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Financial Resource Mobilisation and Academic Program Viability in Private Universities: Evidence from Fort Portal City

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This study examined how resource mobilisation practices influence the viability of academic programs in private universities located in resource-constrained regional contexts, using evidence from Fort Portal City, Uganda. While private universities play a critical role in expanding access to higher education, empirical evidence on how governance- and relationship-based resource strategies sustain academic programs at the sub-national level remains limited. Grounded in Resource Dependence Theory, Resource Governance Theory, and the Institutional Capacity Model, the study assessed the influence of stakeholder engagement, partnership effectiveness, and financial resource mobilization on academic program viability, defined in terms of sustainability, relevance, quality assurance, staffing continuity, and curriculum resilience. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, involving qualitative interviews with senior university leaders and managers, followed by a survey of academic and administrative staff across the two private universities operating in Fort Portal City. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that partnership effectiveness is the strongest predictor of academic program viability ($\beta = 0.437$, $p < 0.001$), followed by stakeholder engagement ($\beta = 0.259$, $p = 0.006$) and financial resource mobilisation ($\beta = 0.230$, $p = 0.002$). Together, these factors explain 25.2% of the variance in academic program viability. Qualitative evidence reinforces these results, revealing heavy dependence on tuition fees, governance rigidities, and the central role of external partnerships in sustaining specialised and practice-oriented academic programs. The study concludes that academic program viability in regional private universities is shaped less by the volume of financial resources and more by governance quality, partnership functionality, and institutional capacity to deploy resources strategically. Practically, the findings underscore the need for formalised partnerships, decentralised resource governance, and capacity-building strategies tailored to the realities of private universities operating outside major metropolitan centres.

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INTRODUCTION

Across global higher education systems, the question of how universities finance their academic missions has moved from a managerial concern to a defining structural challenge. Intensifying massification, declining public subsidies, and heightened accountability regimes have collectively reshaped the political economy of higher education, rendering financial vulnerability a persistent feature rather than a cyclical anomaly. While these pressures affect institutions worldwide, they are particularly acute in Sub-Saharan Africa, where expanding demand for university education has not been matched by commensurate growth in stable funding mechanisms (Hassan & Ahmad, 2025). In this context, private universities have emerged as critical actors in widening access, yet their financial fragility raises profound questions about academic sustainability, program integrity, and institutional purpose.

Uganda's private higher education sector exemplifies these tensions. Since liberalisation in the early 1990s, private universities have proliferated, absorbing unmet demand and diversifying academic offerings. However, this expansion has occurred within a constrained

financial architecture characterised by heavy reliance on tuition fees, episodic donor support, and limited endowment culture. Tuition dependence, while offering short-term liquidity, exposes institutions to enrollment volatility, affordability crises, and intensified market competition from both public universities and peer private providers. Donor funding, where available, often arrives with conditionalities that subtly redirect institutional priorities, raising concerns about mission drift and external influence over academic agendas. At the same time, evolving regulatory expectations, particularly around accreditation, staffing ratios, and infrastructure standards—impose financial obligations that many private universities struggle to meet consistently (Carbonell, 2025).

Within this national landscape, Fort Portal City presents a distinctive yet underexamined setting. As an emerging urban and educational hub in western Uganda, Fort Portal hosts a growing cluster of private universities that serve not only the city's population but also surrounding rural districts and cross-border communities. These institutions play a developmental role by supplying regionally relevant professional skills, supporting social mobility, and anchoring local knowledge economies. Yet the city's socio-economic profile—marked by modest

household incomes, limited industrial base, and uneven philanthropic culture—constrains the financial latitude of universities operating within it. Resource mobilisation in this context is shaped as much by local economic realities and cultural expectations as by national policy frameworks.

Framing financial resource mobilisation merely as an administrative or technical exercise risks obscuring its deeper strategic and ideological dimensions. Decisions about how resources are sourced, prioritised, and allocated are inseparable from questions of institutional autonomy, academic identity, and social responsibility. As Renick et al. (2025) argue, resources are not neutral inputs; they actively shape the forms of scholarship, teaching, and engagement that universities are able and willing to sustain. In private universities, where financial survival is tightly coupled with market responsiveness, resource mobilisation becomes a site of negotiation between entrepreneurial imperatives and academic values.

These negotiations bear directly on the viability of academic programs. Program viability extends beyond financial solvency to encompass sustainability over time, curricular relevance, quality assurance compliance, staffing continuity, and pedagogical resilience. Limited or unstable resources can trigger cascading effects: reliance on part-time faculty, delayed curriculum renewal, constrained laboratory and library provision, and diminished research engagement. Conversely, diversified and strategically aligned resource mobilisation practices can enhance program coherence, protect academic standards, and enable adaptive responses to changing societal needs (Liu et al., 2025; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2025). The relationship between resource mobilisation and academic program viability is therefore neither linear nor purely economic; it is mediated by governance choices, institutional culture, and external accountability pressures.

Existing scholarship has offered valuable insights into resource mobilisation across public

universities, social ventures, and local governments (Calic et al., 2025; Rahman & Akter, 2025; Desa et al., 2025). However, there remains a notable empirical and theoretical gap regarding how financial resource mobilisation practices concretely shape academic program viability within private universities in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly at the sub-national level. Much of the literature privileges macro-system analyses or focuses on single funding instruments, offering limited sensitivity to localised institutional dynamics and mixed evidence drawn from both quantitative patterns and lived academic experiences. Studies attentive to knowledge mobilisation and sustainability have rarely bridged financial practices with program-level academic outcomes in private higher education settings (Onyancha et al., 2025; Hassan & Ahmad, 2025).

It is against this backdrop that the present study is situated. The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of current financial resource mobilisation modalities on the viability of academic programs in private universities in Fort Portal City. Guided by the research question—*How effective are the current resource mobilisation practices on the viability of academic programs in private universities in Fort Portal City?* The study adopts an integrative analytical stance that draws on both numerical trends and interpretive insights to illuminate institutional realities that are often rendered invisible in aggregate policy debates.

By foregrounding a context-specific analysis, this study contributes to scholarly conversations on higher education finance, institutional sustainability, and academic governance within developing higher education systems. Its findings hold significance for academic theory by refining understandings of resource mobilisation as a mediating force between financial structures and academic outcomes. For policymakers and regulators, the study offers empirically grounded reflections on how funding environments intersect with quality assurance ambitions. Practically, it

provides university leaders and stakeholders with insights into resource strategies that can support resilient, relevant, and academically credible programs in financially constrained settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework to explain the relationship between financial resource mobilisation and the viability of academic programs in private universities in Fort Portal City. Given the complexity of higher education financing and sustainability, no single theory sufficiently captures the external, internal, and relational forces shaping institutional outcomes. Consequently, the study draws on Resource Dependence Theory, Resource Governance Theory, the Institutional Capacity Model, and Stakeholder Theory to provide a comprehensive analytical lens for understanding how private universities mobilise, manage, and deploy financial resources to sustain academic programs.

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) offers a foundational perspective on how private universities respond to external financial constraints. Operating in environments characterised by limited public funding, these institutions rely heavily on tuition fees, donors, regulators, and industry partners. RDT explains how such dependence influences strategic behaviour, often compelling universities to align programs with funder expectations in order to secure continued support. Recent scholarship extends RDT by linking it with internal capability development, emphasising the need for institutions to balance external dependence with autonomy and sustainability (Öztürk & Bağış, 2025; Balcıoğlu, 2025). Empirical studies further caution that reliance on narrow funding sources may expose universities to donor influence and mission drift (Kholmuminov et al., 2019; Sarpong et al., 2020). At the same time, structured partnerships with government and industry actors can enhance

curriculum relevance and graduate employability when managed strategically (Kohtamäki, 2023; Zhuang et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2023).

Complementing this external focus, Resource Governance Theory (RGT) centres on internal systems that regulate how mobilised resources are allocated and utilised. RGT posits that institutional sustainability depends not only on the availability of resources but also on governance quality, including transparency, accountability, and strategic coordination (Peter, 2022; Ali & Kamraju, 2023). In tuition-dependent private universities, weak governance structures may result in inefficient allocation and underfunded academic programs. Conversely, adaptive and collaborative governance arrangements enhance efficiency and alignment between financial decisions and academic priorities, even in resource-constrained contexts (Purshouse, 2022; Trihatmoko & Susilo, 2024; Cai et al., 2024).

The Institutional Capacity Model (ICM) further advances the analysis by focusing on the capabilities that enable universities to translate financial inputs into sustainable academic outputs. Institutional capacity encompasses human resources, infrastructure, administrative competence, and strategic leadership (Kovalchuk, 2024). Studies from developing contexts demonstrate that continuous assessment, decentralised decision-making, and adaptive leadership strengthen institutional resilience and service delivery (Serniak, 2021; Isdahartati et al., 2023; Mozin & Nggilu, 2023; Surya, 2022; Jundi, 2023). Strategic agility and risk preparedness are therefore critical for sustaining academic programs amid financial uncertainty (Omelchenko, 2023; Sun et al., 2024).

Finally, Stakeholder Theory situates private universities within a broader network of actors whose interests shape institutional viability. Effective engagement with students, faculty, regulators, communities, and development partners enhances legitimacy, accountability, and resource mobilisation (Jonek-Kowalska et al., 2023; Davila,

2024). Contemporary frameworks emphasise transparency, participation, and responsiveness as central to sustainable stakeholder relationships (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022; Boeken et al., 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that dynamic stakeholder engagement supports program relevance, ethical accountability, and long-term sustainability, particularly in donor-influenced higher education systems (Valentinov & Roth, 2023; Esposito et al., 2025; Vola et al., 2025; Awa et al., 2024).

Together, these theories provide a coherent framework for examining how financial resource mobilisation practices influence the viability of academic programs in private universities in Fort Portal City.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, consistent with the framework advanced by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). The design was implemented in two interlinked phases, beginning with a qualitative inquiry followed by a quantitative phase. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study Context

The study was conducted in private universities located in Fort Portal City, Uganda. A census approach was adopted, encompassing the two private universities operating within the city at the time of the study. For analytical anonymity, these institutions were assigned the pseudonyms University Alpha and University Bravo. The target population comprised key academic and administrative actors directly involved in resource mobilisation and allocation, including Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors (Academic Affairs), Academic Registrars, University Secretaries, Finance Directors, Faculty Deans, and Heads of Department.

Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to identify participants with direct institutional knowledge and decision-making responsibilities. A total of 24 participants across five leadership and management categories were interviewed. This sample size was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, as recurring themes and patterns became evident across interviews. In the quantitative phase, statistical power analysis guided sample size determination in line with Cohen's (1988) recommendations. Based on the population parameters and anticipated effect sizes, an initial sample of approximately 76 respondents was calculated. To account for potential non-response and attrition, the sample size was adjusted upward, resulting in a final target of **80 participants**, ensuring adequate statistical power for detecting significant relationships.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, supplemented by unstructured observations. Interviews were conducted orally and facilitated in a manner that encouraged reflection, elaboration, and clarification. This flexible structure enabled exploration of both explicit practices and underlying institutional dynamics, consistent with best practices in qualitative interviewing (Bell et al., 2022; Hamblin, 2024). The approach supported the emergence of nuanced insights and latent meanings, aligning with principles outlined by Agwu (2023) and Thomas and Earthy (2023).

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative phase utilised structured, closed-ended questionnaires designed to measure respondents' perceptions of financial resource mobilisation practices and their implications for academic program sustainability. Items were presented using Likert-type scales, enabling the

transformation of subjective perceptions into quantifiable data while capturing degrees of agreement or disagreement (Alford & Teater, 2025). Closed-ended formats were intentionally selected to enhance response comparability and reduce interpretive ambiguity (Khan et al., 2024).

Instrument Validity and Reliability

To ensure methodological rigour, the questionnaire underwent systematic validation and reliability assessment in accordance with established standards in social science research (Taherdoost, 2022; Holmes, 2023). Content validity was assessed using the Content Validity Index (CVI), with a threshold of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable, consistent with recommended benchmarks (Yu, 2024).

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative interview data were subjected to thematic analysis, facilitated by ATLAS.ti version 7. The analysis involved systematic generation of open codes, code families, and higher-order thematic categories, organised through primary document tables and network diagrams. The study objectives informed the primary coding framework, while emergent codes that fell outside predefined categories were treated as unintended but analytically relevant outcomes, whether positive or negative.

Quantitative data were analysed using Python version 3.13.3. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to summarise central tendencies and variability in perceptions of financial resource mobilisation strategies. Inferential analyses comprised correlation and multiple regression techniques to examine the magnitude and direction of relationships between resource mobilisation constructs and academic program sustainability. Composite indices representing grounded constructs such as stakeholder engagement, partnership effectiveness, and financial mobilisation were used as predictors in the

regression model. Although Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was initially conducted to explore underlying data patterns, PCA outputs were not incorporated into the regression model.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

To enhance the quality and integrity of the qualitative component, the study adhered to the four classical criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These principles were reinforced through contemporary methodological guidance (Ahmed, 2023; Kakar et al., 2023; Adler, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC) under approval number UCUREC-2024-858. Final authorisation to conduct the study was granted by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) under registration number HS4561ES. Following this, administrative clearance was secured from the participating universities. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality was upheld throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This subsection presents and discusses the findings on the effectiveness of financial resource mobilisation and allocation practices in explaining academic program viability in private universities in Fort Portal City. The analysis proceeds in three stages: measurement reliability and validity, factor structure confirmation, and regression results linking resource mobilisation practices to academic program sustainability.

Reliability and Validity of Measurement Constructs

Prior to inferential analysis, the internal consistency of the composite constructs—stakeholder

engagement, partnership effectiveness, and financial mobilisation—was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. As shown in Table 1, all constructs demonstrated strong internal reliability, with alpha values ranging from 0.83 to

0.89. These coefficients exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement items consistently captured their respective latent constructs.

Table 1: Reliability of Resource Mobilisation Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Stakeholder Engagement	7	0.86	Excellent
Partnership Effectiveness	7	0.89	Excellent
Financial Mobilization	7	0.83	Good

Source: *Primary data*

These results suggest that respondents held coherent perceptions regarding how stakeholders are engaged, how partnerships function, and how financial resources are mobilised within their institutions. High reliability strengthens confidence in subsequent factor and regression analyses and aligns with similar reliability levels reported in studies of universities in Fort Portal.

Construct validity was further examined through factor loadings. As indicated in Table 2, all items loaded strongly on their intended constructs, with minimum loadings above 0.60 and maximum loadings exceeding 0.85. This confirms that the indicators measured distinct but conceptually related dimensions of resource mobilisation.

Table 2: Summary of Factor Loadings

Construct	Items	Minimum Loading	Maximum Loading
Stakeholder Engagement	7	0.63	0.88
Partnership Effectiveness	7	0.66	0.91
Financial Mobilization	7	0.61	0.86

Source: *Primary data*

The absence of weak or cross-loading items indicates satisfactory discriminant validity, supporting the analytical separation of governance-related and financial dimensions in the model.

(KMO) value of 0.81 reflects meritorious sampling adequacy, while Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 326.48$, $p < 0.001$), indicating sufficient inter-item correlations for factor extraction.

Exploratory Factor Analysis and Variance Explanation

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) diagnostics confirmed the suitability of the dataset for multivariate analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin

Three factors were retained based on eigenvalues exceeding unity. As shown in Table 3, the three-factor solution accounted for approximately 79.6% of the total variance, a relatively high explanatory power.

Table 3: Total Variance Explained by Retained Factors

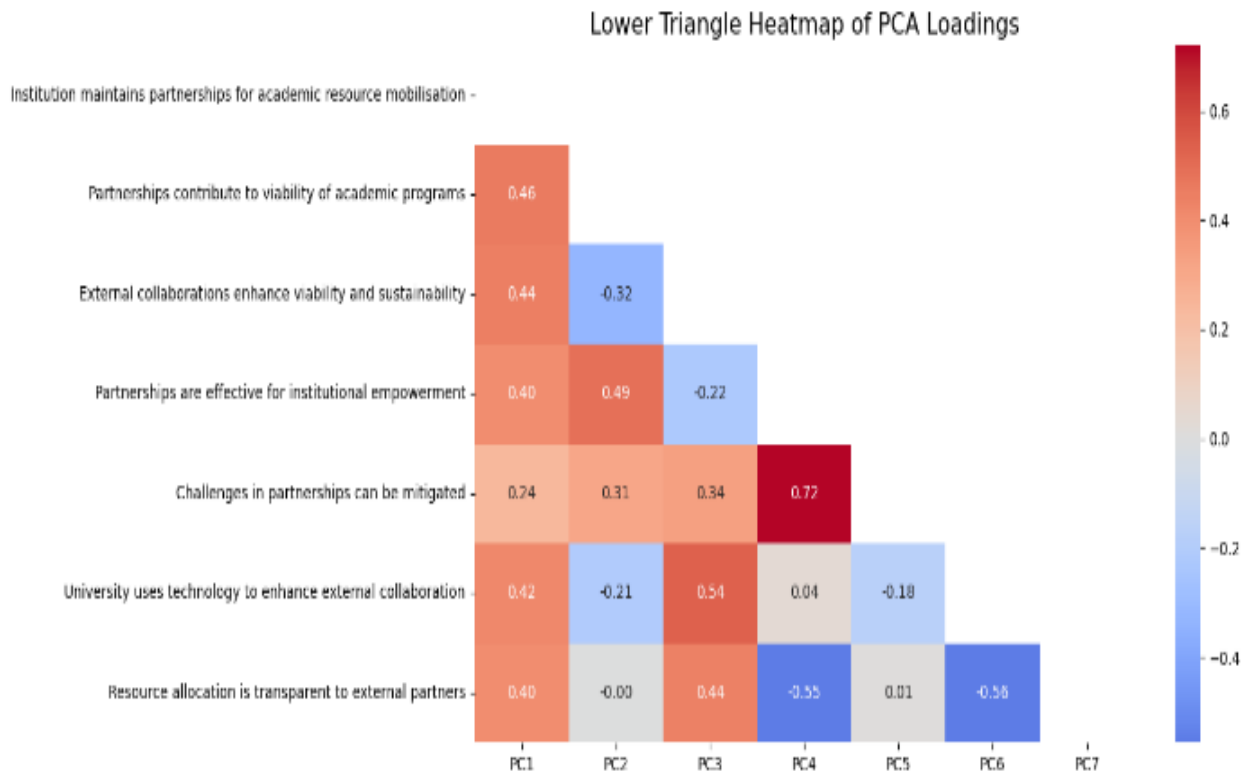
Component	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.4	32.2	32.2
2	5.2	25.9	58.0
3	4.3	21.6	79.6

Source: *Primary data*

The strong cumulative variance suggests that stakeholder engagement, partnership effectiveness, and financial mobilisation collectively represent the dominant dimensions through which resource allocation practices influence academic program sustainability. This finding empirically supports

theoretical claims from Resource Dependence Theory and Resource Governance Theory that sustainability outcomes are shaped by both relational and financial capabilities rather than financial inputs alone.

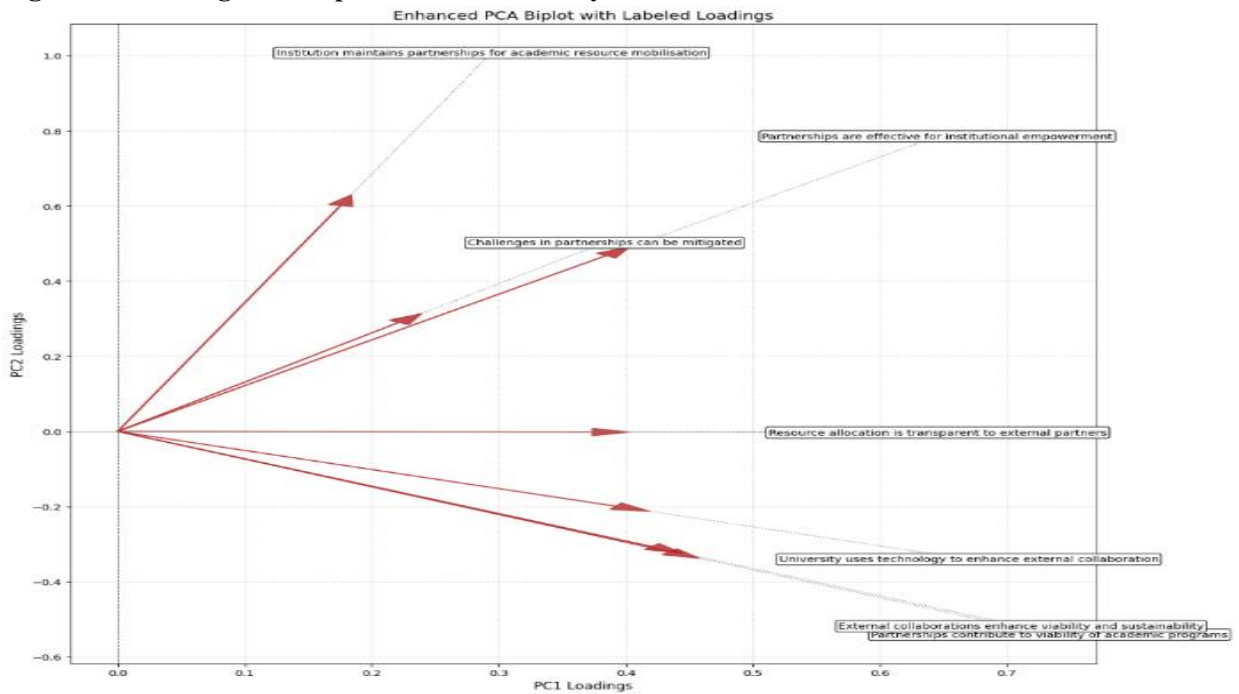
Figure 1: Showing a Heatmap of Variable Loadings onto Principal Component Cumulative Variance (%)



As shown in Figure 1 above, variables related to stakeholder engagement and partnership effectiveness load most strongly on the first two principal components. Items reflecting the contribution of partnerships to academic program viability and sustainability exhibit the highest

loadings on PC1, which alone explains 30.7% of the total variance. This indicates that stakeholder-mediated partnerships constitute the most influential structural dimension shaping resource allocation outcomes.

Figure 2: Showing PCA Biplot of Institutions by PC1 and PC2

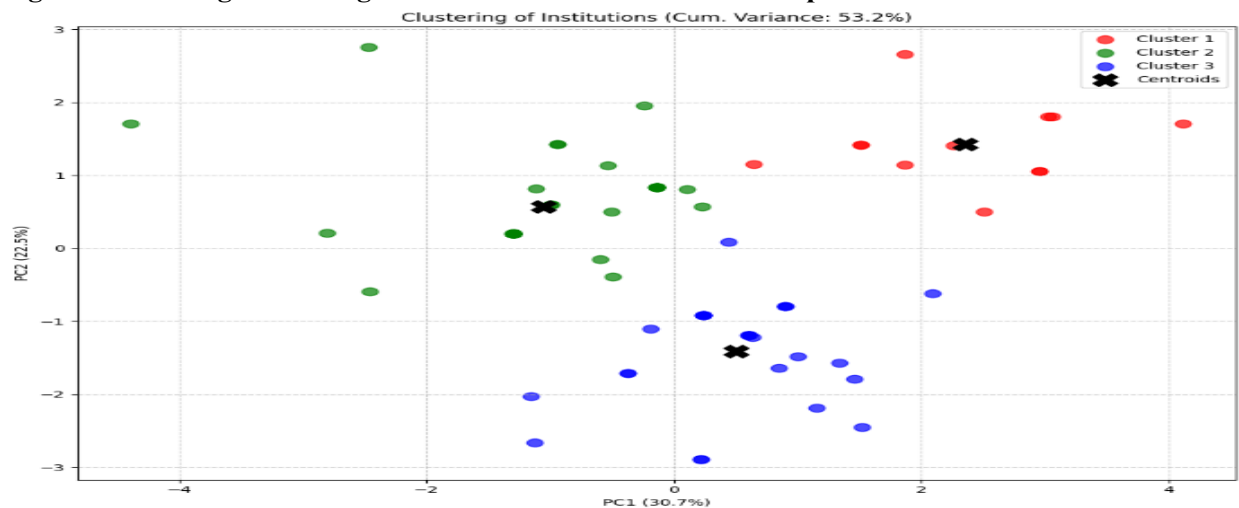


Source: Primary data

Figure 2 above illustrates the positioning of institutions along the two dominant components—academic partnership viability (PC1) and resource mobilisation and empowerment (PC2). The dispersion of cases across these axes demonstrates that private universities differ not only in the extent

of resource mobilisation but also in how stakeholder partnerships are strategically aligned with academic priorities, helping to explain the stronger predictive power of partnership effectiveness in the regression model.

Figure 3: Showing Clustering of Institutions based on PCA Components



Source: Primary data

As depicted in Figure 3 above, the three institutional clusters represent distinct partnership and stakeholder engagement configurations. Institutions with strong academically aligned partnerships exhibit more sustainable resource allocation pathways, reinforcing the conclusion that stakeholder engagement and partnership effectiveness mediate the impact of financial resources on academic program viability.

Regression Results: Predictors of Academic Program Sustainability

To determine the explanatory power of the three constructs, a multiple linear regression model was estimated with academic program sustainability as the dependent variable. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(3,76) = 8.553, p < 0.001$), explaining 25.2% of the variance in academic program sustainability ($R^2 = 0.252$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.223$).

Table 4: Regression Results Predicting Academic Program Sustainability

Predictor	β	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Stakeholder Engagement	0.259	0.092	2.808	0.006*
Partnership Effectiveness	0.437	0.121	3.616	0.001*
Financial Mobilization	0.230	0.072	3.180	0.002*

Significant at 95% confidence level.

Source: Primary data.

All three predictors exerted positive and statistically significant effects on academic program sustainability. Partnership effectiveness emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that collaborative arrangements with donors, industry, and other stakeholders play a more decisive role in sustaining programs than financial mobilisation alone. Stakeholder engagement and financial mobilisation also demonstrated meaningful contributions, underscoring the importance of participatory governance and diversified revenue strategies.

The moderate explanatory power of the model indicates that while financial and relational resource mobilisation practices are critical, academic program viability is also influenced by additional institutional and contextual factors not captured in the model. Nevertheless, the findings confirm that sustainable academic programs in private universities are not driven solely by revenue levels but by how effectively resources are mobilised, governed, and embedded within stakeholder relationships.

The qualitative findings substantively reinforce and contextualise the quantitative results by revealing

how financial resource mobilisation practices are enacted within institutional structures and experienced by academic leaders. While the regression analysis established that stakeholder engagement, partnership effectiveness, and financial mobilisation significantly predict academic program sustainability, interview narratives illuminate the mechanisms through which these relationships operate and their inherent constraints.

The quantitative analysis identified partnership effectiveness as the strongest predictor of academic program sustainability ($\beta = 0.437, p = 0.001$). This statistical prominence is strongly echoed in participants' accounts, particularly from faculties dependent on external professional and industry linkages. A Vice Chancellor noted that:

“We primarily depend on tuition fees, supplemented by project-specific grants and private donor contributions for infrastructure and equipment. These streams allow for predictable short-term planning, but rising costs and limited donor renewals challenge long-term sustainability.” (UB-VC)

Similarly, a Faculty Dean explained how partnerships compensated for limited institutional funding:

“The Faculty of Health Sciences relies on tuition and government-linked internship programs that come with modest subsidies. These enable us to maintain teaching labs and pay adjunct instructors.” (UB-FDN1)

Viewed through Resource Dependence Theory, these narratives illustrate how private universities strategically engage external actors to mitigate uncertainty arising from tuition volatility (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Kohtamäki, 2023). However, participants repeatedly emphasised that many partnerships were informal or donor-driven, exposing programs to dependency risks—an insight that explains why partnership effectiveness, while powerful, remains fragile and contingent (Gao et al., 2023).

The regression results also showed a significant positive effect of stakeholder engagement on program sustainability ($\beta = 0.259$, $p = 0.006$). Qualitative data confirm that inclusive governance structures such as finance committees, academic boards, and faculty consultations play a stabilising role. One Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, remarked:

“Resource allocation is overseen by the Academic Affairs Office in consultation with the finance director, focusing on program performance indicators. Although the framework ensures accountability, we still experience delays in procurement and staff development.” (UA-DVC-AA)

From a Resource Governance Theory perspective, this reflects governance systems that are procedurally sound but operationally constrained by cash-flow instability and centralisation (Ali & Kamraju, 2023; Paauwe, 2024). Stakeholder engagement contributes to sustainability by protecting core academic functions, yet its impact is

moderated when participation does not translate into timely or flexible decision-making.

Although financial mobilisation was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.230$, $p = 0.002$), it emerged as the weakest predictor in the model. Qualitative findings offer a compelling explanation. Nearly all respondents emphasised heavy dependence on tuition as the primary revenue source. A Finance Director observed:

“Tuition remains the backbone of our resource mobilisation... The challenge is that rising operational costs outpace revenue growth, affecting academic quality. Without more robust income streams, long-term sustainability remains a concern.” (UA-FD)

Likewise, a Head of Department stated:

“Our department is heavily reliant on tuition-based budgeting... The funds allocated often fall short of fieldwork or laboratory requirements, affecting the implementation of practical-based learning.” (UA-HOD1)

These accounts align with Institutional Capacity Model arguments that sustainability depends not merely on revenue generation but on an institution’s capacity to convert resources into functional academic outputs (Isdahartati et al., 2023; Surya, 2022). Tuition-based mobilisation supports basic continuity but limits innovation, research investment, and curriculum renewal, hence its relatively smaller explanatory power in the regression model.

Notably, qualitative evidence also helps explain the moderate overall explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.252$). Participants repeatedly referenced contextual constraints, rigid budgeting cycles, centralised authority, delayed disbursements, and local socio-economic limitations in Fort Portal City that shape how resources are ultimately deployed. As one University Secretary explained:

“Despite well-documented procedures, delays in fee collection and inadequate financial forecasting compromise sustainability. The system keeps basic functions running, but doesn’t support growth or innovation effectively.” (UA-US)

The analysis of stakeholder engagement and partnership effectiveness demonstrates that these two constructs represent the dominant relational dimensions through which resource allocation practices influence academic program sustainability in private universities in Fort Portal City. Quantitative evidence from Principal Component Analysis (PCA), clustering, and regression analysis converges with qualitative findings to show that sustainability outcomes are shaped less by financial volume and more by the quality of stakeholder relationships and the strategic orientation of partnerships.

The PCA results revealed that academic partnership viability (PC1) accounted for 30.7% of total variance, making it the most influential component in explaining institutional differences. Variables loading strongly on this component—such as *partnerships contributing to academic program viability* and *external collaborations enhancing sustainability*—indicate that stakeholder engagement is most impactful when partnerships are deliberately aligned with core academic functions. This quantitative pattern is strongly corroborated by qualitative evidence from senior institutional leadership. As one Vice Chancellor explained:

“At Fins... we have adopted a multi-stakeholder engagement model where we reach out to hospitals, international health NGOs, and government agencies to support our academic health programs... stakeholder collaboration has been instrumental in stabilising our medical and nursing programs.” (UB-VC)

This extract illustrates how stakeholder engagement operates as a governance and sustainability mechanism, not merely as consultative participation. In line with Stakeholder Theory and Resource Governance Theory, the quote demonstrates that sustained engagement enhances legitimacy, protects core programs, and guides allocation decisions toward academically strategic areas (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022; Ali & Kamraju, 2023).

The second principal component (PC2), explaining 22.5% of variance, captured resource mobilisation and institutional empowerment, reflecting how partnerships are leveraged to access financial, material, and developmental resources. This dimension directly explains why partnership effectiveness emerged as the strongest predictor of academic program sustainability in the regression model ($\beta = 0.437$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative accounts reveal that effective partnerships provide tangible academic support that compensates for limited internal funding. One Vice Chancellor noted:

“They’ve supplied equipment, curriculum support, and internship opportunities... these links have greatly enhanced our program viability.” (UB-VC)

This evidence substantiates the quantitative finding that partnership effectiveness exerts a stronger influence than financial mobilisation alone. From a Resource Dependence Theory perspective, the quote illustrates how external collaborations reduce uncertainty and stabilise academic programs by substituting or supplementing scarce institutional resources (Kohtamäki, 2023; Zhuang et al., 2024).

However, qualitative findings also reveal the fragility of partnership-dependent sustainability, helping to interpret institutional clustering patterns identified through PCA-based K-means analysis. While cluster analysis confirmed three distinct partnership typologies, interview data show that institutions heavily reliant on a small number of

partners face heightened dependency risks. As a Finance Director observed:

“These partnerships were effective in bridging serious budget gaps... but reliance on a few large partners is a risk.” (UB-FD)

This insight explains why partnership effectiveness, despite its strong predictive power, remains a conditional and context-sensitive sustainability pathway. It reinforces RDT’s argument that dependency management rather than dependency elimination defines organisational survival in resource-constrained environments (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Sarpong et al., 2020).

Stakeholder engagement also emerged as a significant but comparatively moderated predictor of academic program sustainability ($\beta = 0.259$, $p = 0.006$). Qualitative data clarify that while participatory structures exist, their influence is constrained by centralised financial control and cash-flow limitations. One Vice Chancellor explained:

“Internally, our faculty and student leaders are regularly consulted through academic boards... Their suggestions often shape budget prioritisation.” (UA-VC)

This extract confirms that stakeholder engagement contributes to accountability and prioritisation but does not always translate into operational autonomy at the departmental level. From a Resource Governance Theory standpoint, this finding suggests that procedural participation enhances sustainability only when matched with flexible allocation authority (Purshouse, 2022).

Finally, qualitative evidence helps explain why financial mobilisation alone was a weaker predictor than partnerships and stakeholder engagement. Heavy dependence on tuition income constrains long-term academic investment, as noted by a Finance Director:

“Tuition remains the backbone... but rising operational costs outpace revenue growth... without robust income streams, long-term sustainability remains a concern.” (UA-FD)

This account aligns with the Institutional Capacity Model by demonstrating that financial inflows must be matched with administrative capacity, strategic foresight, and relational governance to sustain academic programs (Mozin & Nggilu, 2023; Surya, 2022).

Taken together, the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings confirm that stakeholder engagement and partnership effectiveness are the primary conduits through which resource allocation practices influence academic program sustainability in private universities in Fort Portal City. Financial resources matter, but their impact is mediated by relational alignment, governance quality, and institutional capacity, making stakeholder-centred strategies central to sustainable academic provision.

Taken together, the integrated findings demonstrate strong convergence between quantitative trends and qualitative realities. The evidence confirms that academic program viability in private universities is driven less by the absolute volume of financial resources and more by relational governance, partnership functionality, and institutional capacity to deploy resources strategically. By triangulating statistical associations with lived institutional experiences, the study strengthens the explanatory power and credibility of its conclusions, illustrating the value of mixed-methods inquiry in understanding higher education sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of financial resource mobilisation modalities in shaping the viability of academic programs in private universities in Fort Portal City. The findings demonstrate that, within this regional and socio-economic context, academic program viability is less a function of the absolute amount of financial resources mobilised and more dependent on how

resources are strategically sourced, governed, and embedded within institutional and stakeholder relationships.

Private universities in Fort Portal City operate in an environment characterised by modest household incomes, limited industrial presence, and heavy reliance on tuition fees. Within this setting, the study establishes that effective partnerships with external actors—such as professional bodies, NGOs, health institutions, and local industries—are the most critical contributors to sustaining academic programs. This confirms the explanatory power of Resource Dependence Theory, as universities actively mitigate financial uncertainty by leveraging external relationships to support teaching, training, and infrastructure. However, the findings also reveal persistent dependency risks, particularly where partnerships are informal, donor-driven, or short-term, limiting their capacity to support long-range academic planning.

The study further concludes that stakeholder engagement within university governance structures plays a stabilising but constrained role. While participatory mechanisms exist in both institutions studied, centralised decision-making and irregular cash flows limit the extent to which stakeholder involvement translates into timely and flexible resource allocation at faculty and departmental levels. From a Resource Governance Theory perspective, this suggests that governance frameworks in Fort Portal's private universities are procedurally sound but operationally fragile.

Although financial mobilisation primarily through tuition—remains indispensable for institutional survival, its comparatively weaker influence on program viability reflects structural limitations inherent in the local context. Tuition-based financing supports operational continuity but restricts investment in staff development, curriculum renewal, research engagement, and infrastructure expansion. Consistent with the Institutional Capacity Model, the study concludes that institutional capacity, manifested in leadership

adaptability, administrative systems, and academic infrastructure, conditions the extent to which mobilised resources can sustain viable academic programs. Overall, the study concludes that sustainable academic programming in Fort Portal City's private universities is fundamentally a governance- and capacity-driven process shaped by local socio-economic realities, rather than a purely financial one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, several recommendations are proposed.

- First, private universities in Fort Portal City should institutionalise and strategically manage external partnerships. Given the limited local economic base, universities should formalise partnerships with regional hospitals, schools, courts, NGOs, agricultural enterprises, and professional associations to support practice-based learning, adjunct staffing, and infrastructure sharing. Formal memoranda of understanding, joint planning committees, and periodic partnership reviews would enhance stability and reduce over-reliance on tuition income.
- Second, university leadership should deepen decentralised resource governance. Faculties and departments should be granted greater autonomy in prioritising and managing allocated resources, particularly for program-critical needs such as laboratory materials, fieldwork, and part-time instructional staff. Strengthening internal accountability mechanisms and improving cash-flow planning would enhance responsiveness to academic program demands.
- Third, deliberate investment in institutional capacity building is essential. Within the constraints of available resources, universities should prioritise staff development, financial management systems, and curriculum

innovation aligned with regional development needs. Capacity-enhancing investments would enable institutions to better convert mobilised resources into sustainable academic outputs.

- At the policy level, regulatory bodies and local government authorities should consider supportive interventions tailored to regional private universities, including incentives for community-based partnerships, research collaboration, and infrastructure development outside major urban centres.
- Finally, future research should undertake comparative studies across emerging university towns in Uganda to further illuminate how regional socio-economic contexts shape financial resource mobilisation and academic sustainability.

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