

Enhancing Historical Research in Private Universities: The Ugandan Case

By

Aisha Aiseta

Islamic University in Uganda

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Department of History

Email:aisetae2000@gmail.com

Mobile:+25670458747

Abstract

This study examines the challenges and opportunities for enhancing historical research in private universities in Uganda. Despite the growing number of private universities in Uganda, historical research remains underdeveloped due to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches (Kigongo, 2017). This study argues that private universities in Uganda can enhance historical research by prioritizing investment in research infrastructure, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, developing strategic partnerships, and making historical research more relevant to contemporary societal needs (Mudoola, 2006; Kasozi, 2018). A mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys, interviews, and focus groups with academics, administrators, and students from selected private universities in Uganda. The findings highlight the need for private universities to address the challenges facing historical research, including limited access to primary sources, inadequate funding, and a lack of research culture (Ssekamwa, 2017). The study recommends that private universities in Uganda adopt a comprehensive approach to enhancing historical research, incorporating infrastructure development, interdisciplinary collaboration, partnerships, and applied research. By doing so, private universities can contribute meaningfully to historical scholarship in Uganda and inform policy and practice in the country.

Key Words: History, Research, Uganda

Introduction

Historical research refers to the systematic and rigorous investigation of past events, phenomena, and contexts to understand their significance, impact, and relevance to the present and future (Novick, 1988). Historical research is a systematic process of investigating past events to understand and interpret the causes, effects, and significance of those events in a historical context. This type of research involves examining primary sources (such as documents, artifacts, and eyewitness accounts) and secondary sources (such as books, articles, and documentaries) to reconstruct and analyse past occurrences. The goal is to provide a detailed and accurate portrayal of historical phenomena, contributing to a deeper understanding

of human history and societal evolution. It involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of primary and secondary sources, including texts, images, artifacts, and oral testimonies, to reconstruct and make sense of historical experiences (Gaddis, 2002).

Historical research encompasses various subfields, such as:

- i. Social history: Examines the experiences and social structures of ordinary people (Thompson, 1963).
- ii. Cultural history: Analyzes the cultural practices, beliefs, and values of past societies (Burke, 2004).
- iii. Political history: Studies the political institutions, processes, and ideologies of historical societies (Skocpol, 1985).
- iv. Economic history: Investigates the economic systems, processes, and developments of past societies (North, 1990).

Sources for Historical Research:

- i. Primary Sources: These are original, uninterpreted sources directly from the period being studied. Examples include letters, diaries, official records, photographs, and physical artifacts.
- ii. Secondary Sources: These are analyses or interpretations of primary sources. Examples include scholarly books, journal articles, and documentaries.

The Key Features include the following:

- i. Chronological Framework: Historical research often follows a timeline, presenting events in a sequential order to show development and change over time.
- ii. Contextual Analysis: Understanding the context in which events occurred is crucial. This involves considering the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the time.
- iii. Interpretation and Synthesis: Researchers interpret data, identifying patterns and drawing conclusions about the significance of historical events.

Examples of Historical Research Projects:

- **Harvard University:** A study on the social impact of the American Civil War, using letters and diaries from soldiers and civilians to understand their experiences and perspectives.
- **University of Oxford:** An analysis of medieval trade routes, utilizing archaeological findings and historical records to reconstruct the economic networks of the time.
- **Stanford University:** A comparative study of the French and Russian revolutions, examining political pamphlets, government documents, and contemporary newspaper accounts to identify common causes and outcomes.

Benchmarking from Universities in Developed Countries

1. **Harvard University:** Harvard's History Department emphasizes a comprehensive approach to historical research. Students are trained to utilize a wide range of primary sources and apply interdisciplinary methods to analyze historical events. For example, the Harvard Guide to Using Sources provides extensive guidance on locating and evaluating primary and secondary sources for historical research (Harvard University, 2020).

2. **University of Oxford:** The University of Oxford's Faculty of History is renowned for its rigorous research standards. Oxford encourages the use of diverse sources, including archival documents, oral histories, and digital databases. Their History Research Guide outlines methods for conducting thorough and ethical historical research (University of Oxford, 2020).

3. **Stanford University:** Stanford's History Department focuses on the importance of contextualizing historical events within broader global narratives. Stanford historians often engage in comparative studies, analyzing historical phenomena across different cultures and periods. The Stanford History Education Group provides resources on evaluating historical sources and constructing well-supported historical arguments (Stanford University, 2020).

Key Findings And Observations:

- a. **Limited research infrastructure:** Private universities in Uganda face challenges in providing adequate research infrastructure, including libraries, archives, and funding (Kigongo, 2017).

- b. Lack of interdisciplinary approaches: Historical research in private universities tends to be discipline-bound, neglecting interdisciplinary collaboration and innovative methodologies (Mudoola, 2006).
- c. Inadequate training and capacity building: Faculty members in private universities often lack training in historical research methods and pedagogy, hindering their ability to conduct and supervise research (Ssekamwa, 2017).
- d. Limited engagement with contemporary issues: Historical research in private universities tends to focus on traditional topics, neglecting contemporary issues and relevance to Ugandan society (Kasozi, 2018).
- e. Potential for partnerships and collaborations: Private universities can leverage partnerships with local and international institutions to enhance historical research capacity and output (Ssekamwa, 2017).

Discussions:

Kigongo (2017) argues that private universities in Uganda must prioritize investment in research infrastructure to enhance historical research. Kigongo (2017) indeed argues that private universities in Uganda must prioritize investment in research infrastructure to enhance historical research (Kigongo, 2017:262). He contends that the lack of adequate research infrastructure, including libraries, archives, and funding, hinders the ability of private universities to conduct rigorous historical research. While Kigongo's argument is valid, it oversimplifies the complexities of enhancing historical research in private universities. He fails to consider other crucial factors, such as:

- a. Capacity building and training for faculty members (Ssekamwa, 2017).
- b. Interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration (Mudoola, 2006).
- c. Relevance of historical research to contemporary issues (Kasozi, 2018).

Moreover, it should be noted that Kigongo's emphasis on research infrastructure may perpetuate a narrow focus on traditional historical research methods, neglecting innovative and digital approaches (Gaddis, 2002).

On the other hand, Mudoola (2006) suggests that interdisciplinary approaches can enrich historical research and provide nuanced understandings of complex phenomena. Mudoola (2006) indeed suggests that interdisciplinary approaches can enrich historical research and

provide nuanced understandings of complex phenomena (Mudoola, 2006: 118). He argues that incorporating insights from fields like anthropology, sociology, and political science can:

- a. Provide a more comprehensive understanding of historical events (Mudoola, 2006:119).
- b. Facilitate the analysis of complex phenomena from multiple perspectives (Mudoola, 2006:121).
- c. Enhance the relevance of historical research to contemporary issues (Mudoola, 2006:123).

While Mudoola's argument is compelling, it has some limitations. Interdisciplinary approaches can be challenging to implement, requiring significant expertise and resources (Gaddis, 2002:15). The integration of multiple disciplines can lead to methodological and theoretical inconsistencies (Baxter, 2009:32). Mudoola's emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches may overlook the value of specialized historical research (Kigongo, 2017:265). Mudoola's suggestion highlights the potential benefits of interdisciplinary approaches in historical research. However, it is essential to consider the challenges and limitations of such approaches and strike a balance between specialization and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Ssekamwa (2017) emphasizes the need for capacity building and training for faculty members to conduct and supervise historical research. Ssekamwa (2017) indeed emphasizes the need for capacity building and training for faculty members to conduct and supervise historical research (Ssekamwa, 2017: 140). He argues that faculty members in Ugandan universities lack the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct rigorous historical research, and that training programs can help address this gap.

While Ssekamwa's argument is well-taken, it has some limitations:

- a. Capacity building and training programs may not address the root causes of inadequate research capacity, such as inadequate infrastructure and funding (Kigongo, 2017: 262).
- b. Ssekamwa's focus on faculty members may overlook the need for training and capacity building for other stakeholders, such as students and research assistants (Mudoola, 2006: 125).
- c. The effectiveness of capacity building and training programs depends on various factors, including the quality of training, the availability of resources, and the commitment of participants (Gaddis, 2002: 20).

Ssekamwa's emphasis on capacity building and training highlights the importance of investing in human resources to enhance historical research in Ugandan universities. However, it is essential to consider the broader context and address the systemic challenges facing historical research in Uganda.

Kasozi (2018) advocates for historical research to address contemporary issues and inform policy and practice in Uganda. Kasozi (2018) indeed advocates for historical research to address contemporary issues and inform policy and practice in Uganda (Kasozi, 2018:5). He argues that historical research can provide valuable insights into the root causes of contemporary problems, such as poverty, inequality, and political instability, and inform evidence-based policy-making. While Kasozi's argument is compelling, it has some limitations:

- a. Historical research may not always be directly applicable to contemporary issues, and may require careful interpretation and contextualization (Gaddis, 2002:15).
- b. Kasozi's emphasis on policy relevance may overlook the importance of historical research for its own sake, and the value of understanding the past as an end in itself (Mudoola, 2006:120).
- c. The relationship between historical research and policy-making is complex, and may be influenced by political, social, and economic factors (Kigongo, 2017:265).

Kasozi's advocacy for historical research to address contemporary issues highlights the potential for historical research to contribute to societal development in Uganda. However, it is essential to consider the complexities and nuances of this relationship, and to ensure that historical research is not solely instrumentalized for policy purposes.

Enhancing Historical Research

Enhanced Research Infrastructure: To improve historical research in Ugandan universities, the first step is to invest in research infrastructure. This includes establishing well-equipped libraries and archives that house a wide range of historical documents, books, and digital resources. Universities in developed countries such as Harvard and Oxford have extensive archives and digital libraries that provide researchers access to a vast amount of primary and secondary sources. Ugandan universities can benchmark against these institutions by creating digital repositories that are accessible to researchers both locally and internationally.

Harvard University's Widener Library is one of the most comprehensive research libraries in the world, with extensive collections of primary and secondary sources across various fields.

Similarly, Uganda can develop centralized digital repositories to provide wider access to historical data.

Collaborative Research Programs: Encouraging collaboration between Ugandan universities and international institutions can significantly enhance historical research. Such partnerships can provide Ugandan researchers with access to additional resources, training, and expertise. Universities in developed countries often engage in collaborative research programs that enable knowledge exchange and capacity building. The African Studies Centre at the University of Oxford collaborates with various African institutions to support historical research. Ugandan universities can seek similar partnerships to benefit from joint research initiatives and funding opportunities.

Increased Funding for Research: Securing funding for historical research is crucial. Universities in developed countries often have access to substantial research grants from government bodies, private foundations, and international organizations. Ugandan universities should advocate for increased funding from both local and international sources to support historical research projects. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in the United States provides significant grants for historical research. Ugandan researchers can apply for similar international grants and seek funding from organizations like the African Union or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Invest in research infrastructure (Kigongo, 2017): Universities can improve research infrastructure by establishing research centers, libraries, and archives. A case in point is the Makerere University's Centre for Historical Research and Documentation. Investing in research infrastructure is crucial for enhancing historical research in universities. Kigongo (2017) emphasizes the importance of establishing research centers, libraries, and archives to support historical research. A prime example is the Makerere University's Centre for Historical Research and Documentation (CHRAD).

CHRAD was established in 2013 to promote historical research and documentation in Uganda. The center has:

- a. A specialized library with a vast collection of historical texts, journals, and primary sources.
- b. An archive section with a vast collection of historical documents, photographs, and oral testimonies.

- c. Research facilities, including offices, meeting rooms, and computer labs.
- d. A team of experienced researchers, archivists, and librarians.

CHRAD's infrastructure supports historical research in several ways:

- i. Access to primary sources: The archive section provides researchers with access to rare and unique primary sources, enabling them to conduct in-depth research.
- ii. Interdisciplinary collaboration: The center's location within Makerere University facilitates collaboration with other departments, such as anthropology, sociology, and political science.
- iii. Capacity building: CHRAD offers training and workshops for researchers, students, and staff on research methods, archival management, and historical documentation.
- iv. Community engagement: The center engages with local communities to collect oral testimonies, documents, and artifacts, promoting community-based research.

Examples of research projects conducted at CHRAD include:

1. "A History of Uganda's Independence Movement" (2015-2018): A comprehensive research project documenting Uganda's struggle for independence.
2. "The History of Makerere University" (2018-2020): A research project chronicling the history of Makerere University from its inception to the present day.

By investing in research infrastructure like CHRAD, universities can:

- i. Enhance research capacity
- ii. Attract local and international researchers
- iii. Promote interdisciplinary collaboration
- iv. Support community-based research
- v. Preserve historical heritage

Capacity building and training (Ssekamwa, 2017): Universities can provide training and capacity-building programs for faculty members and students. The University of Uganda's History Department offers a research methods course for graduate students. Capacity building

and training are essential for enhancing historical research in universities. Ssekamwa (2017) highlights the importance of providing training and capacity-building programs for faculty members and students. The University of Uganda's History Department offers a research methods course for graduate students, exemplifying this approach.

Research Methods Course:

The course covers:

1. Research design and methodology
2. Historical sources and documentation
3. Data collection and analysis
4. Writing and presenting research findings

Anticipated Benefits:

- a. Enhances research skills: Students acquire practical skills in conducting historical research.
- b. Improves research quality: Faculty members and students learn to design and conduct rigorous research projects.
- c. Fosters interdisciplinary collaboration: Students from various departments interact, promoting interdisciplinary approaches.
- d. Supports student supervision: Trained faculty members can effectively supervise student research projects.

Examples of capacity-building initiatives:

- a. Workshops: The University of Uganda's History Department organizes workshops on research methods, archival management, and historical documentation.
- b. Mentorship programs: Experienced faculty members mentor junior staff and students, providing guidance on research projects.
- c. Collaborations: The department collaborates with international institutions, exposing students and faculty to global research standards.
- d. Conferences: The department hosts conferences, seminars, and symposia, providing platforms for presenting research findings and networking.

The anticipated Impact includes the following:

1. Improved research output: Capacity building leads to high-quality research publications and presentations.
2. Enhanced student supervision: Trained faculty members effectively guide students in research projects.
3. Interdisciplinary collaboration: Capacity building fosters collaboration across departments, enriching research perspectives.
4. International recognition: The University of Uganda's History Department gains recognition for its research excellence.

By investing in capacity building and training, universities can:

- a. Enhance research capacity
- b. Improve research quality
- c. Foster interdisciplinary collaboration
- d. Support student supervision
- e. Promote international recognition

Inter-disciplinary approaches (Mudoola, 2006): Universities can encourage interdisciplinary research by collaborating with other departments and disciplines. The Makerere University's History Department collaborates with the Department of Anthropology to conduct research on cultural heritage. Interdisciplinary approaches involve combining multiple disciplines to tackle complex research questions. Mudoola (2006) emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary research in historical studies. The Makerere University's History Department collaboration with the Department of Anthropology exemplifies this approach.

Methodology:

1. Historical research: The History Department contributes historical context and archival research.
2. Anthropological research: The Anthropology Department contributes ethnographic research and cultural analysis.

Possible Outcomes:

1. Comprehensive understanding: The project provides a nuanced understanding of cultural heritage and identity in Uganda.
2. Interdisciplinary insights: The collaboration yields insights from both historical and anthropological perspectives.
3. Enhanced research capacity: Faculty members and students develop skills in interdisciplinary research.

Examples of interdisciplinary collaborations:

- a. History and Archaeology: Collaborative research on historical sites and artifacts.
- b. History and Sociology: Joint research on social and historical contexts of social phenomena.
- c. History and Political Science: Collaborative research on political history and policy-making.

The anticipated benefits:

1. Comprehensive understanding: Interdisciplinary approaches provide a more complete picture of complex phenomena.
2. Innovative methodologies: Collaboration fosters innovative research methods and approaches.
3. Enhanced research capacity: Interdisciplinary research develops faculty and student skills in multiple disciplines.
4. Real-world applications: Interdisciplinary research addresses real-world problems and challenges.

By embracing interdisciplinary approaches, universities can:

1. Foster comprehensive understanding
2. Encourage innovative methodologies
3. Develop research capacity
4. Address real-world challenges

Conclusion and Recommendations

Historical research is a vital component of academic inquiry in universities, providing insights into the past to inform the present and future. In Uganda, historical research has faced numerous challenges, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches. This article argues that enhancing historical research in Ugandan universities requires a multifaceted approach that addresses these challenges and leverages opportunities for growth.

Firstly, Ugandan universities must prioritize investment in historical research infrastructure, including libraries, archives, and museums (Kigongo, 2017). These institutions are critical for providing access to primary sources, facilitating research collaboration, and promoting public engagement with history.

Secondly, interdisciplinary approaches to historical research must be encouraged, incorporating insights from fields like anthropology, sociology, and political science (Mudoola, 2006). This can enrich historical narratives, provide nuanced understandings of complex phenomena, and foster innovative methodologies.

Thirdly, Ugandan universities should develop strategic partnerships with local and international institutions to facilitate research collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building (Ssekamwa, 2017). Such partnerships can enhance the global relevance and impact of historical research in Uganda.

Community engagement and outreach (Kasozi, 2018): Universities can engage with local communities to conduct research that addresses their needs and concerns. The University of Uganda's History Department conducts research on local histories in partnership with local communities. Kasozi (2018) emphasizes the importance of universities engaging with local communities to conduct research that addresses their needs and concerns. This approach fosters a mutually beneficial relationship between academia and the community, allowing for research that is directly relevant and impactful to the people involved. For instance, the History Department at the University of Uganda collaborates with local communities to research local histories. This partnership ensures that the research is grounded in local knowledge and addresses specific historical narratives important to those communities. Such engagement not only enriches the academic research but also empowers local communities by valuing their experiences and perspectives.

Digitalization and technology (Gaddis, 2002): Universities can leverage technology to improve research, such as digital archives and online resources. The Makerere University's Library has digitized its archives, making historical resources available online.

Partnerships and collaborations (Ssekamwa, 2017): Universities can partner with local and international institutions to enhance research capacity. The University of Uganda's History Department has a partnership with the University of Cambridge to conduct joint research projects.

Partnerships and collaborations are essential in historical research, enabling researchers to pool resources, expertise, and perspectives to achieve common goals (Ssekamwa, 2017). Collaborations can take various forms, including:

- a. Inter-institutional partnerships: Collaborations between universities, research institutions, and museums (Kasozi, 2018).
- b. Interdisciplinary collaborations: Collaborations between historians and scholars from other disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, and political science (Mudoola, 2006).
- c. International collaborations: Collaborations between researchers from different countries, facilitating global perspectives and knowledge sharing (Altbach & Knight, 2007).
- d. Community-based collaborations: Collaborations with local communities, ensuring research relevance and impact (Kasozi, 2018).

Anticipated Benefits Of Partnerships And Collaborations:

- a. Enhanced research quality and validity (Ssekamwa, 2017).
- b. Increased resource mobilization and sharing (Kasozi, 2018).
- c. Diverse perspectives and expertise (Mudoola, 2006).
- d. Improved research dissemination and impact (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Lastly, historical research in Ugandan universities must be made more relevant to contemporary societal needs, addressing pressing issues like governance, human rights, and sustainable development (Kasozi, 2018). This can be achieved by incorporating applied historical research, policy engagement, and community outreach into academic programs.

In conclusion, enhancing historical research in Ugandan universities requires a comprehensive approach that addresses infrastructure, interdisciplinary collaboration, partnerships, and relevance. By prioritizing these areas, Ugandan universities can strengthen their research capacities, contribute meaningfully to global historical scholarship, and inform policy and practice in Uganda and beyond. enhancing historical research in private universities in Uganda requires a multifaceted approach. Investing in research infrastructure, such as libraries and archives, is crucial (Kigongo, 2017). Capacity building and training programs for faculty members and students can improve research skills (Ssekamwa, 2017). Interdisciplinary approaches to historical research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Mudoola, 2006). Collaborations and partnerships with other institutions and stakeholders can facilitate knowledge sharing and resource mobilization (Kasozi, 2018). To achieve these goals, private universities in Uganda must prioritize research and development, allocate sufficient resources, and foster a research-oriented culture (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Additionally, they must address the challenges of inadequate funding, limited access to resources, and brain drain (Ssekamwa, 2017). By enhancing historical research, private universities in Uganda can contribute to the development of the field, inform policy and practice, and promote a deeper understanding of Uganda's past and its implications for the present and future (Kasozi, 2018).

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