

## Sub-Theme 1:

# Competency Based Curriculum Development and Implementation

### The Status of Implementation of the Reviewed Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum: The Teachers' Perspective

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#### Abstract

The Uganda lower secondary curriculum underwent critical review following concerns of an obsolete, subject-centred and examination-oriented curriculum that did not meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs. Consequently, a competence-based curriculum (CBC) was developed and rolled out for implementation in January 2020. This paper presents the status of the implementation of the curriculum three years later by responding to the question: What are the concerns of Ugandan secondary school teachers about the transition into the CBC? The Concerns-Based Adoption Model offers a theoretical framework through which the concerns of these teachers are analysed. A total of 383 teachers from selected Ugandan Government secondary schools were interrogated regarding their experiences with the implementation of the CBC by use of a structured questionnaire. Their qualitative responses were compiled into a database and analysed using content analysis. Results indicate that the curriculum is perceived positively by majority of the teachers. However, management, informational, and refocusing concerns were most prevalent among the teachers. The insufficiency of instructional materials; poor infrastructure; large student to teacher ratios; lack of access to technological devices; and poor or no internet connection in most secondary schools presents a serious bottleneck to the effective implementation of the lower secondary curriculum. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and its affiliate agencies resolve these issues in order to achieve the overall objectives of the reviewed curriculum.

**Keywords:** Competence-based curriculum, change facilitators, change implementers, implementation, teacher concerns

#### Introduction

Teachers are central to the success of any curriculum reform. Depending on the education system, teachers may take up diverse roles including that of: curriculum developers, implementers, and evaluators. Unfortunately, many curriculum reform processes often relegate teachers to the role of mere implementers. This is common to mandated top-down change which demands fidelity on the part of the teacher (Fullan, 2015; Iskandar, 2020).

While both top-down and bottom-up educational reforms present unique opportunities and challenges, it must be acknowledged that each approach affects teachers and their consequent implementation of the curriculum reform in different ways. This paper shall exemplify implementation of a top-down curriculum reform as in Uganda.

Research on curriculum reform has revealed the importance of paying attention to the experiences that teachers undergo in implementing change (Altinyelken, 2010; Fullan, 2015; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Vandeyar, 2017). Indeed, Fullan (2015) pointed out that change facilitators err in neglecting the phenomenology of change as experienced by implementers. In his seminal book: *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan quipped: “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think - it’s as simple and complex as that” (2015, p.97). Thus, it is critical for change facilitators to work on engendering teacher commitment to curriculum reform at the earliest opportunity possible. A committed teacher will be more willing to expend the extra effort and shoulder additional burdens of self and professional development necessary to sustain a curriculum reform and this is facilitated through change leadership (Liu, 2015; Sodha, 2019).

Majority of curriculum change facilitators at national and school level rely on staff training and capacity development programmes as the main avenue of achieving teacher commitment (Hall & Hord, 2015). However, educational change scholarship has demonstrated that staff training is insufficient; rather, the personal side of change for every change implementer must be attended to (Fullan, 2015; Hall & Hord, 2015; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Moreover, there is a need to interrogate the myriad other factors that besiege teachers as they attempt to implement the curriculum reform.

Unfortunately, some educational researchers have summarily presented the teachers’ responses towards the curriculum reform in Uganda as negative and tending towards resistance (Mubangizi, 2020; Olema et al., 2021). Acknowledging that resistance to change is real, Fullan (2015) nonetheless asserted that it is worthwhile to investigate the experiences that engender this resistance. This study bridged the knowledge gap about the concerns of Ugandan secondary school teachers regarding curriculum reform and hence responded to the recommendation by Altinyelken (2010) that more research be done into curriculum implementation processes in developing countries especially taking school realities into context. It also responded to the proposal by the International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021) that teachers be fully engaged in public debate and dialogue on the futures of education as represented by the curriculum reform in Uganda. This study is thus among the first to explore the concerns of Ugandan teachers in the curriculum reform effort and hence aims to contribute to the management and policy guidance around curriculum reform in Uganda and similar contexts.

## **Research Objective**

The aim of this study was to discover the status of implementation of the lower secondary competence-based curriculum through the perspective of teachers. It sought to answer the question: What are the concerns of Ugandan secondary school teachers in their implementation of the competence-based curriculum (CBC)?

## **Literature Review**

### **The Uganda Education System**

The Education sector in Uganda is overseen by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) whose mandate is to provide technical and policy guidance in order to achieve quality education for all Ugandans. Established in 1961 (Scanlon, 1964), the MoES currently comprises several departments including, among others, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEb), and the Directorate of Education Standards (DES).

The Uganda education system offers four main levels of education: pre-primary, primary, post primary education and training, and tertiary and university education. The primary level is completed in a minimum of seven years while the secondary school level consists of the ordinary level which goes for a minimum of four years and the advanced level which goes for a minimum of two years. The 1992 Government White Paper on Education is the foundational policy framework for the education sector. It stipulated that all Ugandan educational curricula should reflect three key issues: a scientific and technological orientation, development of the ability to use data and information in decision-making, and environmental awareness and concern (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 1992). The 2020 Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC) reform was guided by these three concerns.

### **The Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum Reform**

A national curriculum is the primary instrument through which a country actualizes its socioeconomic aspirations. This is because it is the means by which human capital is moulded to meet the specific needs of the country. Under the NCDC, Uganda has operated a secondary school curriculum that has remained largely unaltered since independence in 1962. This curriculum has come under intense criticism over the past decade and a half primarily because it seems to have failed to produce a market-ready labour force. The 2020 State of the Youth Report showed that while access to education had drastically improved in Uganda, the education system fell short in quality since it was more theoretical than practical (Kwesiga et al., 2019).

The Curriculum, Assessment, and Examinations Report commissioned by the World Bank in partnership with the Uganda Ministry of Education (Clegg et al., 2007; Museveni, 2020) highlighted seven key areas in which the secondary curriculum was proving inadequate:

- i) the curriculum espoused teaching methodologies that were examinations-oriented to the detriment of effective learning and skills acquisition,
- ii) it lacked a guiding framework, resulting in an overloaded curriculum,
- iii) the curriculum catered to an exclusive academic elite leaving out a majority for students,
- iv) it was failing to produce a competent workforce to support socio-economic growth,
- v) much of the knowledge content in the curriculum was obsolete,
- vi) it was unable to develop metacognitive skills relevant to the 21st century, and
- vii) it was unsustainably costly owing to the numerous optional subjects, especially in the vocational, science, and technical categories.

Consequently, in accordance to the Education Sector Strategic Plans 2009/2018 and 2017/2020 (National Curriculum Development Centre, 2020), the LSC was reviewed to make it competence-based. This competence-based curriculum was to be a departure from the previous knowledge-based curriculum in that, among other aspects, it is less examinations-oriented, placing greater emphasis on the acquisition of skills and values by learners (NCDC, 2020).

The new curriculum stipulated new roles for the teacher and the learner. This was in order to transform the educational experience into one which is learner-driven rather than teacher-driven as had been the case. In the previous curriculum, the teacher was the custodian of knowledge and transmitted this to the learners primarily through the lecture method and note-taking. Summative assessment in form of end of topic tests and end of term examinations were relied upon to determine academic achievement of learners. In the new curriculum, however, the learner became the originator of knowledge with the teacher guiding and building upon the learners' knowledge.

The new curriculum introduced a kaleidoscope of learning methods, including: projects, debates, drama, research, problem-solving activities, field trips, and community engagements (NCDC, 2018). Moreover, assessment was now split between formative and summative assessment with the former constituting 20% of the end of cycle grade. This role reversal was a stark departure from both established practice and the teacher training received by majority of in-service Ugandan teachers. Unsurprisingly, therefore, teachers are implementing the curriculum amid various concerns which, if unattended to, may hinder the success of the reform.

### Teacher Concerns

Concerns are a ubiquitous part of any social environment, including the school. Concerns represent heightened thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding a particular phenomenon (George et al., 2006). Educational reforms are one such phenomenon that trigger the development of concerns among stakeholders. Scholars of educational change have shown that the concerns of change implementers present the most superior outlook of how the reform process is unfolding (Fullan, 2015; Hall & Hord, 2015; Leithwood et al., 1994). The individual teacher's personal journey through change is succinctly encapsulated in the concerns they express as they implement the curriculum. Thus, teachers' concerns in a curriculum reform effort present an excellent point of leverage for curriculum change facilitators to track the progress of individual teachers as well as groups in the implementation process thereby allowing them to guide and support teachers in a relevant and effective manner (Fullan, 2015; Hall & Hord, 2015).

When the LSC was introduced in Uganda, various stakeholders, including parliamentarians, parents, community leaders, school leaders, and teachers expressed concerns about it (Ahimbisibwe, 2020; Museveni, 2020). While all stakeholder concerns are of import, this paper argues that the concerns of teachers should be keenly noted, monitored, and addressed in order to support a successful curriculum reform process. Being the clinical educational experts, teachers possess a keen understanding of the technicalities of classroom instruction and hence curriculum delivery (Gouëdard et al., 2020; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

According to the MoES' roadmap for the LSC reform, training of teachers on the curriculum implementation including classroom-based assessment was to begin in 2019. This training utilised a cascaded model in which a selection of teachers was trained and these were tasked with training their colleagues at school level. Teacher training and support was to continue all through the implementation process. This paper argues that a predetermined teacher training schedule can only go so far to address teachers' needs and concerns about a curriculum. While it may serve to provide a basic framework of knowledge and skills required by the teacher, the unique individual and school contexts cannot be anticipated by such a training programme. These must be investigated at school level as this study has attempted to accomplish. Change facilitators must recognise that addressing teacher concerns regarding a curriculum reform is not a one-off endeavour. Research into the concerns of teachers has revealed that they are developmental and can be categorised into three main stages: self, task, and impact (George et al., 2006). Therefore, when one level of concerns is addressed for an individual teacher, he then transitions to another level of concerns. This continues all through the curriculum implementation process.

Research on teacher concerns in several countries has proved to be revelatory and instructive on the curriculum reform processes in those countries. Unfortunately, there is a significant paucity of research on teacher concerns in Africa with majority of the available studies conducted in Southern Africa and West Africa. In Malaysia, Lo (2018) found that English teachers using the Common European Framework of References for Languages Innovation were manifesting a distrustful non-user profile. These teachers had high awareness, personal, and management concerns which pointed to a need for intervention programmes to support the teachers in the curriculum implementation.

A study by Yan and Deng (2019) on the concerns of teachers implementing an inclusive education programme in China revealed that their concerns varied according to certain demographic factors. The teachers' implementation of the programme was being guided by their knowledge of it and whether or not they believed it to be effective, hence it was imperative that educational leaders conduct effective professional development programmes to address this.

In Africa, a study by Oguoma et al. (2019) found that, in the implementation of practical work in the physical sciences curriculum in South Africa, teachers were grappling with the day-to-day management of the curriculum. This was a siren call to educational leaders to support teachers in that regard. Sarfo et al. (2020) investigated teacher concerns on the implementation of the information and communication technology curriculum in Ghana and their results showed that teachers lacked prerequisite knowledge to implement the curriculum innovation and were also highly concerned about its impact on their students' learning. Apau (2021) reported that a study on the implementation of a standards-based curriculum in Ghana revealed that teachers' main concern was to promote peer collaboration as well as to work with change facilitators to implement the curriculum. This implied that teachers had embraced the curriculum and were implementing it well. Such studies have great instructional potential for change facilitators since they help to point them in the right direction as regards how to support teachers in their implementation of curriculum reforms. These studies demonstrate the need to investigate teacher concerns in any educational innovation, particularly a high-stakes one like a curriculum reform in order to facilitate its success.

### The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM)

The basis for scholarship on teacher concerns was provided by Fuller et al. (1974) who conducted a study of pre-service teachers investigating what their primary concerns were. Findings from the study revealed that these pre-service teachers' concerns were actually expressions of felt need that affected their motivation for learning (Fuller et al., 1974). Fuller's concerns theory therefore postulated that the concerns of student teachers progressed with experience from self to task, and ultimately to impact concerns. The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was developed by researchers at the University of Texas Research and Development Centre for Teacher Education as a spin-off from Fuller's concerns theory.

The CBAM supports change facilitators to measure the implementation of an innovation by revealing the affective and behavioural processes that change implementers undergo. An innovation is conceptualised as a change (Hall & Hord, 2015) and in this study, the LSC reform was the educational change and hence innovation in focus. The CBAM (Figure 1) provides three diagnostic tools with which to track the implementation of an innovation: the stages of concerns questionnaire, the levels of use interview tool, the innovations configuration tool.

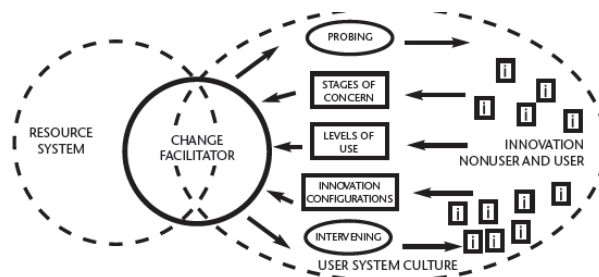


Figure 1: The Concerns Based Adoption Model (George et al., 2006, p. 1)



Note: Adapted from *Measuring Implementation in Schools: The Stages of Concern Questionnaire* (p. 1), by George A.; Hall, G; and Stiegelbauer, S.M., 2006, SEDL. Copyright 2006 by SEDL. Adapted with permission.

According to the CBAM, change implementers, in this case teachers, undergo seven stages in their implementation of an innovation: stage 0 (awareness), stage 1 (information), stage 2 (personal), stage 3 (management), stage 4 (consequence), stage 5 (collaboration), and stage 6 (refocusing) (George et al., 2006). At the awareness stage, teachers are pre-occupied with other tasks besides the curriculum under question and are therefore less involved with it. Teachers at the informational stage manifest a basic awareness of the curriculum and a need to learn more about it. At the personal stage, teachers are preoccupied with the ways in which the curriculum reform will affect them personally in terms of work demands, changing roles, commitments and remuneration. At the management stage, the teachers' focus is on how to navigate the curriculum in terms of processes, daily tasks, and resources required. Teachers who are at the consequences stage are more concerned about how the curriculum will affect the learning of their students. Those at the collaboration stage are keenly looking for opportunities to cooperate with other change implementers and even facilitators in implementing the curriculum. Finally, those at the refocusing stage are beginning to look beyond the curriculum, to modify it in order to glean greater benefits for students, or to replace it altogether with a better curriculum.

All these concerns manifest differently depending on a number of factors, including the individual teacher's predispositions, school culture and affinity to reforms, the school socioeconomic context, and curriculum reform strategies employed by change facilitators. Hall and Hord (2015) referred to the curriculum reform strategies as the functions of interventions. They enumerated six functions that they believed needed to be undertaken by change facilitators in order to facilitate a successful innovation. These functions were: the articulation and communication of a shared vision of the change, planning for and providing resources, facilitating continuous professional development for change implementers, monitoring of progress, provision of continuous assistance, and creating contexts that are supportive of change in terms of culture, staffing, resources and infrastructure (p. 35).

Figure 2 shows a conceptual framework of how three key factors: curriculum reform strategies, teacher concerns, and quality of curriculum implementation interact to bring about a successful curriculum reform. They are conceptualised as three cogs in a machine. Ideally, curriculum reform strategies should drive implementation of the curriculum. However, teacher concerns, whether acknowledged or not, and if unattended to, may present a significant barrier to effective curriculum implementation. Therefore, change facilitators do well to continuously attend to and address these concerns.



Figure 2: Conceptual model (Authors, 2023)

Note: The model shows the interaction between curriculum reform strategies that may be employed by change facilitators, teacher concerns in the curriculum reform, and the quality of curriculum implementation by teachers who are the main change implementers.

### Research Design

This paper was based on a mixed methods study in which teacher concerns and their relationship to the implementation of a curriculum reform were investigated. It was grounded in the pragmatic philosophical worldview. The study utilised a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections: the stages of concerns questionnaire (George et al., 2006), a closed-ended section interrogating the teachers’ experiences with the curriculum reform process and their implementation of the LSC, and a comments section at the end. Participants’ responses to the comments section provided data for this paper. Here, participants were prompted to express their concerns in their own words by making a comment on their experience with implementation of the curriculum or on any of the issues that had been highlighted in the two foregoing sections. This allowed a deeper probing of teachers’ concerns and experiences by allowing participants freedom to highlight specific issues pertinent to them. It also allowed an analysis of frequently occurring themes.

### Population, Sampling Frame and Sample

The target population for this study was all secondary school teachers in Uganda. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics report of 2019 numbered the secondary school teachers at 114,859 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). Therefore, at a confidence interval of 95% and a 5% margin error, a sample size of 383 was considered representative of the total population (Cohen et al., 2018). The sampling frame consisted of government-aided secondary schools within the central sub-region of Uganda. Due to its proximity to the administrative capital, Kampala, and hence perceived ease of access to resources like instructional materials and trainers, the central sub-region was deemed appropriate to provide a benchmark for the nature of teacher concerns. Government-aided schools were selected for study because they are directly resourced and supervised by the Government of Uganda (Education Act Uganda, 2008) and hence it was assumed that they are more likely to be implementing the LSC reform with greater fidelity.

Sampling was done by cluster random sampling in which schools were randomly selected from the sampling frame. According to the Uganda MoES, the central sub-region boasts 267 secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). Thus 40 government-aided secondary schools were randomly selected from this list. All teachers present on the day that the researchers visited were included in the sample and requested to fill out the questionnaire. At every school that was visited, an average of 10 teachers were present and on duty. No school was visited twice. A total of 383 secondary school teachers participated in the survey. Of these, 286 (74%) provided a qualitative response in the last section of the questionnaire. Demographic information on the study participants was collected on five criteria: gender, highest academic qualification, length of teaching experience, subject group taught, and main source of information regarding the LSC reform as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study participants. (Source: Field data, 2023)

Characteristic	Number of respondents (n= 286)	%
Gender		
Male	191	66.78
Female	95	33.22
Highest academic qualification		

Characteristic	Number of respondents (n= 286)	%
Certificate	0	0.35
Diploma	41	14.34
Bachelor's degree	212	74.13
Masters	32	11.19
Teaching experience (years)		
0 to 5	69	24.13
6 to 10	59	20.63
11 to 15	70	24.48
Over 15	88	30.77
Subject group taught		
Humanities, Business, and Languages	130	45.45
Math and Sciences	100	34.97
Vocational and Arts	56	19.58
Main information source		
NCDC Training	212	74.13
School administrators	26	9.09
Fellow teachers	44	15.38
Internet	4	1.40

### Ethical Considerations

At every study site, school administrators including the head teacher, deputy head teacher or director of studies were requested for permission to access the teachers. The senior-most school administrator present during the study visit was approached for permission. The front page of the questionnaire consisted of an informed consent statement which introduced the study to the participants, explaining its purpose and emphasizing the principles of voluntariness and anonymity. Teachers were invited to signal their consent by proceeding with the survey therein. The informed consent was also explained orally by the researchers prior to handing out the questionnaires to the teachers.

### Data Analysis

All the qualitative responses were compiled into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. These responses were the teachers' individual expressions of concern regarding the curriculum reform process thus far. These statements were analysed using content analysis with the aim of both describing and quantifying participant responses (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Content analysis was deemed appropriate as it allows for the analysis of frequency of occurrence of themes within the data through the creation of a numerical data matrix (Kuckartz, 2014).

In this study, the frequency of occurrence of various themes from the expressed teacher concerns was equated with the degree of importance of that particular concern in the LSC implementation



process. The data were analysed following the five steps outlined by Denscombe (2014) in Cohen et al. (2018, p. 675): i) selection of a data sample, ii) extraction of codes from the text on the basis of predetermined units of analysis, iii) distillation of categories from those codes, iv) matching the units with the categories, and v) counting the frequency with which the units occur within the various categories.

### Findings

The teacher responses allowed three levels of codes to be carved out: level one (in vivo), level two (categorical), and level three (conceptual) (Yin, 2016). Analysis of the in vivo codes produced 16 categories which were fitted into the six CBAM stages of concern as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: In vivo codes, categories and stages of concern emerging from the teachers’ responses (Source: Field data, 2023)

Conceptual (Level 3)	Categorical (Level 2)	A SELECTION OF IN VIVO CODES (LEVEL 1)
INFORMATION	Teacher training and preparation	Insufficient teacher preparation
PERSONAL	Human resource	High learner/ teacher ratio
	Remuneration and motivation	Big classes limiting individual attention to learners Big workloads
MANAGEMENT	Instructional materials and resources	Few/ no teaching/learning materials, DIT materials
	Infrastructure	No technological devices, poor or no internet, small learning spaces, poorly equipped libraries
	Time allocation	Too much content vis a vis time allocated/ limited time on the timetable
	Change facilitator support	Limited administrative support
CONSEQUENCES	Impact on learners	Development of learner talents/ potential/ skills
	Learner challenges	Learners hesitant
COLLABORATION	Satisfaction with CBC	Better than old
	Personal competence	Supporting other teachers
REFOCUSING	Education sector policy	Allow learner gadgets, start CBC in primary
	Stakeholder engagement	Need for teacher involvement in CBC evaluation, little parental support
	Mode of assessment	Advocacy for 40:60 ratio of summative to formative assessment
	Learning content	Shallow/misleading/overwhelming content

A frequency count revealed that at 76% (216), the management concern was the most prevalent of the concerns, followed by the information concern at 24% (70), and the refocusing concern at 20% (57). This is shown in Figure 2.

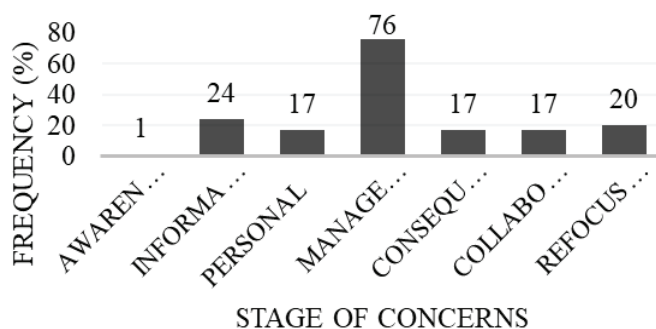


Figure 2: Percentage occurrence of stages of teacher concerns (Source: Field data, 2023)

Note: The data was collected between November 2022 and February 2023.

The data revealed that majority of the teachers perceived the competence-based LSC in a positive light. Teachers used descriptors like: good, effective, better, timely, right direction, enjoyable, and interesting to express their views of the curriculum. Such responses included:

*“The CBC is OK and better than the old curriculum. So, the learners are going to benefit. (Respondent W317)”*

*“The CBC has made me a better teacher because am able to discover the unique abilities of each learner unlike before. It is also less tiresome. The lesson is interesting. (Respondent W320)”*

*“The implementation of CBC was a little tricky at first but after many sessions of training by the school administration, it has proven to be the best curriculum. It gives learners chance to explore and discover a lot on their own. (Respondent Kay116)”*

*“The competent based curriculum is likely to be the best curriculum when compared to the old theory curriculum that was not encouraging creative thinking amongst the learners. (Respondent Kay205)”*

*“I am so far convinced with the CBC system that we can move our country forward because the learners are able to actively participate in the activities given in the system going forward. (Respondent L108)”*

Nonetheless, numerous concerns were raised pertaining to the curriculum reform process from the onset of implementation in 2020 to date. These concerns corresponded with the CBAM stages of concern as explained in the following section:

### Awareness Concerns

This stage of concern had the lowest percentage occurrence. It was manifested by respondents who seemed non-committal about their implementation of the LSC. This was an indication that the teachers were not yet fully immersed in the curriculum. One such response was:

*“I am still studying the CBC programme. However, it is a good one. (Respondent K110)”*

Concerns on awareness could be emerging among teachers who were exclusively teaching the higher classes but anticipate having to eventually engage with the CBC. At the time of data collection, seniors three, four, five, and six were carrying on with the old curriculum. However, such teachers are in the minority as common practice in Uganda is that teachers teach across the board from O to A level.

## Informational Concerns

Several teachers expressed a need for more information regarding the LSC as they felt unprepared in terms of knowledge and skills to implement the CBC. Some revealed struggles with transitioning from the old curriculum into the LSC. The majority of teachers with informational concerns desired help with the new assessment modes, specifically summative end of year assessments, projects and activities of integration (AOI) as well as report-making. They also indicated that they were ill-equipped to prepare learners for the end of cycle assessment by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB).

*“The CBC is a good one but still requires much more preparation on the side of the teachers (facilitators) since they were not adequately prepared through trainings nationally. (Respondent L112)”*

*“I think at this moment due to my experience; the students and we (teachers) are still locked in an old curriculum therefore it is still transforming and many teachers mix the old and new curriculum. (Respondent K111)”*

*“Guidance on the summative assessment by UNEB is hidden from the teachers up to now. So we teach but don’t know how UNEB will set its assessment yet it carries the biggest percentage of 80%. (Respondent L104)”*

The informational concerns expressed by the teachers offer excellent guidance in the preparation of continuous teacher training programmes.

## Personal Concerns

The personal concerns that the teachers expressed in this study spanned three specific issues: large student to teacher ratios in the classrooms, huge workloads, and need for better remuneration as expressed by this respondent:

*“Teacher-student ratio still remains a big challenge especially with the USE programme in many secondary schools. Additionally, the disparities in salaries between Arts and Science teachers is a great hinderance to the teaching and learning process. (Respondent Kay105)”*

The issue of big classes was persistent regardless of the socioeconomic status of the school. Citing classes of over 100 learners, respondents felt this was a significant hindrance to the interaction between teachers and individual learners and hence defeating the purposes of the CBC. Issues of better remuneration and motivation were closely tied to the perceived increase in workload that accompanied the LSC as evident in the following field excerpts:

*“CBC implementation has been very interesting. Had it not been the challenge of a high teacher-pupil ratio (1:130). How I wish it is addressed. (Respondent Mu211)”*

*“The CBC is good enough; however, many schools still give teachers a bigger teaching load which seriously affects the teacher’s concentration on the CBC curriculum. (Respondent L203)”*

These concerns indicate that teachers are attempting to reconcile their personal and professional needs with the demands of the LSC.

## Management Concerns

The management concerns were the most prevalent among the respondents. Teachers revealed key challenges that they grappled with in their day-to-day implementation of the LSC. Four main issues emerged: insufficiency of instructional materials, finances, and resources; inadequacy of infrastructure including poor internet connectivity, few or no technological devices, relatively small

and few classrooms, and ill-equipped libraries; insufficient time allocation; and limited change facilitator support including the MoES, NCDC, and school administrators. Some respondents commented as follows:

*“The CBC needs review between content and time scheduled as in many cases the available content and activities exceeds the scheduled time for the lessons and other activities. (Respondent W111)”*

*“The school lacks a functional computer lab therefore it becomes hard to use ICT in the teaching learning process. This being a USE school it is hard to get money to facilitate projects. I improvise but can’t all the time improvise. (Respondent W301)”*

*“Can the Ministry of Education and curriculum developers (NCDC) keep timely checking on us and see where we need to adjust. The learner’s guides are still few in some subjects compared to big numbers... There are many software developers coming up with inadequate information on report writing and schools choose who is cheaper hence ending up with assessment disparities. ICT gadgets are so demanding and calls for data/internet where some of our learners miss a lot specially when it comes to research work to support their delivery. (Respondent W309)”*

It was evident from the respondents’ comments that large learner to teacher ratios; insufficient instructional materials; limited resources including finances and time; inadequate infrastructure including small classrooms, poorly-equipped libraries, lack of internet connectivity and few technological devices; and the perceived insufficiency of change facilitator support at both school and national levels present a significant bottleneck to the sustained success of the curriculum reform.

### **Consequence Concerns**

Several respondents expressed concerns about the impact of the new curriculum on the learners. A section appreciated the curriculum’s potential to develop learners’ talents and skills, as well as confidence in communication and research. Concurrently, a few teachers were concerned that learners’ competence in basic reading, writing and speaking was lacking. Others opined that many learners were simply reluctant to engage at the level required by the curriculum, a problem that was exacerbated by large classes as remarked below.

*“According to me, CBC has done good to change format teaching. In my school, my learners have improved in writing good essays; they are confident during classroom presentation. However, there are some challenges for instance, CBC favours learners who like to study but those who do not want are left out, they don’t work, no reading. So I need to look into that so as to help these learners. (Respondent W310)”*

*“CBC is more student-centred because they carry out their own research and make notes. It has also developed confidence in the learners. (Respondent W312)”*

*“The CBC seems to require very shallow knowledge from the students and yet the AOI require many details i.e. it gives a superficial approach. Students are not yet aware of their role as learners, they still expect to be given most of the information. (Respondent K203)”*

Such concerns reveal that teachers are assessing the curriculum for its merits as far as student achievement is concerned and its potential to deliver positive outcomes for learners. Consequence concerns showed that teachers had noted the potential of the curriculum to improve learning outcomes and were therefore inspired to support it. They also noted learner weaknesses like poor reading and writing competence that needed to be addressed.

## Collaboration Concerns

A few respondents expressed concerns that fell under the need and willingness to collaborate with others in the implementation of the curriculum. Such respondents were overt in their appreciation of the curriculum while others felt they were competent enough to implement it and even support others in their implementation. This is evident in the extracts below:

*“Now I feel like am in the system. I always form groups of teachers to explain to them. Supporting them on grading, AOI, and criterion referencing. (Respondent MGB55)”*

*“I appreciate the fact that with my experience in new curriculum teaching, I have so far been in position to master and teach what is required in form of assessments and many others... (Respondent L311)”*

Such concerns reveal the availability of potential teacher champions for the curriculum reform. A positive sentiment and even a confession of a basic level of competence indicates that the curriculum has been positively received and is poised to take root if handled well.

## Refocusing Concerns

The refocusing concern, in which respondents had ideas to improve, modify, or completely redirect the reform effort, was evident among a sizeable proportion of respondents. A section of teachers pointed out gaps in the education sector policy that facilitated the introduction of the CBC. For instance, one respondent faulted budget allocation for the LSC:

*“The new curriculum is too costly yet the government is not effective in provision of the teaching/ learning aids. The school administration has been economically strained to spend yet it had not budgeted and the nation is too impoverished to cater for the expenses. (Respondent W402)”*

Another respondent opined that the LSC should have been introduced at the primary level rather than at the secondary school level. Several respondents felt that engagement with key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and private schools, was inadequate. The ratio of formative to summative assessment 20:80 was faulted by several respondents as encouraging examination-orientation. Most advocated for a 40:60 ratio instead. Finally, several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching content presented in the LSC materials. While some felt that it was shallow, others thought it was too broad. Some of the content was thought to be misleading and in other instances, lacking in relevant content. For instance:

*“The CBC is indeed supposed to be a good system to facilitate learning, it stimulates the learners to like studies, self-discovery, etc., but it was hurriedly implemented without involving the stakeholders (teachers)- not given ample time. It also requires learners to have gadgets e.g., phones, Ipads, laptops, etc. Are we going to allow smart phones in schools? What about the learners who can't access these gadgets? Why still maintain the 80% of UNEB marks when actually we want to promote skills? (Respondent K206)”*

*“CBC should be integrated with the old curriculum in assessment and make vocational subjects like metal works, technical drawing, food and nutrition compulsory. (MGB62)”*

The refocusing concerns showed a two-pronged response to the curriculum reform: supportive and resisting. Supportive responses revealed ideas to improve the approach to the reform and make it more impactful. On the other hand, resisting responses tended to dismiss the curriculum in its entirety.



## Discussion

This study sought to answer the question: What are the concerns of Ugandan secondary school teachers about the transition into the CBC? Contrary to the assertion by Olema et al. (2021) that teachers generally have negative perceptions of the competence-based LSC, data revealed that in general, the curriculum has been well received by teachers. The expression of teacher concerns was found to correlate with the expected trends as explained by Hall and Hord (2015). According to Hall and Hord, in early implementation of an educational innovation, usually the first three years, management concerns are often the most intense. However, as implementation progresses, impact concerns, which include consequence, collaboration, and refocusing, should ideally intensify as task and self-concerns (informational and personal) wane. They did caution that if self and task concerns are not well handled, they could progress beyond the third year of implementation, thereby undermining the success of the innovation.

This trend of teacher concerns was evident from the data. With the LSC in its third year of implementation at the time of the study, self and task concerns were prevalent among the teachers. This underscores the need for change facilitators to pay close attention to the needs and concerns expressed by teachers as they implement the curriculum. Goodson (2014) termed this as a crisis of positionality among professional educators wherein they were compelled to respond to externally-generated change rather than being the originators of this change. In agreement with Fullan (2015), Goodson posited that external change agents often erroneously assume the goodwill and cooperation of internal change agents (educators). Self and task concerns are therefore a manifestation of efforts by change implementers to align their personal and professional missions with the mandated change. This was evident in the concerns voiced by respondents in this study.

The prevalence of task concerns, also termed management concerns (George et al., 2006) is noteworthy. Teachers pointed out a general insufficiency of resources and infrastructure to support the implementation of the curriculum. This issue has been identified as a perennial hindrance to effective curriculum implementation and hence quality education in Africa (Akala, 2021; Cunningham, 2018; Fleisch et al., 2019; Isaboke et al., 2021; Makunja, 2016; Sajitha et al., 2018). Outlining major obstacles to success of new curricula implemented in sub-Saharan Africa from 2007 to 2016, Fleisch et al (2019) cited rampant under-resourcing of educational environments as a key pragmatic challenge. These are issues that will have to be addressed by Ugandan change facilitators if the LSC reform is to take flight.

The highest and most ideal level of concerns is the impact level since such concerns indicate that the teacher is engaging with the reform at the philosophical level of vision and rationale (Hall & Hord, 2015). Impact concerns include consequence, collaboration, and refocusing concerns. The data revealed that the impact concerns, specifically refocusing concerns were the third most prevalent category. Teachers were interrogating how the CBC was delivering better student outcomes. According to Hall and Hord (2015), refocusing concerns are expected among implementers who have gained some degree of experience with use of the innovation as they seek to modify and improve, or even replace it with a better one.

However, the refocusing concerns in this study tended to reveal resisting tendencies among the teachers. This is in agreement with Mubangizi (2020) and Olema et al. (2021) who cited resistance to the curriculum among the Ugandan teachers although, at only 20%, it was not as widespread as claimed in these two studies. This could be attributed to conservativeness among the teachers (Goodson, 2014), majority of whom had over 15 years of experience in teaching. Moreover, the teachers have not adequately engaged with the CBC given that it is only in its third year of implementation.

## Conclusion

In as much as this paper presents an analysis of the concerns of teachers, it must be acknowledged that this is but a vignette of the wide range of concerns that teachers across the country may harbour. However, it does provide a sound starting point for change facilitators to address these concerns at school, district, and national levels. The findings suggested that most Ugandan secondary school teachers are committed to the LSC reform at a fundamental level. However, this commitment is in danger of being worn out by the daily toils of endeavouring to implement the curriculum within a resource-scarce context. Frustrations from limited understanding of specific aspects of the curriculum also seems to come through. Thus, change facilitators must be awake to the fact that the multiplicity of management concerns, especially when unaddressed could stall the curriculum implementation significantly.

The personal and management concerns reveal practical points of intervention for change facilitators. For instance, the occurrence of informational concerns is an indication that the cascaded model of teacher retooling may have been limited in effectiveness. Interestingly, 74% of teachers stated that their main source of information regarding the LSC reform was the NCDC trainings. This could be a signal to the NCDC to review its training programmes for effectiveness. According to the NCDC, the new curriculum aims to impart generic skills in the learners, one of which is ICT proficiency (National Curriculum Development Centre, 2018). However, the widespread insufficiency, and in many cases, absence of ICT equipment and internet connectivity means that ICT proficiency will likely elude a vast majority of Ugandan youth. Thus, the scarcity of resources and inadequate infrastructure presents a significant threat to the successful implementation of the LSC reform. Nonetheless, as pointed out by Fullan (2015) and Goodson (2014), educational change takes time to yield expected objectives. The latter is dependent upon prudent actions taken by both change implementers and change facilitators. Curriculum reform is a cyclic process therefore change facilitators must be committed to monitoring and addressing the concerns of change implementers on a continuous basis.

## Limitations

This study was carried out within the geographical scope of the central sub-region of Uganda. It therefore does not capture the unique concerns of teachers in other regions of the country. However, it included schools from all socio-economic contexts as well as urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. It may therefore be considered approximately representative of teacher concerns across the country. This paper only addresses schools under the financial support of the government: universal secondary schools (USE) and non-universal secondary schools (non-USE). It is acknowledged that the concerns of teachers in private schools, which constitute 66% of the secondary schools in Uganda (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2022), may differ from these expressed herein.

## Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to change facilitators, change implementers, and for further scholarship:

1. The most influential change facilitators are at the school level. These are the school administrators, departmental heads, and teacher leaders. They are best placed to address teacher concerns at self, task, and even impact levels especially through the strengthening of professional learning communities. Therefore, school administrators should undertake to devise methods of monitoring, documenting, and addressing teacher concerns as they implement the curriculum.
2. The Ministry of Education and Sports equip schools to facilitate the curriculum in terms of infrastructure, internet connectivity, and increased financial support. This has been identified both in literature and through teacher concerns as a significant threat to the success of a curriculum reform at this scale.
3. The National Curriculum Development Centre step up its training programmes in order to reach every teacher, paying particular attention to learner assessment. The study results have revealed that although NCDC is a main source of information for teachers, significant information gaps persist. The NCDC should be guided by the specific areas of concern highlighted by teachers in this study.
4. National Curriculum Development Centre and Ministry of Education and Sports should work with teachers to establish robust feedback channels through which teachers countrywide can relate their concerns and have them addressed. Literature has revealed the danger of neglecting teachers as the main change implementers. School and district administrative structures should be leveraged for this purpose. Teacher organisations and social media platforms can also offer excellent milieu for meaningful engagements.
5. School administrators, in collaboration with local governments and supported by the MoES should conduct intensive stakeholder engagement targeting parents, community leaders and all proprietors of educational institutions. This will help teachers find the support system they crave both locally and nationally.
6. Change implementers, specifically teachers, should allow themselves time to learn, engage with, and master the curriculum rather than dismissing it at this early point of implementation. Educational reform scholarship has demonstrated that concerns evolve as implementation progresses. Thus, teachers should make their concerns explicit through the available channels in order to facilitate their advancement to higher stages of concern.
7. Further research should be dedicated to the concerns of teachers implementing the curriculum reform in private schools in Uganda. It is worth discovering the concerns of teachers in private schools as the nationwide success of the curriculum may be largely determined by them. A comparison of teacher concerns in private versus government-aided schools should then be carried out to provide scholars and change facilitators with a circumspect understanding of the curriculum reform process and national teacher support needs.

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