

# Classroom-Based Challenges Affecting the Implementation of Competence-Based Curriculum: Secondary School Teacher's Perspectives in Southern Central Region of Uganda

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore classroom-based challenges teachers perceive to affect the successful implementation of 'O' level secondary school Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). The study adopted a qualitative research approach and followed the Interpretivist paradigm, which enabled participants to create, construct, and interpret all their classroom. Participants were drawn from school in six districts: Kalungu, Bukomansimbi, Ssembabule, Lwengo, Kyotera, and Rakai. A total of 50 secondary school teachers that teach at 'O' level participated in the study. Teachers were selected purposively to enable the researcher to gather qualitative responses from the best-fit participants whose responses were relevant to the study. A structured interview was used to gather data and in-depth information. Through triangulation, the methods enabled the researcher to collect in-depth subjective reality, which was analysed using thematic analysis. The result revealed; larger class sizes, limited physical classroom spaces, limited teaching materials including laboratory apparatuses, textbooks, computers, and projectors that hinder some pedagogical practices, challenging students' behaviours when they cannot access required resources, challenges associated with integration and project activities, assessment constraints, increased workload, interconnectedness between primary school curriculum and CBC in secondary, and poor time allocations as the pressing challenges. This paper therefore recommends an immediate review of the implementation of the CBC by National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), training of teachers in assessment and new classroom pedagogies, continual inspection by local government facilities, collaboration among teachers and other stakeholders, and provision and subsidisation of school materials required for teaching.

**Keywords:** Competence Based Curriculum, Teacher Perception, Curriculum Implementation

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

On a global scale, there are changes in labour markets and the competences needed for future working life. One of the key issues in many countries around the world is about how to prepare ourselves for future societal challenges and the role of education in providing the skills and competences needed (Erstad, O., Voogt, J. 2018). Social transformations are rapid, and educational processes including curriculum development has been boosted to include new skills and competencies for the youngsters entering the secondary school system. This is to prepare young people leaving the education system and entering the labour market. Greater emphasis is put on education to teach socio-cognitive skills associated with knowledge work, with the production of ideas, knowledge, and information rather than material "stuff" (Williamson, 2013, p. 19).

In 2020, the Ugandan government, through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE&S) and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), introduced a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) for secondary schools at 'O' level. The CBC curriculum was an attempt to adapt positively to the changes and learning requirements of students and in response to universal issues that emphasize the preparation and readiness of students to learn in the 21st century (Katiba & Ji, 2017). It aims to address the limitations of the traditional curriculum and assessment methods (Muwanguzi, Kibaya & Serunjogi, 2023; Namaalwa et al., 2024).

The CBC is designed to help students improve their communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Thornburg, 2014; Musundi & Kariuki, 2020). CBC is focused on competencies, flexibility, and

student-centred learning approaches that seek to equip learners with the abilities and skills essential to successfully meet the expectations of the 21st century (Abagi & Wanjala, 2019). As a result, CBC implementation has emerged as the greatest endeavour made by educators, administrators, parents, governing boards, and others to adopt or carry out the secondary school curriculum. CBC implementation at the national level entails a deliberate and planned effort to bring about changes in overall teaching and attain change in outcomes at the 'O' level. This has been done along the lines of the intentions and prescriptions of the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) curriculum guides, the MoE&S, district education officials, and the school boards. At this level, implementation involved the initiation of specific programs for teachers as implementers and learners as recipients and the provision of the necessary resources and materials to enable them to occur. It also included a series of activities designed to ensure adoption and use of the curriculum and is intended to provide achievable experiences for identified objectives to be realised by targeted students.

CBC is designed to be adaptable to the individual learning needs of each student, allowing for differentiated instruction and assessment (Mugo & Kariuki, 2020). At the classroom level, CBC implementation involves putting a planned curriculum into action in the classroom. It involves translating the curriculum's goals and content into effective teaching and learning practices. This includes planning, teaching, assessment, resources, and profession development. The planning involves developing lesson plans, units, and assessments that align with the curriculum's objectives. On the other hand, teaching involves using a variety of instructional strategies to engage students and facilitate their learning, while assessment encompasses monitoring student progress and providing feedback to inform instruction. Also to note, resources involve utilising appropriate materials, technology, and other resources to support learning, whereas professional development is to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum effectively.

### *1.2 Problem statement*

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) has been implemented in various educational systems around the world, including Uganda (Kitasse & Ssematya, 2024). Teachers are central to whether a curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively, and with efficacy to enable the support of student progress and growth (Neeta, 2019). Studies have been conducted to establish challenges affecting CBC, these have been general challenges about CBC and its implementation. For instance, Akankwasa and Kibedi (2018) noted poor teacher training, and limited support from parents and the community. Other challenges have been inadequate staff, inadequate infrastructure and lack of adequate teaching and learning resources (Kitasse & Ssematya, 2024). Namaalwa et al (2024) also noted that CBC is considered expensive and time for preparation is not enough. However, limited studies have been done to uncover teachers' views of the challenges that arise from their classroom practices and directly affect the implementation of the CBC. Understanding these difficulties in implementing CBC that arise from the classroom could give school officials, school inspectors, MoE&S, NCDC the means to resolve teacher concerns and offer essential training, necessary materials, and support for a successful rollout. If we don't understand what teachers are going through in classroom and its effect on CBC implementation, we risk failing our young generation to attain the competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century for which the CBC was majorly introduced. Hence, making this research paramount.

## **2. Literature Review**

The CBC aims to promote student centered learning and the development of practical skills that align with the needs of the job market (Akankwasa, 2020). It is designed to enhance critical thinking, creativity, and innovation among learners (Mulindwa et al. 2020). According to Namaalwa et al. (2024), the implementation of CBC was driven by the need for Uganda to move away from rote memorisation and focus on practical skills and knowledge that will be useful in the workforce. Instead of concentrating just on knowledge acquisition, competency-based curricula (CBC) emphasise the development of certain competencies or skills (Thornburg, 2014). Muwangizi et al (2023) noted that CBC aims to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary skills and abilities to perform tasks effectively in real-life situations. CBC has several key characteristics, including learner-centeredness, a focus on skills and competencies, flexibility, and personalization (Kitasse & Ssematya, 2024). To help students learn and apply their knowledge and abilities in real-world situations, CBC also stresses the utilisation of project-based learning and real-life scenarios (Wambua & Wanjala, 2019). It is vested with learner-centeredness, focus on skills and competences, adaptability, and customisation (Abagi & Wanjala, 2019). Curriculum implementation encompasses different components, including the delivery of the curriculum through resources and instructional practices (Neeta, 2019). According to Lature et al. (2024), the

keys to successfully implementing CBC at the school level are providing teachers with suitable training, facilitating their access to resources, and continuing to promote collaboration between teachers and associated parties

### 3. Methodology

This research employed a qualitative study design to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of classroom-based challenges affecting the implementation of CBC curriculum. The one-on-one interviewing enabled gathering in-depth data and a rich understanding of participant experiences, understandings, and emotions. Participants were teachers selected using purposive sampling. It was intentional to include teachers who have taught the curriculum for more than 36 months at 'O' level. Other teachers who haven't taught 'O' level or only teach 'A' level were excluded. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives relevant to the research question. The final sample consisted of 50 participants with more than 36 months of teaching at 'O' level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information about participants' experiences, perceptions, and beliefs. An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing for flexibility to explore emerging themes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Through triangulation, the methods enabled the researcher to collect in-depth subjective reality, which was analysed using thematic analysis. This increased the validity, credibility, and reliability of research findings.

### 4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers who participated in this study highlighted many challenges that are affecting the successful implementation of the CBC. These were student-related, teacher-related or classroom-environment challenges. Among the student related challenges included: behavioural issues leading to disruptive behaviour, lack of focus, and difficulty following classroom rules. Lack of motivation was also identified as a crippling factor at the start of exposure to this curriculum in S.1 given the great change that occurs after leaving primary seven class and joining secondary classroom. Lastly was diversity and inclusion which requires teacher to cater for the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and abilities. Teacher-related challenges included excess workload in lesson planning, grading, and administrative tasks. Another challenge was the insufficient resources, such as textbooks, technology, and teaching materials. Large class sizes were difficult to manage and providing individual attention. The issue of limited opportunities for ongoing training and skills development. Suffice to note, are the environmental challenges which include classroom condition related to poor ventilation, lighting or noise level which result from allowed classroom discussion. Others include; technological difficulties with computers, projectors, or other equipment and insufficient space for group work, activities or storage. It was discovered that these issues interacted with one another, making the process of developing productive learning environments even more challenging. A multifaceted strategy combining cooperation between teachers, administrators, parents, and students is needed to address these issues. Among these many challenges, this research recommends that teachers should adopt teaching methods different from the conventional teacher-centred approach to one that is more student-centred and places a focus on problem-solving, active learning, and teamwork. They must be able to apply suitable assessment techniques to gauge students' development and match their teaching approaches with the curriculum's listed competencies. In order to promote critical thinking abilities, educators must receive training in inquiry-based methodologies and other techniques, including digital technologies and continuous assessment and feedback.

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