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Author(s):	Dr. Kamonges Wahab Asad[1], Prof. Joseph Olurotimi Ogunlade[2], Dr. Katumba Faisal[3]
Affiliation(s):	[1] Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda [2] Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria [3] Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Islamic Call University College, Kampala
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Corresponding Author:	Dr. Kamonges Wahab Asad
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Competence Based Curriculum in Uganda: Success Stories, Challenges and Strategies

Dr. Kamonges Wahab Asad[1]
[1] Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda

Prof. Joseph Olurotimi Ogunlade[2]
[2] Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Dr. Katumba Faisal[3]
[3] Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Islamic Call University College, Kampala

Abstract

The present state of competency-based curriculum implementation in Uganda is highlighted in this academic study, along with success stories, challenges, and strategies. Using the expost-facto research design, the authors examined documents pertaining to the implementation of competence-based curricula in order to determine what progress has been made, what challenges have been faced, and what can be done to ensure that the new curriculum is successfully implemented in Uganda. The Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Uganda, in collaboration with sister agencies like the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC), among others, has made admirable efforts to implement competency-based curricula at primary and secondary educational levels, from primary (2007) to lower secondary (2020). In order for universities and other postsecondary institutions to adopt the new curriculum for the 2027–2028 academic year, reforms are being made to align the existing university curricula with the requirements of competence-based curriculum. The CBC was established in 2007 by Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports with the goals of advancing learner-centred education, lowering educational inequalities, and creating students who can compete internationally.

Key Words: Competence-based Curriculum Implementation, Success stories, Challenges, Strategies.

Introduction

In the United States, competency-based curricula have a long history dating back to the early 1970s (Richard & Rogers, 2001). It was a type of educational movement that outlined learning objectives in terms of exact, quantifiable descriptions of behaviours, skills, and knowledge. Due to the severe lack of professionals such as engineers, technicians, and artisans, competency-based curricula were first implemented in South Africa in 1998. A curriculum that emphasizes skills rather than knowledge is known as competency-based (Makunja, 2016). The goal of CBC, a learner-centred, adaptable, and competency-based approach to education is intended to help learners acquire the skills and abilities necessary to fulfil the demands of the twenty-first century (Abagi & Wanjala, 2019).

Traditional schooling has been criticized for producing professionals who are unproductive to the economy because they are unable to compete successfully in the labour market (Malunda, 2018). It is observed that countries such as Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and all of East Africa's nations—including Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya—have adopted the new system. According to Nabunya et al. (2019), the Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda launched the CBC in 2007 with the intention of fostering learner-centred education, lowering educational inequalities, and creating students who can compete on a global scale. The development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills was not prioritized in the conventional curriculum, nor did it address the varied learning requirements of children (Nakkazi & Nampijja, 2020). Curriculum changes are essential because they enable a nation to analyse, update, and assess its educational programs and processes on a regular basis (Kennedy, Kwanghee & Javehoon, 2023). To promote critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning, Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) places a strong emphasis on learner-centred pedagogy and ongoing assessment (Nakawuki, Kyasanku & Tebenkana, 2025).

According to Mokoro (2020), the CBC is focused on helping students improve their knowledge, comprehension, skills, talents, values, attitudes, and interests so they can perform tasks with success, accuracy, and complete responsibility. In contrast to traditional time-bound academic approaches, CBE integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application in real-life circumstances, emphasising mastery of job-relevant abilities and quantifiable competencies (UNESCO, 2022).

Competence -based education (CBE) bridges the training-employment gap and equips graduates to successfully address contemporary industry expectations by matching training with real-world demands (Eze et al., 2022). In order to ensure full mastery of content while conforming to individual learning styles and industry standards, modern CBE programs make use of digital learning systems that offer competency-based examinations, personalised learning routes, and real-time feedback (Rhoney & Meyer, 2024). According to UNESCO (2017), curricula are seen as a way for a nation to equip its citizens with the fundamental values, information, attitudes, and abilities needed to contribute to national development.

Review of Related Literature

Learners who participate in experiential learning get the technical know-how and self-assurance necessary to successfully negotiate challenging job contexts (Ghezir et al., 2021 & Ismail et al., 2022).Although the National Board for Technical Education encourages CBE, implementation is still uneven in the absence of intentional institutional capacity building and industry engagement (Nwogu & Ezeh, 2023).Collaborative,inquiry-driven activities and a variety of instructional approaches that support the development of both hard and soft skills are essential components of effective CBE (Dilmore et al., 2011; Curry & Docherty, 2017).

Learner-centeredness, a focus on skills and competences, flexibility, and personalisation are some of the fundamental features of CBC, according to Abagi & Wanjala (2019). Differentiated instruction and evaluation are made possible by its adaptability to each student's unique learning needs (Mugo & Kariuki, 2020). Competency-based education places a strong emphasis on cooperative learning and group projects, which need a significant investment of resources (people, materials, and time). In order to foster competency in understanding, skills,

talents, and information that can be applied in real-world circumstances, teaching and learning must be interactive so that the instructor can identify students' challenges and find solutions (Bernikova, 2017).

According to Mutisya (2019), the CBC permits a range of methods of instruction that motivate students to participate more actively in their education. Kemboi and Maina (2021) assert that ,the CBC gives students the chance to acquire the knowledge and abilities required to prosper in a world that is becoming more interconnected and complex.

According to Muga, Abuya, and Wagude (2020), the CBC in Kenya was created to foster the development of core competencies such as cooperation and communication, critical thinking and problem solving, imagination and creativity, citizenship, learning to learn, self-efficacy, and digital literacy at the conclusion of its educational cycle. Tanzania was the first country to implement the CBC in 2005. It sought to improve learners' skill acquisition. The Tanzanian Development Vision of 2025, particularly the Education Development sector program, provided the inspiration for the CBC.

Namaalwa, Josephine and Mugula (2025) findings emphasised limited awareness due to limited professional development led to inconsistencies in implementing effective assessment. Stakeholders were not always well-informed about the updated assessment practices, which caused challenges in aligning assessment with curriculum goals.

Success stories

The Ministry of Education and Sports of the Ugandan government launched CBC in 2007. The government sought to develop candidates who could compete on a worldwide scale and encourage learner-centred education. With an emphasis on developing people with employable skills, the government unveiled the new lower secondary curriculum in February 2020.

The National Development Plan (NDP) II 2016-2020 and Uganda Vision 2040 were in line with the curriculum review procedure. According to a recent assessment by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), the CBC has helped students perform better. The Ugandan government has continued to implement the CBC (UNEB, 2020). Kitasse and Ssembatya (2024) reported that, teachers' training sessions appeared to be helpful as they were familiar with the information and abilities required for successfully implementing competency-based curricula.

Challenges of Competence-Based Curriculum Implementation in Uganda

Wasike and Namusisi (2018) noted issues include stakeholder resistance to change, a lack of resources, and insufficient training for educators. Modern classrooms, creative centers, smart boards, labs, and cutting-edge technology are just a few of the physical obstacles that have complicated the CBC's adoption in Kenya and Uganda. Teachers in Uganda still struggle with performance-based learning, ICT integration, and unfamiliar assessment techniques, frequently without enough resources or training (Namubiru et al., 2024; Wambi et al., 2024; Kidega & Mugarura, 2024). Inconsistent pedagogical approaches and teacher preparation are obstacles to collaborative approaches like competency-based curricula (CBC) (Muchira et al., 2023; Benson & Njuguna, 2023). Studies include creating peer learning networks, providing sufficient resources, and continuing professional development to enhance CBC implementation (Namubiru et al., 2024; Nsengimana et al., 2023). The use of CBC has been patchy, especially in poor nations where structural obstacles such a lack of resources, opposition to pedagogical reform, and insufficient training still exist (Nzima, 2016; Momanyi & Rop, 2019).

According to MoES (2010), Uganda's present lower secondary school curriculum focuses on particular learning outcomes, such as making graduates responsible and patriotic citizens, lifelong learners, and constructive contributors to society through practical and production skills.

Uganda and other African nations require greater expertise in using ICT in the classroom to enhance student learning (Kasule et al., 2016). The majority of teacher educators in primary teachers' colleges adhered to traditional teaching practices, which ran counter to the strategies suggested by the Primary Teacher Education Curriculum (Wambi, 2021). Regular, organised, ongoing professional development is required, with a focus on CBC evaluation techniques, ICT integration, and rubric creation (Kachope et al., 2025). Adak (2017) showed that pupils who were

taught science through constructivist techniques performed better academically than those who were taught traditionally.

Kitasse and Ssembatya (2024) reaffirmed that in certain regions of the nation, particularly rural areas, there was insufficient knowledge and application of competency-based learning practices. Additionally, there was a lack of resources and logistics to successfully promote these practices. Eriya et al. (2023), issues like poor teacher preparation, scarce resources, and improper evaluation techniques must be resolved.

A critical study reveals that the CBC was launched without sufficient workshops, seminars, or mentorships due to instructors' inadequate training, which resulted in gaps in planning, material delivery, and assessment. Teachers' perspectives have been significantly impacted by this, and it has also made it more difficult to change the knowledge models from the previous content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum. This suggests that some educators in certain schools are still not implementing the new curriculum in accordance with the Ministry of Education and Sports' instructions.

Additionally, the delivery of CBC at the lower secondary level has been hampered by instructors' high rates of computer illiteracy. One of the main requirements of the CBC is the usage of ICT technology. In light of this, the majority of schools have hired ICT specialists to assist, which is costly for the institutions and has an impact on the timely delivery of the results because each instructor would have been responsible for doing it themselves.

Besides, inadequate teaching resources, including textbooks, teacher guides, ICT infrastructure, contemporary classrooms, labs, libraries, and more, are provided to headteachers in addition to funding gaps, making it unable to accommodate the growing number of students enrolled in government secondary schools. Only twenty percent of the recurring education budget is thought to be allocated to teaching and learning activities, with the remaining eighty percent going toward wages. Even though the number of students enrolled in government secondary schools has skyrocketed, placing an unreasonable strain on the available classroom space, CBC functions best when there are fewer students in the classroom because the teacher can better address each student's unique needs, which is a prerequisite for its successful implementation.

Due to stakeholders' negative attitudes regarding the usage of instructional resources, CBC learner-centred pedagogies, CBC assessment modes, and teacher ineptitude, the CBC failed in South Africa during its implementation stages (Cheptoo & Radamasi, 2019). Significant gaps in ICT integration, resource availability, and assessment competency were identified by Gladyce, Viola, and Adrian (2025), who found high instructor confidence and moderate adaptation.

Strategies

It is the responsibility of policymakers to ensure that CBC aligns with national development goals and priorities and prepares students for the opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century. The evaluation methods used in the competency-based curriculum must accurately represent students' understanding of these skills and align with the intended objectives. This study highlighted the need of coordinated collaboration, stakeholder participation, and continuous professional development.

To meet the growing number of secondary school students, the government must immediately invest more infrastructure resources in the form of classrooms, ICT facilities, labs, libraries, and teaching materials.

In order for teachers to fully embrace the implementation of Competence-Based Curriculum at all levels in the education sector, it is imperative that the Ministry of Education and Sports, along with its sister agencies, host frequent awareness and sensitization workshops and seminars.

Lastly, the Republic of Uganda's government, through the Ministry of Education and Sports should provide scholarships to educators so they can pursue additional education in their areas of expertise and, upon graduation, become an invaluable resource for teaching other educators how to implement competence-based curricula.

Conclusion

As this academic study examines, Uganda's adoption of a competence-based curriculum has seen some success despite certain difficulties. The education industry is undergoing a shift from knowledge-based to competence-

based curricula as a result of government changes. Since the nation's second cohort of students completed the new competence-based curriculum, the results of the UNEB (2025) ordinary level test showed better performance. The Republic of Uganda's government has improved some infrastructure in some of the nation's government-aided elementary and secondary schools since the competency-based curriculum was first implemented, but more is still required to keep up with the increasing number of students. As this essay examines, there are still certain obstacles to overcome, and the suggested solutions would help maximise the advantages of introducing the competency-based curriculum in Uganda at both the basic and secondary levels. Future research should concentrate on how competency-based curricula are being implemented in private primary and secondary schools.

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