

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULUM (CBC) IN ENHANCING PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LUUKA DISTRICT

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in enhancing student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District, Eastern Uganda. Specifically, it investigated the relationships between CBC teaching methods, assessment and evaluation practices, and student performance. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving 44 teachers from two randomly selected secondary schools. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. The findings revealed that assessment and evaluation practices under the CBC had a strong and statistically significant positive effect on student performance ($\beta = 0.666$, $p < 0.05$), whereas CBC teaching methods did not have a statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.335$, $p = 0.121$). The regression model explained 53.3% of the variance in student performance, indicating that effective assessment practices play a pivotal role in translating curriculum objectives into measurable learning outcomes. The study concludes that strengthening competency-based assessment practices is essential for improving student performance under the CBC. It recommends targeted teacher training, provision of instructional resources, and sustained monitoring to enhance both assessment and teaching practices.

Keywords: Competence-Based Curriculum, student performance, teaching methods, assessment and evaluation, lower secondary schools, Uganda

1.0 Background

All countries worldwide are competitively striving to achieve Quality Education. However, the difference lies in the fact that some countries are clearly more advanced in this pursuit than others (Wambi et al., 2024). A well-implemented curriculum is pivotal in shaping educational outcomes and fostering holistic development in students globally. Firstly, it ensures that learning objectives are clear, structured, and aligned with both national standards and global competencies. This alignment helps bridge the gap between educational goals and real-world applications, equipping students with essential skills for the future (Moore et al., 2023; Narvekar et al., 2020). Achieving learning outcomes has long been a challenge for education systems in the developing world, significantly impacting economic development. In 2017, 60 percent of children and adolescents did not meet minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. One major factor is the misalignment between curriculum and the skills needed for academic and real-world success. An outdated or poorly designed curriculum has hindered students' ability to achieve proficiency, and various systemic issues further create barriers to effectively aligning and orienting education systems toward improving learning outcomes (World Bank, 2022).

Despite significant transformations in Sub-Saharan Africa, numerous sub-regional learning assessments indicate that educational progress has not translated into substantial improvements in the quality of schooling and learning. Learning achievement gaps remain a significant issue across the African continent, with many primary and secondary students failing to attain basic literacy levels. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of coherence between teaching policies and other critical components of the education system, such as infrastructure and facilities, the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment nexus, availability of teaching and learning resources, school inspection and supervision, and national learning assessments and monitoring mechanisms. These weaknesses continue to impact African education systems significantly (Hassan et al., 2022; Salzano & Labate, 2016). According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and UNESCO, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of out-of-school children globally, with over one in five children aged 6 to 11 and nearly three in five adolescents aged 15 to 17 not attending school (Adjadeh, 2024).

In Uganda, the education system faces numerous challenges that prevent widespread access to quality education. The public education system includes seven years of primary education, four years of lower secondary, two years of upper secondary, and three years of university for undergraduate programs. Although some levels of education are free, tertiary education requires financial investment, leading many parents to prefer private schools over government ones. Uganda's literacy rate is approximately 79%, which is lower than neighboring countries such as Kenya (82%) and Tanzania (80%). This indicates that there are issues within the education system that need addressing to enhance the quality of education in Uganda. The curriculum has long been considered outdated and has faced criticism for being overly theoretical, failing to adequately prepare students with the practical skills needed in the workplace (Nangayi, 2023).

In 2020, the Government of Uganda introduced a new lower secondary school curriculum with the goal of improving learning outcomes and addressing the skills gap in the country's education

system. This initiative was designed to modernize the educational framework and better equip students with the necessary skills for the future (Mwesigwa, 2024). However, a report by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) on teacher training highlighted several significant challenges impeding the curriculum's full implementation. The report pointed out that the curriculum rollout was premature, as many teachers had not received adequate training to effectively deliver the new content and methodologies. Moreover, there was a substantial lack of essential training materials and textbooks, further complicating the transition to the new curriculum. These deficiencies have hindered the intended improvements in educational quality and learning outcomes, highlighting the need for more comprehensive planning and resource allocation to ensure successful curriculum implementation (Mwesigwa, 2024).

In Luuka District, performance at the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) level has remained persistently low compared to other districts in the Eastern region. Records indicate that out of 1,360 candidates who sat for the UCE examinations, only 542 passed, representing a pass rate of 39.9% (LGMSD Report, 2022/23). Furthermore, the 2024 UCE school rankings revealed that the majority of secondary schools in Luuka District were poorly ranked based on overall grades, underscoring continued challenges in student achievement despite the curriculum reform (Daily Monitor, 2024). This poor performance suggests that learners may not be adequately acquiring the expected competencies and academic skills envisaged under the CBC. Furthermore, the transition to the CBC has been accompanied by several implementation challenges, including limited teacher preparedness, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient infrastructure, and inconsistencies in assessment practices. These challenges may undermine the realization of the curriculum's objectives, particularly in rural districts such as Luuka. However, there is limited empirical evidence examining whether the CBC has effectively enhanced student performance and competency development in such contexts. Existing studies largely focus on teacher perceptions or policy analysis, with minimal emphasis on learner performance outcomes at the district level.

This lack of evidence-based evaluation creates a significant knowledge gap regarding the actual effectiveness of the CBC in improving student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District. Consequently, this study sought to examine the effectiveness of the Competence-Based Curriculum in enhancing student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District.

1.1. Objectives

Both overall and specific objectives guided the study.

1.1.1 Overall Objective

To examine the effectiveness of the competence-based curriculum (CBC) in enhancing performance of students in lower secondary schools in Luuka district in eastern Uganda

1.1.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the relationship between teaching methods under CBC and performance of students in lower secondary schools in Luuka district.

- ii. To establish the relationship between assessment and evaluation practices under CBC and performance of students in lower secondary schools in Luuka district.

1.1.3 Hypotheses (Alternative Hypotheses)

H1: Teaching methods under CBC are significantly associated with performance of students in lower secondary schools in Luuka district.

H2: Assessment and evaluation practices under CBC are significantly associated with performance of students in lower secondary schools in Luuka district.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Philosophy

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy, which is appropriate for quantitative research and emphasizes objectivity, measurement, and hypothesis testing. Positivism assumes that reality is objective and can be observed and measured using scientific methods (Park et al., 2020). In line with this philosophy, the study used quantitative techniques to examine the effectiveness of the CBC in enhancing student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District. Data was collected using structured questionnaires to generate numerical data on teaching methods, assessment and evaluation practices, and student performance. The positivist approach enables statistical analysis of relationships between variables and supports the generation of empirical, generalizable, and unbiased findings (Park et al., 2020).

2.2 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design using a quantitative approach. The design is appropriate for collecting data from a representative sample of respondents at a single point in time in order to examine relationships between teaching methods, assessment and evaluation practices, and student performance under the CBC (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The cross-sectional design allows the researcher to describe current practices and statistically determine the strength and direction of relationships between the study variables. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, making the design suitable for achieving the study objectives and generating generalizable findings for lower secondary schools in Luuka District.

2.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Luuka District, located in the Eastern Region of Uganda. Luuka District was selected as the study area due to its persistently low performance in lower secondary school examinations, particularly at the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) level, compared to other districts in the region. This setting provided an appropriate context for examining the effectiveness of CBC teaching methods and assessment practices in enhancing student performance. Furthermore, the selection of Luuka District enabled the study to generate context-

specific evidence that can inform educational policy and curriculum implementation strategies in similar rural districts across Uganda.

2.4 Study Population

The study population comprised lower secondary school teachers implementing the CBC in selected secondary schools in Luuka District, Eastern Uganda. The study specifically involved teachers from the following schools: Busalamu Secondary School, Nakabaale High School, Nawansega Secondary School, Busiuro Secondary School, Our Lady's Secondary School, Seed of Faith High School, Nakabugu Muslim Secondary School, Valley View Secondary School, Ikumbya Seed Secondary School, and Immaculate Heart of Mary Secondary School. These schools were selected because they are actively implementing the CBC at the lower secondary level. Focusing on teachers from these schools enabled the collection of relevant quantitative data on CBC teaching methods and assessment practices and their relationship with student performance.

2.5 Sampling Design and Sample Size Determination

Sampling Design

The study employed a simple random sampling technique to select two secondary schools—Nawansega Secondary School and Ikumbya Seed Secondary School—and respondents from the population of lower secondary school teachers implementing the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Luuka District. From each selected school, 22 teachers were randomly selected, resulting in a total sample of 44 respondents.

Sample size

The sample size for the quantitative data was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where: n = sample size, N = target population, e = margin of error (0.05).

Given an estimated population of 50 teachers from two schools, a sample of approximately 44 respondents was selected. The sample will be proportionately distributed among the participating schools.

2.6 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Quantitative data were obtained using structured questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended statements arranged on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). It captured respondents' views on teaching methods, assessment practices, and student performance.

2.7 Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 through a series of systematic and sequential procedures. Prior to analysis, completed questionnaires were checked for completeness to minimize missing data. Data were then coded, cleaned, and entered into SPSS to ensure accuracy and consistency. Any errors or inconsistencies identified during data screening were corrected before proceeding to analysis.

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and the key study variables. This involved the computation of frequencies and percentages for categorical variables, as well as means and standard deviations for Likert-scale items measuring teaching methods, assessment and evaluation practices, and student performance. These descriptive statistics provided an overview of prevailing CBC teaching practices, assessment approaches, and levels of student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District (Cooksey, 2020). The reliability of the research instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. A Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for reliability (Jarupunphol et al., 2024). To establish construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to confirm that questionnaire items appropriately load onto their respective constructs, namely teaching methods, assessment and evaluation practices, and student performance (Tavakol & Wetzel, 2020). Constructs with factor loadings of 0.5 or above were retained for inferential analysis.

Inferential statistical analyses were then performed to test the study hypotheses and address the quantitative objectives. Pearson’s product–moment correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between CBC teaching methods and student performance, as well as between assessment and evaluation practices and student performance. Thereafter, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effect of teaching methods and assessment and evaluation practices on student performance under the CBC. The regression analysis established the extent to which each independent variable significantly contributes to variations in student performance. Statistical tests were conducted at a 1% and 5% level of significance. Results were presented using tables, and interpretations were made in relation to the study objectives, hypotheses, and existing literature.

Table 1: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Codes	Items	Factor Loadings	Reliability Test
	Teaching Methods		
	Learner-Centered Instruction		0.847
LC1	Lessons under the CBC are organized to actively involve students in the learning process	0.854	
LC2	I encourage students to ask questions and express their ideas during lessons	0.851	
LC3	Learners are given opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.	0.871	
LC4	Teaching under the CBC focuses more on facilitating learning than on lecturing.	0.747	
	Experiential / Practical Learning		
E1	Practical activities are regularly used to reinforce theoretical concepts.	0.914	
E2	Students engage in hands-on tasks that relate learning to real-life situations.	0.852	
E3	Project-based learning is commonly used to assess students’ understanding.	0.819	
	Collaborative Learning		

CL1	Group work is frequently used during CBC lessons	0.837	
CL2	Students learn effectively through discussions with their peers	0.768	
CL3	Collaborative learning activities improve students' teamwork skills	0.842	
	Instructional Materials and ICT		
IMT1	Textbooks and learners' workbooks are adequate for effective teaching under the CBC.	0.772	
IMT2	Teachers' guides are available and useful in supporting lesson preparation	0.844	
IMT3	I frequently use charts, posters, and visual aids during lesson delivery.	0.840	
IMT4	The school uses practical materials such as laboratory equipment and science kits to support hands-on learning.	0.649	
IMT5	Locally available and improvised instructional materials are used to support learning.	0.764	
IMT6	Computers or laptops are available for teaching and learning activities.	0.827	
IMT7	Projectors and digital displays are used to enhance lesson delivery.	0.844	
IMT8	Digital learning resources such as videos and e-books are integrated into classroom teaching.	0.803	
IMT9	Internet access is available to support students' learning of subject content.	0.793	
	Assessment and Evaluation Practices		
	Formative Assessment Practices		0.814
FA1	Continuous assessment is used to monitor students' progress	0.785	
FA2	Assessment is integrated into daily teaching and learning activities	0.888	
FA3	Feedback is provided to students promptly after assessment	0.806	
FA4	Assessment results are used to improve subsequent teaching	0.593	
	Learner Involvement in Assessment		
LI1	Students are involved in self-assessment of their learning	0.845	
LI2	Peer assessment is encouraged during learning activities	0.794	
LI3	Students understand the assessment criteria used to evaluate their work	0.839	
	Competency-Based Assessment		
CA1	Assessment focuses on learners' ability to apply knowledge and skills	0.820	
CA2	Practical tasks and projects are used to assess competencies	0.879	
CA3	Assessment emphasizes mastery of competencies rather than memorization	0.928	
CA4	Rubrics and checklists are used to assess student performance	0.845	
	Performance of Students		
	Academic Performance		0.931
AP1	Students demonstrate improved understanding of subject content under the CBC	0.867	
AP2	Students are able to apply learned concepts to solve academic problems	0.865	
AP3	Students' performance in tests and continuous assessments has improved	0.910	
AP4	Students show better retention of knowledge compared to the previous curriculum	0.769	
AP5	The CBC has contributed to improved overall academic achievement of students	0.885	
	Management Aspects (Self-Management and Learning Management)		
MA1	Students manage their learning tasks effectively under the CBC	0.803	
MA2	Students complete assignments and projects within the given timelines	0.818	
MA3	Students demonstrate improved time management skills	0.869	
MA4	Students take responsibility for their own learning	0.856	
MA5	Students are able to plan and organize learning activities independently	0.862	
	Discipline		
DI1	Student discipline has improved since the implementation of the CBC	0.801	
DI2	Students demonstrate positive classroom behavior during lessons	0.869	
DI3	Cases of indiscipline during learning activities have reduced	0.910	
DI4	Students respect school rules and classroom norms	0.838	
DI5	Students demonstrate self-discipline during group and independent tasks	0.819	
	Skills Development		
SD1	Students demonstrate improved critical thinking skills	0.812	
SD2	Students communicate their ideas confidently during lessons	0.808	
SD3	Students demonstrate problem-solving skills in learning activities	0.832	
SD4	Students work effectively in teams during collaborative tasks	0.813	
SD5	Students apply practical and vocational skills in real-life situations	0.716	

Table 2 presents the eigenvalues and variance explained by the principal components extracted through exploratory factor analysis. The results indicate that twelve components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained in accordance with the Kaiser criterion, and together these components explained 82.48% of the total variance.

Table 2: Eigenvalues and Variance Explained by Principal Components

Component	Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative % of Variance
1	15.358	30.716	30.716

2	5.189	10.377	41.093
3	3.592	7.184	48.277
4	3.336	6.671	54.948
5	2.292	4.584	59.532
6	2.097	4.194	63.726
7	2.025	4.05	67.776
8	1.782	3.564	71.34
9	1.679	3.358	74.698
10	1.563	3.127	77.824
11	1.245	2.489	80.313
12	1.081	2.163	82.476

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) prior to the commencement of data collection. In addition, formal permission was sought from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to access schools and interact with students, teachers, and education officers. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants after providing them with detailed information about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Questionnaires did not include identifying information such as names, and data was coded to ensure participants cannot be traced. Collected data were securely stored in password-protected electronic files, and physical materials were kept under lock and key accessible only to the researcher. Findings were reported in aggregated form to avoid attributing any response to an individual participant or institution.

3.0 Results

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of the relationships among the study variables. As shown in Table 3, CBC teaching methods were moderately and positively associated with student performance ($r = 0.627$, $p < 0.01$), while assessment and evaluation practices demonstrated a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship with student performance ($r = 0.725$, $p < 0.01$). The findings indicate that these variables are meaningfully related and therefore suitable for inclusion in a multiple linear regression model.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between the Study Variables

		Teaching Methods	Assessment and Evaluation Practices	Performance of Students
Teaching Methods	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	36		
Assessment and	Pearson Correlation	.678**	1	

Evaluation Practices	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	36	36	
Performance of Students	Pearson Correlation	.627**	.725**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	36	36	36
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the combined effects of CBC teaching methods and assessment and evaluation practices on student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka district.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of CBC Teaching Methods and Assessment Practices on Student Performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.174	.632		-.275	.785
	Teaching Methods	.335	.211	.250	1.591	.121
	Assessment and Evaluation Practices	.666	.189	.555	3.532	.001
Adjusted R Square		0.533				
F-statistic		20.964				
P-value (F-statistic)		0.000				
Dependent Variable: Student performance						

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the effects of CBC teaching methods and assessment and evaluation practices on student performance. The regression findings reveal that assessment and evaluation practices under CBC had a positive and statistically significant effect on student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka district ($\beta = 0.666$, $t = 3.532$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that improvements in assessment and evaluation practices are associated with higher student performance when other factors are held constant. In contrast, teaching methods under CBC showed a positive but statistically non-significant effect on student performance ($\beta = 0.335$, $t = 1.591$, $p = 0.121$).

The model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in student performance with an adjusted R^2 of 0.533, indicating that approximately 53.3% of the variation in student performance is jointly explained by teaching methods and assessment and evaluation practices. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 20.964$, $p < 0.05$), meaning that the model provides a good fit to the data.

4.0 Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in enhancing student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District, Eastern Uganda. Specifically, the study assessed the relationship between CBC teaching methods and student performance, as well as the relationship between assessment and evaluation practices under the CBC and student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District. The findings

revealed that assessment and evaluation practices under the CBC had a positive and statistically significant effect on student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District. These findings are consistent with those of Namaalwa et al. (2024), who, in a study conducted among secondary schools in Kampala, Uganda, found that assessment practices under the CBC were generally well implemented. These results imply that effective assessment practices such as formative assessment practices, learner involvement in assessment, and competency-based assessment may reinforce student engagement and mastery of competencies, thereby translating curricular intentions into measurable performance gains.

The observed dominance of assessment and evaluation practices over teaching methods in predicting student performance may be attributed to several contextual and systemic factors influencing the implementation of the CBC. First, competency-based assessment emphasizes continuous, formative evaluation and timely feedback, which directly shapes students' learning behaviors, motivation, and mastery of competencies (Lee & Chiu, 2022). Second, teachers may find assessment tools and guidelines under the CBC more structured and enforceable than pedagogical innovations, leading to greater fidelity in assessment implementation than in instructional delivery (Kachope et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in enhancing student performance in lower secondary schools in Luuka District, Eastern Uganda, with particular emphasis on teaching methods and assessment and evaluation practices. The findings demonstrate that while CBC teaching methods were positively associated with student performance, their effect was not statistically significant when analyzed alongside assessment practices. In contrast, assessment and evaluation practices under the CBC emerged as a strong and statistically significant predictor of student performance. These results show the pivotal role of effective competency-based assessment in translating curricular goals into improved learning outcomes. Overall, the study concludes that strengthening assessment and evaluation practices is essential for realizing the intended benefits of the CBC in lower secondary schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the CBC in lower secondary schools in Luuka District. First, policy makers and school administrators should prioritize strengthening assessment and evaluation practices, as these were found to have the most significant impact on student performance. This could include providing teachers with continuous professional development on competency-based assessment techniques, formative feedback strategies, and use of assessment tools aligned with CBC objectives. Second, although teaching methods did not show a statistically significant effect, efforts should still be made to support the consistent implementation of learner-centered pedagogies, including providing adequate instructional resources, reducing class sizes, and mentoring teachers in innovative CBC-aligned teaching approaches. Finally, further monitoring and support systems should be established to ensure that both teaching methods and assessment

practices are effectively integrated and sustained, thereby maximizing the potential of CBC to improve student learning outcomes in rural contexts.

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