

Strengthening Implementation of Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) Through Teacher Insights

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Background

Uganda introduced a competence-based Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC) in 2020, in line with global efforts to prepare learners with 21st-century skills. Designed to replace the traditional, knowledge-heavy curriculum, the LSC emphasizes critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and practical application of knowledge. However, nearly five years on, a study by the African Population and Health Research Center and Kyambogo University—drawing on teacher experiences—reveals that while the curriculum offers notable opportunities, its implementation has been hindered by significant systemic challenges.

Key Opportunities Identified by Teachers

1. **Enhanced Collaboration:** Teachers, especially in well-resourced schools, report stronger teamwork in lesson planning and delivery, fostering professional growth and improved learning outcomes.
2. **Active Learning & Learner Autonomy:** Learner-centered approaches like group discussions, debates, and presentations have increased engagement, built confidence, and improved understanding.
3. **Skills Development:** The CBC fosters transferable skills—communication, research, logical reasoning, and collaboration—through hands-on, practical activities.
4. **Improved ICT Competence:** Both teachers and students have gained valuable exposure to digital tools, enriching classroom instruction and supporting self-directed learning.

Implementation Challenges

1. **Work Overload and Time Constraints:** Teachers face heavy preparation demands, particularly due to detailed lesson planning, large class sizes, and burdensome continuous assessment documentation.
2. **Gaps in Training and Understanding:** Teachers and even trainers struggle with core CBC concepts like “competence” and “learning outcomes.” Inadequate training materials and rushed sessions have compounded these issues.
3. **Assessment Issues:** The shift from termly to end-of-cycle summative exams has weakened student motivation. Resistance to new grading formats, especially in private schools, reflects poor stakeholder orientation.
4. **Infrastructure and Resource Inequities:** Inadequate textbooks, labs, teaching aids, and digital infrastructure hinder effective delivery, especially in under-resourced schools.
5. **ICT Illiteracy:** Older teachers often lack digital skills, limiting effective use of ICT in lesson delivery.
6. **Shallow Subject Scope:** Some teachers feel compelled to supplement content with material from the old curriculum, fearing that reduced subject depth compromises educational quality.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Targeted Resourcing for Low-Income Schools:** Provide differentiated support—teaching materials, ICT tools, and infrastructure—to bridge the gap in implementation capacity between affluent and less privileged schools.
2. **Strengthen and Decentralize Training:** Deliver comprehensive, ongoing training for all educators and administrators, with modules on digital literacy, competence-based planning, and assessment. Use regional centers to reach rural schools.
3. **Orient All Stakeholders:** Develop awareness programs for students and parents to build acceptance of new grading and assessment systems.
4. **Support Teacher Workload:** Reduce teacher-to-student ratios, consider co-teaching models, and offer incentives such as salary enhancements or reduced workloads to improve morale.
5. **Invest in Infrastructure:** Prioritize equipping schools with science labs, vocational tools, computers, and reliable internet access to support the CBC's practical and vocational components.
6. **Review Assessment Frameworks:** Align assessment weightings with the effort required in formative activities. Clarify expectations for integration activities and develop sample summative assessments to guide teachers.

Equity Lens

A key insight from this study is the strong correlation between school affluence and capacity to implement the LSC effectively. Without differentiated support, the CBC risks deepening existing educational inequalities. Policymakers must adopt flexible, context-specific strategies to ensure no learner is left behind.

Recommendations for Further Research

- Classroom observations to examine real-time teaching practices and constraint navigation.
- Exploration of student perspectives on CBC across gender, class, and ability lines.
- Review of pre- and in-service teacher education for CBC readiness.
- In-depth studies on assessment practices, gender dynamics, and expert teacher models.

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