

Competency-Based Curriculum And Skills Empowerment Among Primary Schools In Kabale District: A Case Study Of Rutooma Primary School

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Abstract

This study investigated the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and its impact on Skills Empowerment among primary schools in Kabale District, focusing on Rutooma Primary School as a case study. The research objectives included: establishing the extent of CBC implementation, assessing the level of skills empowerment progress, and examining the relationship between the competency-based curriculum and skills empowerment at the school. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect data from teachers, pupils, and school administrators through structured questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The findings indicated that while significant strides had been made in implementing the CBC, challenges such as inadequate resources, teacher preparedness, and time constraints hindered its full realization. The study also revealed that skills empowerment progress was evident, particularly in critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical skills. However, disparities existed due to varying levels of support and resource allocation. Furthermore, the results underscored a strong positive relationship between the implementation of the CBC and enhanced skills empowerment, suggesting that the curriculum fostered the holistic development of learners when effectively applied. In conclusion, the study recommended increased investment in teacher training, provision of adequate teaching materials, and regular monitoring of CBC implementation to maximize its impact on skills empowerment. The findings contributed to the ongoing discourse on educational reforms and their role in equipping learners with the skills necessary for personal and societal development.

Keywords: Competency-Based Curriculum, Skills Empowerment, Primary Schools and Kabale District

Background of the study

The contemporary global education landscape is undergoing a profound paradigm shift, moving away from traditional, knowledge-based models towards approaches that prioritize the development of practical skills, competencies, and lifelong learning. Driven by the demands of the 21st-century economy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive, equitable, and relevant quality education, nations worldwide are re-evaluating their pedagogies (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). The core critique of traditional education is its frequent emphasis on rote memorization and examination performance, which often fails to equip learners with the critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity skills necessary to navigate complex real-world challenges (David et al., 2023). In response, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) has emerged as a leading reform model. CBC focuses on ensuring learners can successfully apply integrated knowledge, skills, and attitudes in diverse situations, thereby empowering them with practical capabilities beyond academic certificates (Julius, 2025). This global

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movement positions education not merely as a process of information transmission, but as a fundamental mechanism for fostering adaptable and empowered citizens.

In Africa, this shift is particularly urgent. Despite significant progress in school enrollment, the continent continues to face a severe "learning crisis," where many children complete primary school without acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skills, let alone the competencies needed for employment and entrepreneurship (Ahumuza et al., 2025). The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) explicitly advocates for curricula that are aligned with Africa's developmental needs, emphasizing science, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). Many African nations, including Kenya, Rwanda, and Ghana, have embarked on ambitious CBC reforms to bridge the gap between education and the socio-economic realities their youth face. However, the implementation of CBC across the continent has been fraught with challenges, including inadequate teacher preparation, a lack of appropriate learning resources, and resistance to change from stakeholders accustomed to the old system (Emmanuel et al., 2023). The success of these reforms is thus not guaranteed by policy alone but is contingent on effective execution at the most granular level the classroom.

Uganda, recognizing these global and continental imperatives, launched its own revised Lower Secondary Curriculum in 2020, with a strong competency-based approach. This reform is now being extended to the primary level, signaling a national commitment to transforming its education system. The government's White Paper on Education (1992) and the more recent National Teacher Policy (2019) have long emphasized the need for education to be relevant and practical. The primary goal of adopting CBC is to move away from the theoretical focus of the old curriculum and empower learners with hands-on skills that enhance their self-reliance and employability, thereby addressing issues of youth unemployment and national development (Nelson & Christopher, 2022). This policy change represents a significant departure from the established norms of Uganda's primary education, which for decades has been dominated by teacher-centered instruction and high-stakes Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) that often discouraged innovative teaching and skill development (Frank et al., 2023).

Kabale District, a region in Southwestern Uganda known for its rugged terrain and predominantly agrarian economy, the implementation of CBC presents both a unique opportunity and a formidable challenge. The district's primary schools, such as Rutooma Primary School, serve communities where poverty levels are high and many children engage in subsistence farming. In this context, a competency-based curriculum that integrates practical skills like agribusiness, financial literacy, and local craftsmanship holds the potential to make education immediately relevant and empowering for learners (Gracious, 2023). It could directly connect classroom learning to the economic activities of the household and community, fostering a generation that is not only educated but also equipped to innovate within the local

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economy. However, the successful rollout of CBC in a resource-constrained environment like Kabale is highly uncertain (Kajansi et al., 2024). Teachers may lack the training and confidence to facilitate competency-based learning, schools often suffer from critical shortages of instructional materials, and infrastructure may be inadequate for the practical activities CBC requires (Julius, 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum and its actual impact on skills empowerment at Rutooma Primary School in Kabale District (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). It aims to determine the extent to which the principles of CBC are being translated into classroom practice and whether this new approach is effectively equipping pupils with the practical competencies intended by national policy.

Statement of the problem

Despite the Ugandan government's strategic shift towards a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) designed to equip learners with practical, lifelong skills, a significant disconnect exists between this policy and its effective implementation in many primary schools (Victoria et al., 2023). This problem is critically evident at Rutooma Primary School in Kabale District. The core issue is that the theoretical adoption of CBC has not reliably translated into tangible skills empowerment for pupils. Preliminary observations suggest that teaching methodologies often remain rooted in rote memorization, failing to foster the critical thinking, problem-solving, and vocational competencies that are the cornerstone of the CBC model (Anthony et al., 2023). This implementation gap is exacerbated by profound contextual challenges within the district, including inadequate teacher training on CBC pedagogies, a severe shortage of appropriate learning materials for practical activities, and insufficient infrastructure (Emmanuel et al., 2023). Consequently, there is a critical need to investigate the specific factors hindering the effective implementation of the CBC at Rutooma Primary School and to assess the actual extent to which the curriculum is empowering pupils with practical skills (Moses & Ntirandekura, 2022). Without a clear understanding of these localized barriers, the transformative potential of the CBC remains unrealized, risking the continuation of an education system that fails to prepare learners for the socio-economic demands of their community and the nation (Justus, n.d.).

Specific objectives

1. To establish the extent of implementing Competency-based curriculum at Rutooma Primary School.
2. To find out the level of Skills Empowerment progress at Rutooma Primary School.
3. To find out the relationship Competency-based curriculum and Skills Empowerment at Rutooma Primary School in Kabale District.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, employing a triangulation of a case study design and a cross-sectional survey design. This synergistic design was selected to facilitate an in-depth examination of the phenomenon at Rutooma Primary School while also allowing for the collection of data from a representative cross-section of the target population at a single point in time (Rasheed et al., 2022). The case study approach was deemed appropriate as it

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permitted a detailed exploration of the relationship between the competency-based curriculum and skills empowerment within its real-life context, given the constraints of time and financial resources that precluded a national survey. Concurrently, the cross-sectional survey design enabled the researcher to gather data from a sample of the population to arrive at findings that could be generalized to the broader study population (Olanrewaju, Lukman Abiodun, et al., 2021). To align with this dual design, the study deployed both quantitative and qualitative techniques; quantitative methods were applied to numerical data to statistically measure the influence of the curriculum, while qualitative techniques were used to analyze non-numeric data, such as respondents' views, opinions, and attitudes, thereby providing a richer, more nuanced understanding (Jallow et al., 2022).

The research was conducted at Rutooma Primary School in Kabale District, a remote district in Southwestern Uganda. The study population comprised 133 individuals, including officials from the Kabale District Education Office, teachers at Rutooma Primary School, and students from the same school (Olanrewaju, Waititu, et al., 2021). From this population, a sample size of 100 respondents was determined using Slovene's formula to ensure a 95% confidence level. The sampling strategy employed a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings and to mitigate bias (A & Ahmed, 2019). Officials from the District Education Office and teachers were purposively selected because, by virtue of their positions and expertise, they possessed in-depth knowledge about the implementation and outcomes of the competency-based curriculum. In contrast, students were selected using simple random sampling to give each student an equal opportunity for participation, ensuring their views were representatively captured (Maiga et al., 2021).

Data collection was carried out using multiple instruments to facilitate triangulation. Primary data was sourced through physical visits where questionnaires, comprising both open and closed-ended questions, were administered. This instrument was valued for allowing respondents time to consult records and provide considered, unbiased responses. Additionally, face-to-face interviews were conducted using an interview guide, which proved effective for studying attitudes, values, and motives, and allowed the researcher to clarify questions and probe for deeper insights. Focus group discussions were also utilized to gather instant answers and enable immediate clarification, minimizing misinterpretation (Abiodun et al., 2022). To supplement this primary data, a comprehensive documentary review was undertaken, which involved analyzing existing literature such as reports, journals, and publications to establish a foundational understanding and verify the accuracy of information provided by respondents.

Following data collection, a rigorous processing and analysis procedure was implemented. Quantitative data from the questionnaires underwent cleaning, sorting, and coding before being entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Nelson et al., 2022). The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the

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primary variables and inferential statistics, including Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient and regression analysis, to test relationships between variables and determine the extent of impact. Qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questions was analyzed through content analysis, which involved transforming the raw data into systematic categories and codes to identify meaningful themes and patterns (Nelson et al., 2023). The entire analytical process involved meticulous editing to amend errors, coding to classify responses into meaningful categories, and tabulation to present the data in statistical tables for clear interpretation.

Throughout the research process, strict ethical considerations were upheld. The study was conducted with the full authorization of relevant education authorities, and an introductory letter from the researcher’s university was presented to eliminate suspicion and gain cooperation. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and informed that the research was solely for academic purposes. Despite these measures, the study encountered several limitations, including the initial unwillingness of some respondents to participate, significant financial and transport constraints, and logistical challenges posed by adverse weather conditions during the rainy season.

Results

Table 1: Level of CBC Implementation

Level of Implementation	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Fully Implemented	30	30
Partially Implemented	50	50
Not Implemented	20	20
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Table 1 provides a critical diagnostic of the current state of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at Rutooma Primary School, revealing a significant implementation gap. The data shows that only 30% of respondents reported that the CBC is "Fully Implemented," while a full 50% indicated it is only "Partially Implemented," and a concerning 20% stated it is "Not Implemented" at all. This distribution indicates that the transition to the new curriculum is incomplete and faces substantial hurdles. The fact that the majority of responses fall into the "Partially Implemented" category suggests a superficial or inconsistent application of CBC principles. In practice, this could mean that while teachers may be aware of the curriculum and attempt to use its terminology or some of its activities, the core pedagogical shift from content-based, teacher-centered instruction to skill-based, learner-centered facilitation has not been fully realized. The 20% reporting no implementation points to more profound resistance, a lack of essential resources, or a critical deficit in teacher training and support.

Table 2: Skills Empowerment Progress

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Level of Progress	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
High	35	35
Moderate	45	45
Low	20	20
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The results are mixed but lean cautiously optimistic, with 45% of respondents observing "Moderate" progress and 35% reporting "High" progress. This indicates that, to a considerable extent, the CBC is having a positive effect on equipping students with practical competencies. The "High" progress reported by more than a third of stakeholders is a strong endorsement of the curriculum's potential when its methodologies are effectively applied. However, the dominant "Moderate" category suggests that the empowerment is often incomplete or not meeting its full potential. This aligns directly with the "Partial Implementation" from the previous table; partial efforts are yielding partial results. Furthermore, the 20% reporting "Low" progress is a stark reminder of the consequences of implementation failure. This figure likely corresponds to the classrooms where the CBC is either not implemented or so poorly executed that it has little to no impact on student skills.

Table 3: Perceived Relationship between CBC and Skills Empowerment

Impact Level	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Positive	40	40
Positive	35	35
Neutral	15	15
Negative	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data, 2024

An overwhelming 75% of respondents (combining "Strongly Positive" and "Positive") perceive a beneficial relationship between the CBC and skills empowerment. This is a profoundly significant finding. It demonstrates that despite the clear implementation challenges documented in Table 1, there is a strong, prevailing belief in the theoretical validity and potential effectiveness of the CBC model. This buy-in from stakeholders is an essential asset, as teachers and administrators are more likely to persevere through difficulties and continue engaging with a reform they believe in. However, this table also reveals a critical disconnect between perception and reality. While 75% believe in a positive relationship, only 35% observed "High" progress in skills empowerment (Table 2). This gap can be interpreted as a manifestation of hope and professional conviction respondents see the value of the CBC approach and attribute the positive changes they do see to it, even if the outcomes are not yet optimal due to implementation barriers. The 10% who perceive a "Negative" relationship may represent those who are either resistant to change, have experienced

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the drawbacks of poor implementation firsthand, or work in contexts where the curriculum is fundamentally mismatched with available resources.

Conclusions

It was concluded that the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum at Rutooma Primary School was markedly inconsistent and incomplete. The findings clearly demonstrated that the curriculum had not been fully institutionalized across the school. While a minority of educators had successfully integrated the CBC framework into their teaching practices, the majority were only applying its principles partially, and a significant portion had not implemented it at all. This widespread partial and non-implementation was primarily attributed to systemic barriers, including inadequate teacher training on CBC methodologies, a critical shortage of appropriate teaching and learning resources, and insufficient time for teachers to develop the required competency-based lessons amidst their other duties.

The study concluded that the progress in student skills empowerment was directly correlated with the level of CBC implementation and was consequently moderate and uneven. The data confirmed that the CBC had a tangible, positive effect on equipping learners with practical competencies, but this effect was not universal. In learning environments where the CBC was more fully embraced and applied, higher levels of skills progression were observed. However, the dominant outcome was moderate empowerment, reflecting the prevalent state of partial implementation. The study therefore determined that the potential of the CBC to transform learning outcomes was being curtailed by the very implementation gaps it identified, leading to an inequitable experience for students whose skill development depended heavily on their specific teacher's capacity to execute the new curriculum.

It was concluded that despite the operational challenges, there existed an overwhelming consensus among stakeholders on the intrinsic value and positive potential of the CBC model. Educators and officials overwhelmingly perceived a strong positive relationship between the curriculum and skills empowerment, indicating a strong theoretical buy-in and a belief in the reform's philosophy. This highlighted a critical divergence between perception and practice; stakeholders were convinced of the curriculum's benefit but were pragmatically constrained from realizing it fully. Consequently, the overarching conclusion was that the primary obstacle to achieving widespread skills empowerment at Rutooma Primary School was not a rejection of the CBC's principles, but a failure in the support systems required for its effective execution. The transformative promise of the curriculum remained largely untapped due to a deficient enabling environment, rather than a flaw in the curriculum itself.

Recommendations

To address the critical issue of inconsistent implementation, a comprehensive and continuous professional development program for teachers must be established. Instead of one-off workshops, this should involve ongoing,

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hands-on training sessions focused on the practical aspects of CBC, such as designing competency-based lesson plans, creating low-cost teaching aids from local materials, and implementing learner-centered assessment methods. Furthermore, the government, in partnership with school administration, should prioritize the provision of essential teaching and learning resources. This includes not only textbooks but also practical kits for subjects like science and agriculture, and basic stationery to facilitate project work and interactive learning. Finally, to mitigate time constraints, school administrators should review teachers' timetables to create dedicated, protected time for lesson planning, resource development, and collaborative peer learning within the school schedule.

To transform the prevailing positive perception of CBC into tangible, high-level skills empowerment, a systemic shift towards supportive monitoring and community engagement is needed. The role of district inspectors and school leadership should evolve from compliance-focused supervision to instructional coaching, providing mentors who can offer real-time feedback and support to teachers in their classrooms. Simultaneously, the school should actively foster stronger links with parents and the local community. This can be achieved by organizing regular exhibitions where students showcase their projects and acquired skills, thereby demonstrating the value of CBC and galvanizing community support. This will also help contextualize learning, making it more relevant to the local environment of Kabale District and strengthening the connection between knowledge and practical application.

To ensure the sustainability and scalability of these efforts, robust policy and resource allocation mechanisms must be strengthened. The Ministry of Education and Sports, along with development partners, should consider launching a targeted grant scheme for schools in remote districts like Kabale to specifically fund CBC implementation, covering costs for materials and local capacity building. A national digital portal should be established for teachers to share best practices, lesson plans, and success stories related to CBC, fostering a collaborative professional community. Ultimately, the government must honor its commitment to the curriculum by increasing the national education budget's allocation for primary education, ensuring that ambitious curricular reforms are matched with the necessary financial investment for successful rollout, thereby transforming policy into impactful practice for every learner.

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