perspective about the educational system, in preparing young people to serve the needs of society, we asked respondents to rate the educational system in their countries. Figure 13 presents data on the latter aspect and indicates that students, graduates and faculty members rated the educational system as good.

**Fig. 13. Thinking about the educational system (in terms of preparing the people to serve the needs of the society we live in), would you say it is good/poor?**



● Good    ● Neither good nor poor    ● Poor

**Note:** Base is all (Ghana (406), Kenya (202), Uganda (225)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.



Image by freepik

## → AREAS TO IMPROVE AND PLAN TO STUDY ABROAD

Following the considerations on quality of education as perceived by different stakeholders, we probed to understand the areas of education that students and graduates believe need improvement. The top three areas listed by students and graduates vary slightly across countries, but it appears that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills and subjects deserve further attention to improve education outcomes for students. In addition, some improvements are required in technical/technological skills, mathematics, communication as well as more practical sessions (Figure 14).

**Fig. 14. Which subject areas require attention to improve outcomes for students?**



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### Ghana

	ICT	<b>25%</b>
	Technical/ Technology skills	<b>16%</b>
	Practicals	<b>11%</b>

### Kenya

	Practicals & Internship/ mentorship	<b>13%</b>
	ICT	<b>5%</b>
	Mathematics	<b>5%</b>

### Uganda

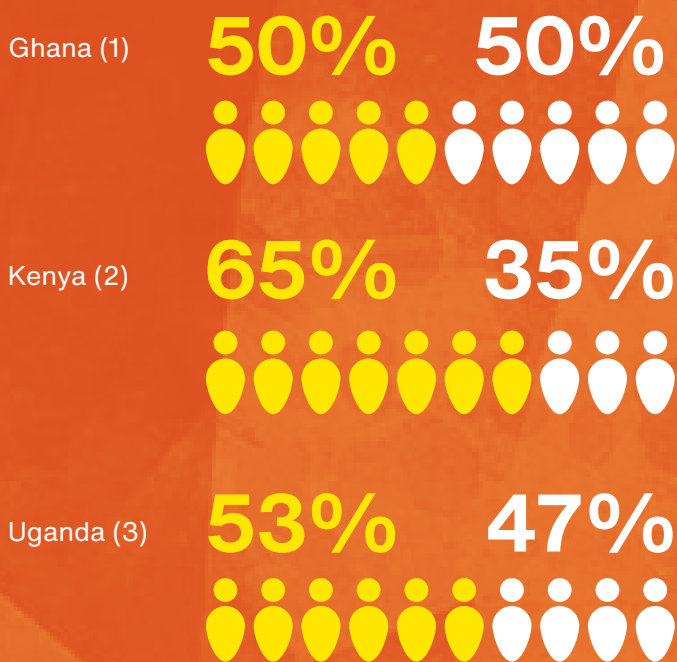
	Practicals	<b>40%</b>
	ICT	<b>25%</b>
	Communication	<b>10%</b>

**Note:** Base 100 is students and recent graduates (Ghana (79), Kenya (39), Uganda (40)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.



**Fig. 15. Do you have any plans to study abroad?**

● YES    ● NO



**Note:** Base 100 is students (Ghana (205), Kenya (102), Uganda (100)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

Finally, evidence shows that the outcomes of seeking higher education abroad are larger in countries with poorer university quality. Moreover, since quality is among the main reasons why young people aim for higher education abroad, **(GEM Report, 2020)**, our audience analysis tried to assess students' and graduates' perceptions about studying abroad. Data from the three focus countries indicates that over 50% of students had plans to study abroad (Figure 15).

Image by freepik

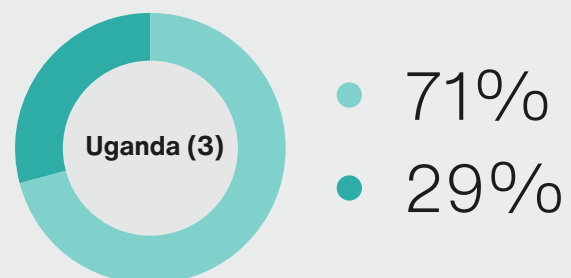
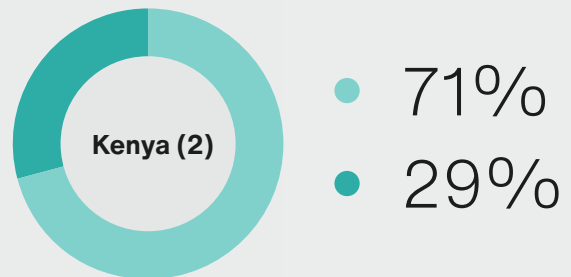
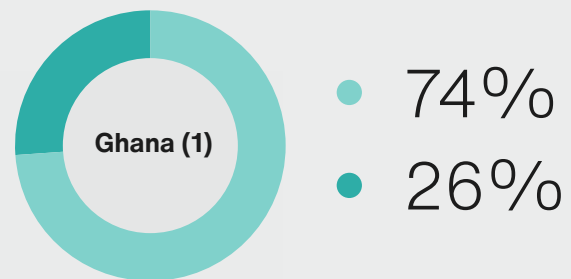
### 3.3. TRANSITION TO WORK

The aim of higher education is, among others, to provide young people with lifelong skills and values to improve their chances of quality jobs. Thus, as part of our audience analysis, we looked at the issues surrounding the transition to work, to try to understand whether young people work during their studies, their motivations for doing so, and the usefulness of education and training to find a job.

#### → WORKING STUDENTS

For several reasons, students work during their studies, mostly part-time. In Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, the data collected indicates that between 25% and 30% of students work while schooling. Among the working students, over 75% earned some pay since they work for private companies, in a family business, and as interns (Figure 16). Seeking to understand the main motivations why some young people work during their studies, the data revealed that around 80% of working students do so to earn to support themselves and their families, and to get professional experience (Figure 17).

Fig. 16-a. Did you work while you studied (or do you work while you study)?

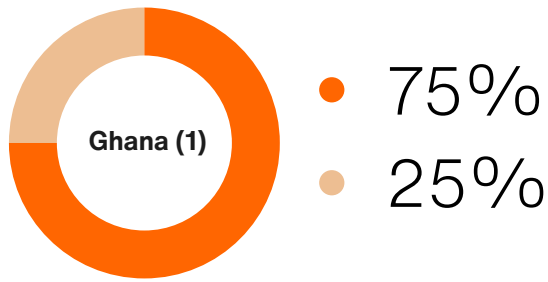


- NO
- YES

**Note:** Base is students and recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185))

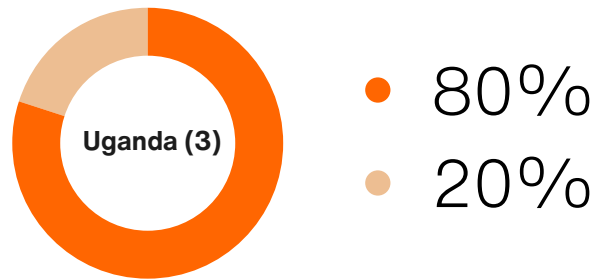
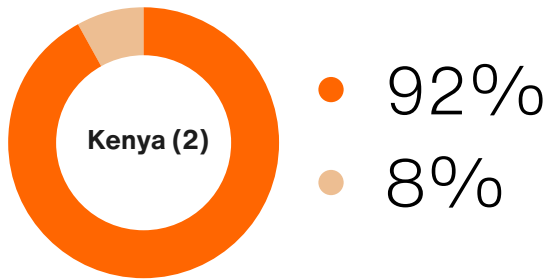


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**Fig. 16-b. Was the work paid or unpaid?**

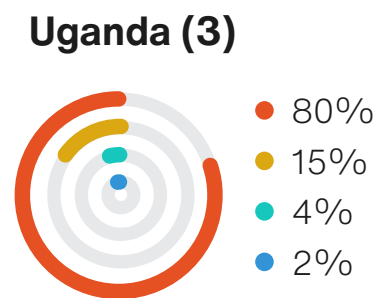
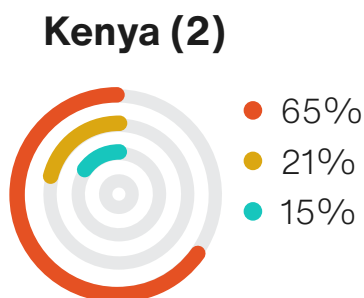
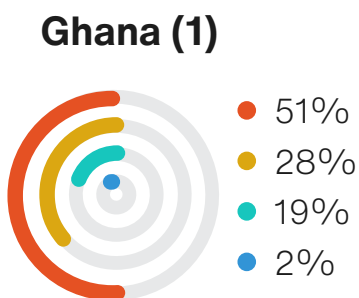
● PAID ● UNPAID



**Note:** Base is students and recent graduates who work/worked while studying (Ghana (85), Kenya (48), Uganda (54))

**Fig. 17. What was (is) your primary motivation in working while studying?**

- To earn money/ to cater for self and family
- To gain work experience/build up a curriculum vitae
- To make connections that could lead to future employment
- Other

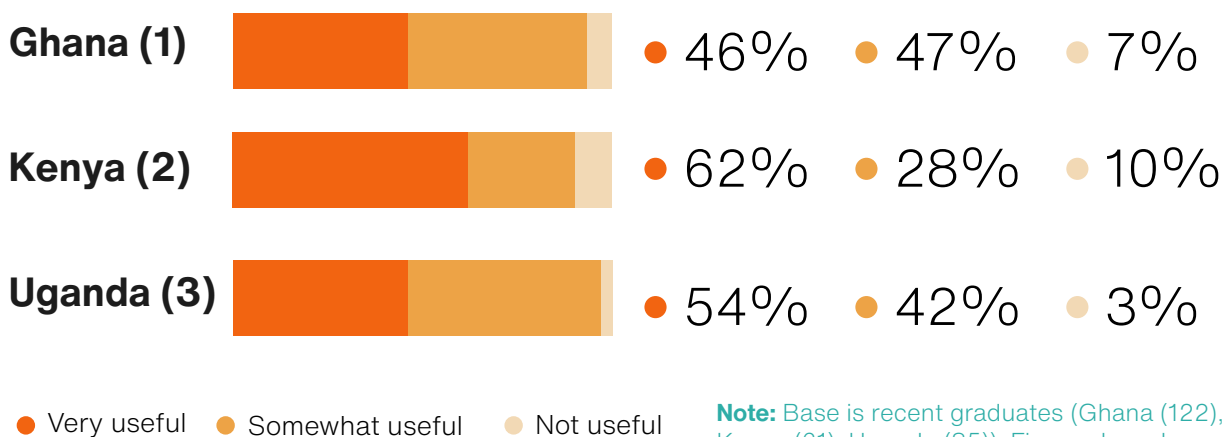


**Note:** Base is students and recent graduates who work/worked while studying (Ghana (85), Kenya (48), Uganda (54)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

## → USEFULNESS OF TRAINING AND AMBITIONS

Higher education is an investment, the highest returns of which can be achieved only when the life skills that have been gained through education are used. Thus, asking young graduates “how useful education is?” seems of major importance, as answers to that question may highlight the discrepancies between skills gained through education and the ones required by the labour market.

**Fig. 18. Do you feel the education/training you received in the past is useful in getting a job?**



**Note:** Base is recent graduates (Ghana (122), Kenya (61), Uganda (85)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

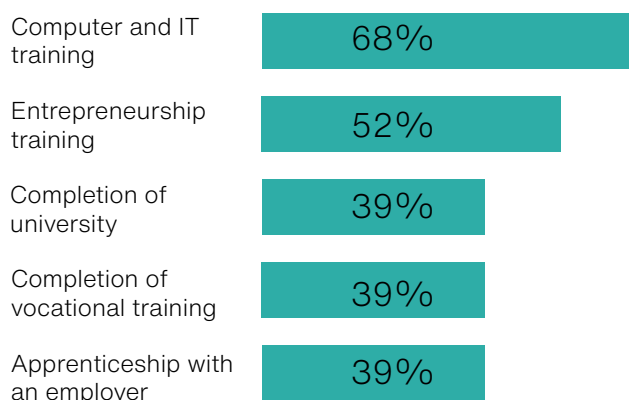


Image by senivpetro on Freepik

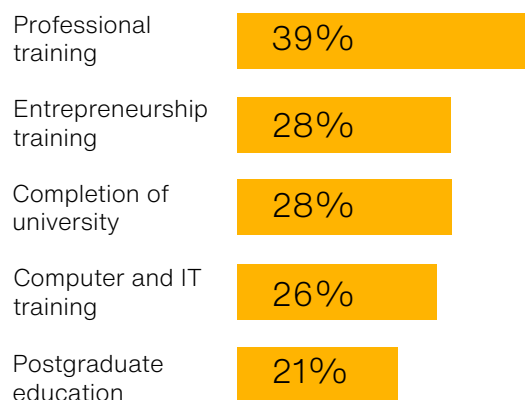


**Fig. 19. What kind of training do you think would be most helpful in finding a job?**

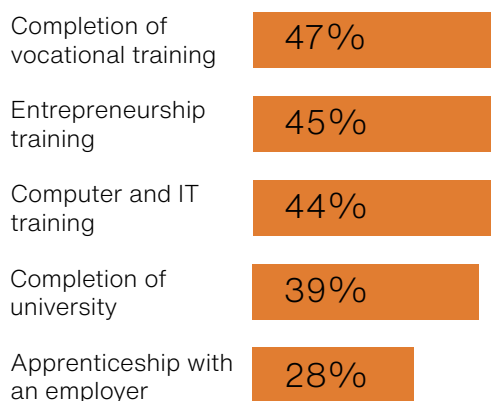
### Ghana



### Kenya



### Uganda



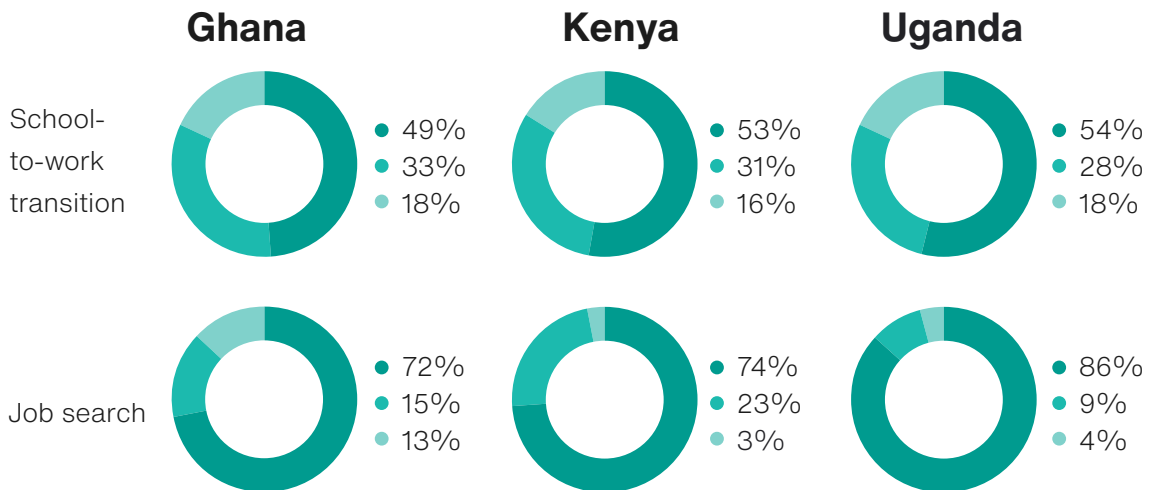
**Note:** Base 100 is recent graduates (Ghana (122), Kenya (61), Uganda (85)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

On the usefulness of education in getting a job, responses by recent graduates from Ghana, Kenya and Uganda indicated that for more than 90% of young people, the education and training they received are useful to get a job (Figure 18). Also, we surveyed young graduates about training they consider most helpful in finding employment. On this last aspect, most Ghanaian graduates mentioned that computer and information technology, and entrepreneurship training are the two most helpful additional training for finding a job. In Kenya, recent graduates selected vocational training and entrepreneurship training as the two most useful training, while in Uganda it was the completion of vocational training and

entrepreneurship training (Figure 19). Besides the usefulness of higher education to find a job, we tried to understand how young graduates rate challenges relating to job search, school-to-work transition as well as how different socio-economic factors contribute to forming young people's career ambitions. Overall, for most recent graduates - more than 70% in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, job search is challenging. Similarly, rating the entire employment circle, many young graduates reported data suggesting that, though higher education is useful to find a job, the transitioning process from school-to-work is challenging (Figure 20).

**Fig. 20. How would you rate your personal experience across below stages during your employment cycle?**

- More challenging
- Normal challenges
- Less challenging/other



**Note:** Base is recent graduates (Ghana (122), Kenya (61), Uganda (85)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

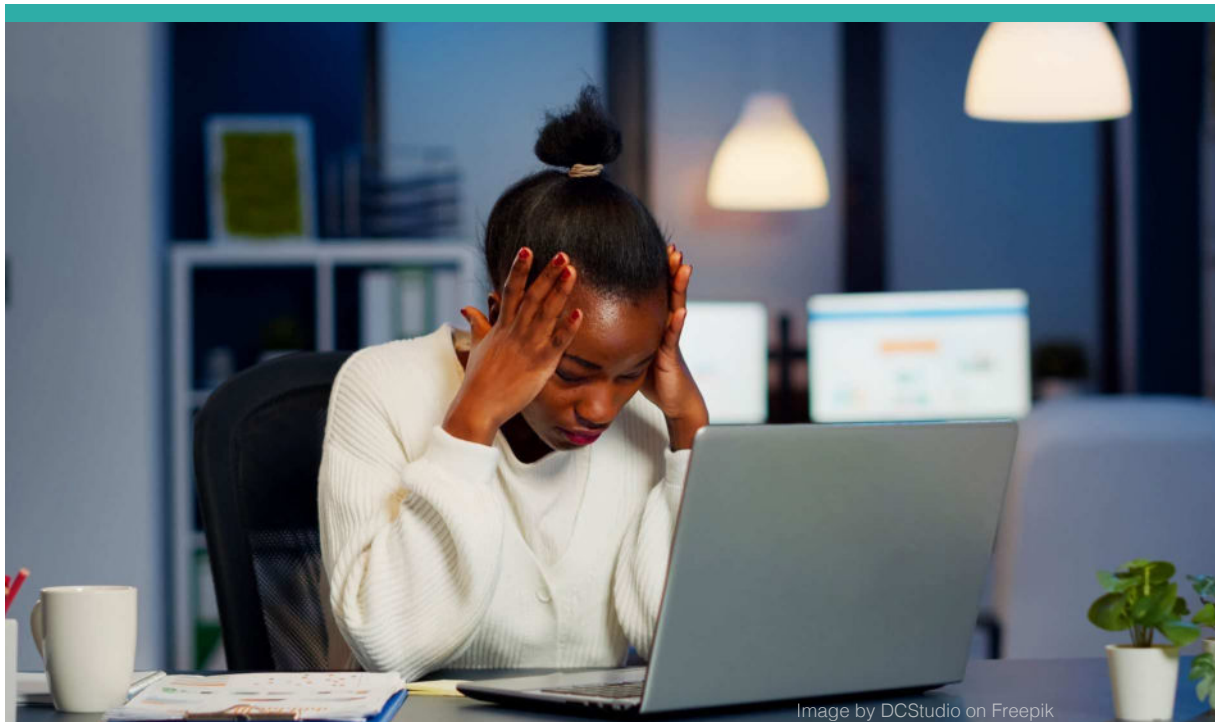
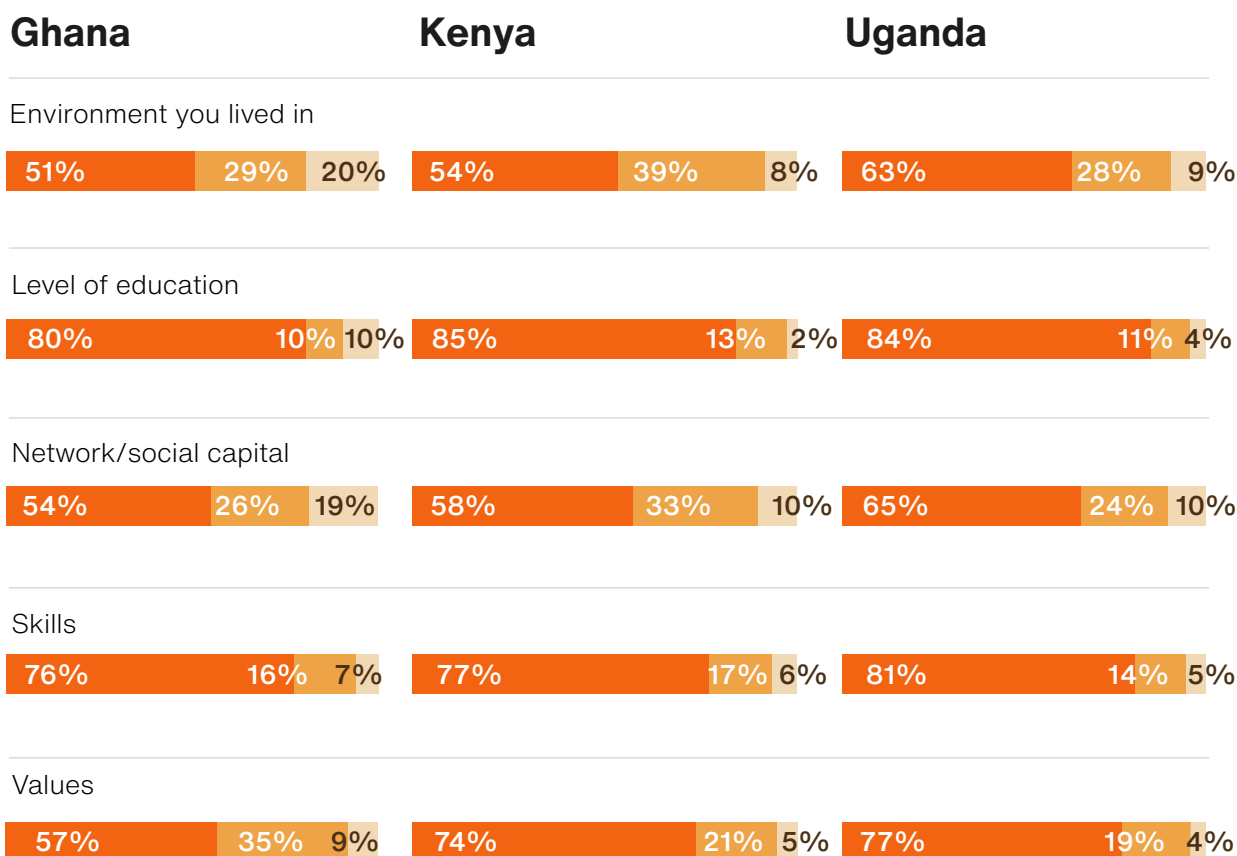


Image by DCStudio on Freepik

Finally, concerning career ambitions, theoretical perspectives show that both individual (aptitudes, abilities, and values) and environmental characteristics contribute to the formation of career ambitions (Royle, 2015). In the same vein, our audience analysis questions the role, among others, of education, skills, and network in students' and recent graduates' career ambitions.

**Fig. 21. To what extent do you think the factors below affect your personal career ambitions?**

- Positively
- Neutral
- Negatively



**Note:** Base is students recent graduates (Ghana (327), Kenya (163), Uganda (185)). Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

Figure 21 reports five factors that drive career ambitions, as reported by students and recent graduates in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. In all three countries, most of our stakeholders mentioned that their level of education and skills positively affect their career ambitions. In addition to these factors, 54% and 51% of Ghanaian students and graduates stated that their network (social capital) and the environment they lived in as having an impact on their career ambitions. Similar tallies were reported in Kenya. Likewise, in Uganda, 63% and 65% of respondents respectively identified their network and immediate environment as positively driving their career ambitions.

A final step in assessing the transition from school to work, as perceived by young African graduates, consisted of looking for the main challenges to finding a job. Responses to the question *what has been the main obstacle in finding a decent job?* helped identify factors such as *“Not enough jobs available,” “No work experience,” “Limited access to information of job opportunities,” “Poor working conditions in available jobs”* and *“Low wages in available jobs.”* The data suggested that a key obstacle faced by African graduates in job search is the unavailability of enough jobs, aside from the fact that most graduates have no work experience.

## 3.4. RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

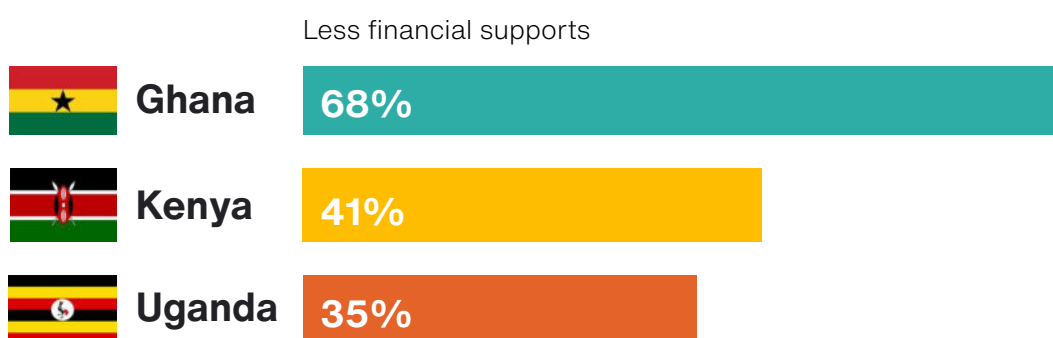
For our audience analysis, in addition to students and recent graduates, we surveyed and interviewed faculty members and decision-makers in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. This aspect of the data highlights considerations relating to the educational system, evidence generation and gender, and communication.

### → RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT AND OUTPUT

It is well documented that research and researchers in African higher education institutions face some challenges, among others, the inadequacy of resources or materials and poor quality of research equipment. Considering faculty members in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, we tried to understand which factor academics perceive as being the main setback while planning and carrying out research.

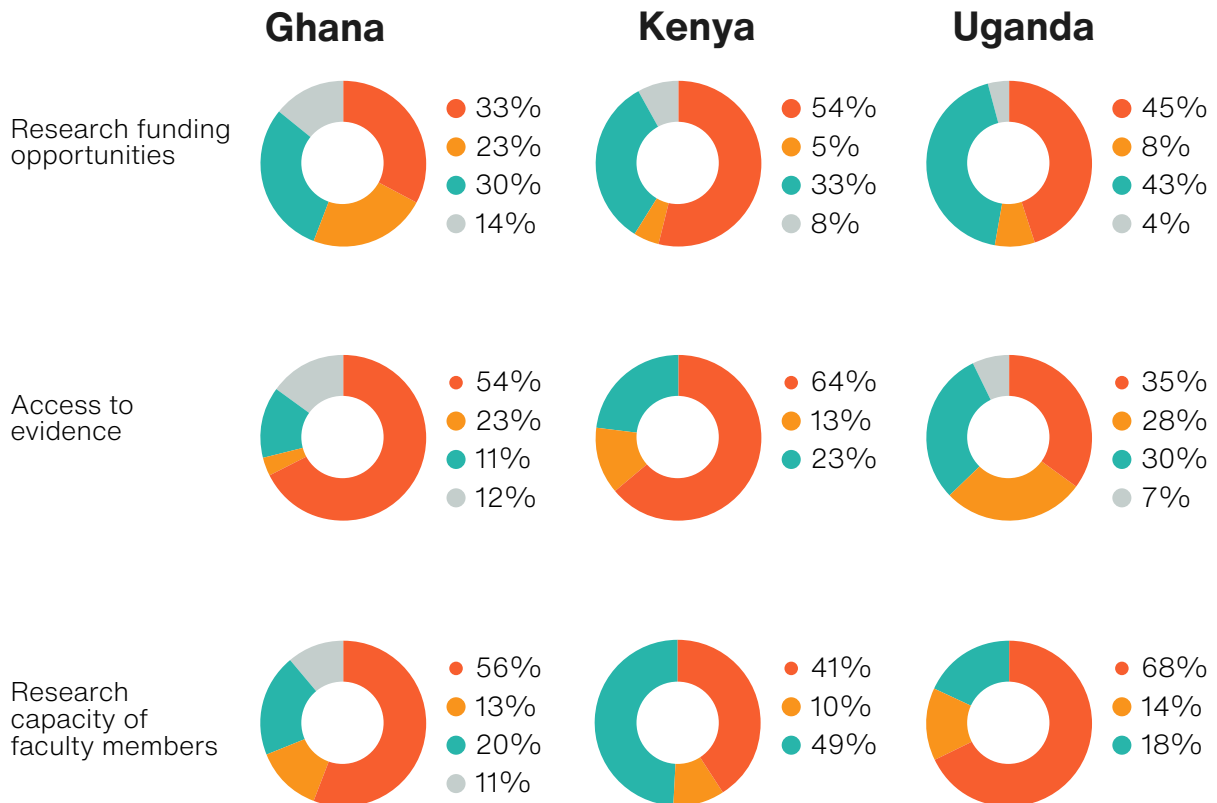
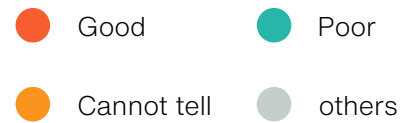
Faculty members in all three countries identified financial support within their institutions as a challenge (Figure 22). For 68%, 41% and 35% of Ugandan, Kenyan and Ghanaian academics, the limited financial support is the main obstacle they face when carrying out research activities (**Essah et al., 2021**). In the same vein, we asked respondents (faculty members) to rate, among others, funding, and research capacity within their institutions.

**Fig. 22. What are the setbacks you usually envisage or know of, while carrying out research?**



**Note:** Base 100 is faculty members.

**Fig. 23. How do you assess the following regarding research within universities or colleges?**

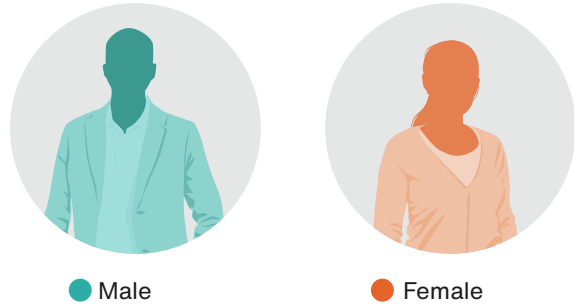


**Note:** Base 100 is faculty members. Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

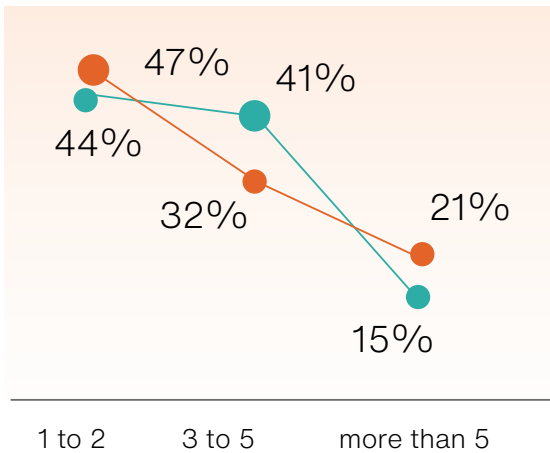
Figure 23 reports data about academics' assessment of research funding opportunities, access to research material and research capacity of faculty members in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. Analysing the figures, that for a significant share of researchers in the countries considered, research funding opportunities are poor. Besides these concerns about research funding, while 54% and 64% of Ghanaian and Kenyan academics respectively considered that access to documentation is good in their institutions, this figure was only 35% in Uganda. Finally, regarding research capacity, most respondents from Ghana and Uganda (56% and 68% respectively) indicated that faculty members in their institutions have a good capacity to carry out research activities.



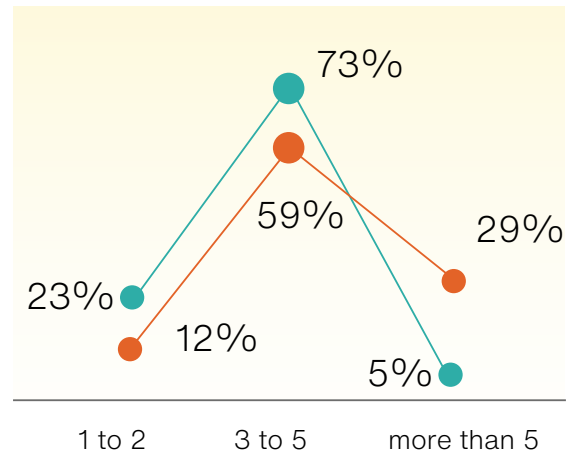
**Fig. 24. On average, how many research papers do you publish in five years?**



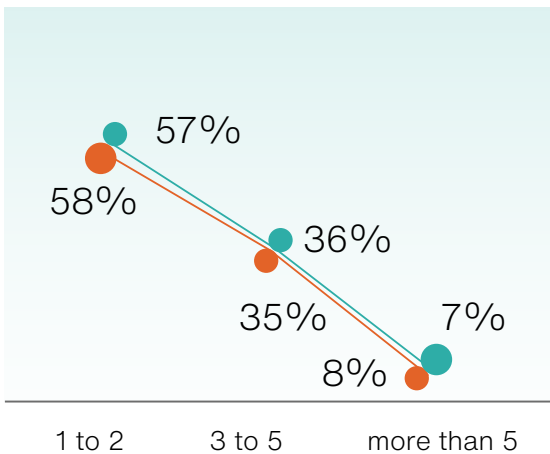
### Ghana



### Kenya



### Uganda



**Note:** Base 100 is faculty members. Figures have been rounded to zero decimal places.

Research publication is one of the most important elements of research culture and international academic competition between researchers or higher education institutions. Whether for the purpose of career advancement or scientific contribution, academics in the focus countries are likely to publish their work. Our audience analysis collected data on research outputs. Figure 24 displays the number of research articles published in the five years preceding the survey (2021). The data reported indicates that most female and male academics in Ghana and Uganda published 1 to 2 research papers during the considered period of five years, compared to Kenya where most researchers published between three and five items. In terms of patterns, the survey data signals that male and female Kenya academics are more productive than their counterparts from Ghana and Uganda.

# 4. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

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## 4.1. CONCLUDING REMARKS

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This report overviews data collected in 2021 in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, for the purpose of building understanding of the higher education ecosystem in the three focus countries. Also, to assess how students, graduates, and faculty members perceived issues related to several aspects of higher education. Assessing the data has revealed some lessons relating to access to education, quality of education, and the transition to the labour market.

**Access to tertiary education is open to all in the three countries considered, subject to obtaining a pass mark.** Some challenges persist in the educational system and for almost 70% of students and recent graduates in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, financial constraints drive their choice of where to study. **Considering the quality of the educational system, most respondents (80%) think it serves the needs of society well.** Similarly, around 50% of recent graduates and faculty members, rated the quality of teachings as good. Yet, besides infrastructure and teaching materials-related issues, the quality of the educational system still faces challenges. For instance, 43%, 31% and 30% of students and recent graduates from Ghana, Kenya and Uganda reported *too abstract tuition, a lack of career service and an*

*archaic/non-relevant curriculum, respectively.* **About the transition to the labour market, most students think about their career while studying, and they even suggested that ICT, communication, and entrepreneurial training and skills are useful to meet their career ambitions.** *Unavailability of enough jobs* in the labour market, in addition to the fact that most graduates have no work experience are, among others, factors affecting the transition to work.

This audience analysis, contrasting the voice of students, recent graduates, and faculty members have several implications for ESSA's work as well as education decision-makers. For the latter, it is to note that although access to tertiary education is open to all and different financing opportunities are available in the countries under consideration, financial constraints, limited scholarship opportunities, irrelevant curricula, and poor infrastructures, among others, are persisting issues that require urgent attention. For ESSA, despite its data-related limitations, this assessment helped identify knowledge gaps relating to *“access to educational scholarship”* and *“usefulness of higher education for finding a job,”* among others, that motivate ESSA's future research.

## 4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The different groups of respondents mentioned some priority areas and challenges in the educational system that need improvement. Our recommendations to public authorities and higher education decision-makers reflect our observations as well as suggestions provided by students, graduates, and faculty members. Specifically:

### → AN EQUITABLE SCHOLARSHIP POLICY TARGETING STUDENTS IN NEED

Scholarship opportunities and access are mostly academic performance based. This also applies in most African universities, as observed by university decision-makers during the interviews. Thus, some students, who do not need it, get an educational scholarship, while those who really need that to pursue higher education do not. **Although justified by academic merits, this procedure excludes (economically) disadvantaged groups. Policies towards equity in access to scholarship, more broadly funding opportunities, are needed to support specific groups.** In addition to equity policies, the data encourages scholarship providers and university decision-makers to **also use for dissemination channels students mostly rely on to find out information about universities, courses, and opportunities: social media and online platform.** Using channels primarily used by students for the dissemination of scholarship-related information will expand access to funding opportunities and increase equity.

### → EMPHASIS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PRACTICAL TRAINING

Transition to work appears to be challenging for young graduates, as reported by the survey data. Also, the experience of unavailability of job opportunities, coupled with the lack of practical knowledge and work experience, represent serious concerns for young students and graduates. **An emphasis on practical training, most importantly entrepreneurship and internships, could give young Africans practical skills and prepare them to start their own businesses, instead of remaining unemployed or underemployed.**

### → INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE, RESEARCH FACILITY AND CAPACITY

Quality of teaching and excellent research requires, in addition to human capacity, adequate facility and infrastructure. As indicated by higher education stakeholders in the three countries considered, **continued investments in infrastructure, ICT materials and research equipment, as well as facilities, are needed to improve the quality of teaching content, research, and evidence generation.**



Image by Roungroat  
via <https://t.ly/BC4L>

### 4.3. LIMITATIONS AND AVENUE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

First, the data presented in this report will strengthen ESSA's background knowledge of the educational system and its stakeholders in the countries considered. Also, due to financial constraints and COVID-19-related restriction measures, a total of 406, 202 and 225 higher education stakeholders participated in the data collection process in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda respectively. Such a sample size is not representative of HEIs, nor of students, recent graduates, and faculty members in the considered countries. Moreover, survey data are partly opinions and need to be confirmed by existing research and evidence since opinions may suffer from subjectivity. Second, our assessment of the data uses descriptive statistics to reflect the voice of young people in the considered African countries. In so doing, it does not provide genuine explanations to our observations and related questions such as: Access to education scholarship: Who needs

and who gets a scholarship? Why for some students, their education or training is useful to get a job, while for others it is not? Why do most students in the considered countries plan to study abroad?

These limitations in the data and assessment represent opportunities for more targeted data collection and investigations into the drivers of the different observations made. For instance, answering the question, "Who needs and who gets a scholarship?" will help explore the drivers of access to an educational scholarship, in addition to informing policies towards equity in access to scholarships. Understanding why most students plan to study abroad will be useful in identifying the role of access, quality, work opportunities and finances in young people's desire to study abroad. This latter research work will also be useful in designing and implementing policies aimed at curbing the brain drain.





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VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY  
EDUCATION AND THE  
TRANSITION TO WORK

FROM GHANA, KENYA AND UGANDA



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