



# “New Wine in the Old Bottles”: An Ethical Reflection of Uganda’s Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)

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## Abstract

This study interrogated the newness of Uganda’s competency-based curriculum (CBC) in comparison with the curriculum of the 1920s to show how it enhances learning and improves learners’ ability to reach their full potential. It poses a philosophical question: Is the CBC enabling learners to bring out their best as God created them to be than the curriculum of the 1920s did? The study unravels the continuities and discontinuities in the two curricula. The study compared the main components of curricula such as aims of education, structure, school requirements, expected generic skills, subjects, pedagogy, language of instruction, and assessment during the European education (EE) and CBC in Uganda. This study used the qualitative approach, employing the phenomenological design. The sample comprised five key informants (KIs), 22 in-depth interviews (IDIs), and archival data complemented by secondary data. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that although the CBC was introduced, its implementation did not reflect genuine innovation. Instead, it largely repackaged the old one of the 1920s under a new label, giving rise to the apt characterisation of the reform as “new wine in old bottles” within the existing education system. It was concluded that the continuity of the previous curriculum is still evident within the CBC, resulting in it being considered “new wine in the

old bottles". It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) should undertake a comprehensive philosophical re-examination of Uganda's education system. Curriculum reviews should focus on substantial structural adjustments rather than superficial rebranding. It is essential to allocate sufficient resources for comprehensive teacher retooling before implementing curriculum changes. Additionally, there is a need to shift from a teacher-centred approach to a genuinely learner-centred pedagogy with enabling environment where learners actively participate in knowledge construction. Assessment systems should be reformed to acknowledge the diverse competencies and abilities of learners and ethically imperative to enable learners to realise their full potential during curriculum development.

**Keywords:** *CBC; Philosophy; New wine; Old wine; Divine Mandate.*

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## Introduction

This study assesses whether the CBC introduced in the lower secondary school in Uganda is actually new. To understand this, we will explain what curriculum is with specific attention to what the CBC introduced in 2020 in comparison with the old curriculum of 1920 and thereafter draw ethical reflections on the Divine Mandate according to English Standard Version, [ESV], 2001, Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply, and the earth and subdue it..." The Divine Mandate ideally means Full Potential. Learners are created in the image of God and, therefore, with an inherent potential and purpose to fulfil depending on the curriculum in place. Being created in God's image means that learners are God's representatives on earth to fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth, and this is in every learner. In this case, the curriculum is to help learners unleash their potential.

Curriculum's being central to education results from the philosophical considerations of the education to be undertaken (Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Curriculum is defined differently by different people depending on its purpose within a particular society (Kelly, 2004; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Dewey views curriculum as a continuous reconstruction of child's experience into an organised body of truth (Dewey, 1902).

To Kelly, curriculum is the “totality of experiences that the pupil has as a result of provision made” (Kelly, 2004, p. 8). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017, p. 5) defines curriculum as “the means by which a country empowers its citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for social and economic engagement and empowerment, both personally and nationally.” In our view, curriculum encompasses both planned and unplanned activities that a learner encounters in life, reflecting beliefs and values that lead to a meaningful life in any society. Curriculum is a tool to transfer the philosophical underpinnings of any society (Kelly, 2004; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). It transfers the educational objective that is further divided into sub-objectives, learning objectives, and how to be delivered to achieve the bigger aim of education in any society. Curriculum may be communicated in the case of a formal setting or hidden with unplanned activities within any school setting (Kelly, 2004). In this article, we will pay close attention to the formal curriculum that was communicated, though with a hidden motive, by the Europeans that makes it a hidden curriculum due to the transfer of a foreign educational philosophy to Uganda.

An educational philosophy refers to the guiding principle that encompasses ideas, values, and beliefs that underpin any education system (Bhatt, 2018; Dash, 2015;; Muwagga, 2006, 2016). It arises from the people’s culture, out of the most cherished values (the national philosophy). These values become central while designing the curriculum for the learners to be transferred from one generation to another (Ssekamwa, 1997) and it combines both theory and practice (Tuck & Moore, 1984). As Muwagga (2006, p. 10) asserts, “The philosophical orientations provide the framework on which institutional philosophies emerge”. Though Uganda had its stipulated educational philosophy in the indigenous educational system of continuity of life and educating for life (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Mbiti, 1994; Rodney, 1973; Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998), with the introduction of formal education by Christian missionaries to Uganda, this philosophy was suppressed with the advent of the European philosophy of empiricism (Rodney, 1973) that was communicated through education as formal education.

Since the 1920s when the foreign curriculum was introduced, it has faced several challenges of relevance but with minimal responses to curriculum reviews. For instance, after independence in 1962, a few subjects, such as History of Uganda and Geography of Uganda, were added for relevance purposes (Ssekamwa, 1997). However, from that point onwards, the curriculum became a constant, only to be reviewed in 2007 as the thematic curriculum, which was communicated as learner-centred (NCDC, 2008). Despite the review, the teacher-centred methodology remained in place and the subjects were changed to themes, but the content remained unchanged (Altinyelken, 2010). This did not treat the irrelevance of the curriculum among Ugandans. This resulted in the design of the CBC, introduced in 2020, in line with a directive by the MoES under Cabinet Minute 45, to review the curriculum in 2006, as revealed by the NCDC Executive Director Baguma (2023) at a conference.<sup>1</sup> This disclosure by the NCDC Executive suggests that although the review took place, most of the components of curriculum, such as mode of delivery, pedagogy and others, were not given much attention for the learners to benefit from. Such omission poses an ethical challenge to learners through not being helped by the new curriculum to realise their potential.

The CBC in principle is a curriculum that focuses on the competences of the learner, as the name suggests. It aims at “producing a secondary school graduate who has the competences that are required in the 21st century; promoting values and attitudes; effective learning and acquisition of skills in order to reduce unemployment among school graduates” (National Curriculum Centre [NCDC], 2019, p.3). Despite the good intentions on the part of the NCDC, the body responsible for curriculum development in Uganda, the implemented CBC does not fully enable learners to realise their potential, as God created them to. This leads to the empirical question: Does the CBC truly support learners’ human abilities and potential to fully understand their Divine

1 This conference was a stakeholders’ conference held in Munyonyo at which the Executive Director clarified why the O’level curriculum was reviewed. It seemed to show that the curriculum review was a product of a directive rather than a comprehensive needs assessment that should have been done by the NCDC. <https://youtu.be/wFeaEO6OPuE>

Mandate (DM), or is the CBC not a rebrand of the old curriculum with a new name, hence “new wine in old bottles”?

The concept of “new wine in old bottles” was derived from the Biblical expression (Matthew 9:16-17) “new wine in old bottles”. It refers to something new added to or imposed upon an established order. However, in this study the expression was borrowed from David Thompson’s book *Europe since Napoleon*, referring to the ambiguities and inconsistencies between the forces of change and new change in Europe. The CBC, which is largely a 1920s curriculum, is bound to “break”.

This study was underpinned by the continuity-discontinuity framework proposed by scholars like Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson and supported by Albert Bandura and B.F. Skinner. The framework emphasises continuous learning through cumulative experiences and social observation in a stage-like discontinuous development (Sternberg & Okagaki, 1989; Bandura, 1977; Skinner, 1953). The framework suggests three core assumptions. First, development can be analysed through temporal patterns revealing either smooth transitions or abrupt shifts. Second, institutional and educational systems carry historical imprints that persist despite reform attempts. Third, context determines whether change represents genuine transformation or superficial modification (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Lange, 2009).

The central argument is that the CBC represents “new wine in old bottles”, which directly stems from the continuity-discontinuity framework. This shows that nominal reforms have failed to bring about significant changes because the underlying systems and philosophies remain the same. The framework helps to explain how colonial objectives, such as producing obedient workers and maintaining class divisions, continue to influence contemporary CBC implementation despite claims of learner-centred approaches. The continuity-discontinuity framework is applied in this study to compare the educational contexts of the 1920s and the 2020s, including goals, school requirements, desired skills, teaching methods, and assessment practices. We hypothesise that the CBC be presented in a completely overhauled education system and not merely patching it in the existing system. The study shows that true educational transformation requires fundamental structural changes rather than just superficial rebranding of the curriculum. We argue that

there is a strong connection between the European curriculum of the 1920s and the Ugandan curriculum of the 2020s, despite curriculum revisions in 2007 and 2020, respectively. Both curricula fail to fulfil their intended purpose of allowing individuals to reach their full potential as envisioned in Genesis 1:28.

## Methodology

The methodology section covers the procedures that were followed in conducting the study. These were the basis for the collection and analysis of data.

### Approach and research design

This study used a qualitative approach which involved utilisation of the participant experiences with the CBC, perspectives, positions, and viewpoints. The study employed the phenomenological design which involved collecting, analysing, and merging the lived experiences of the participants and archival data (Creswell, 2019). This was particularly suitable for this study because it enabled collection of the lived experiences of the different stakeholders in education. These lived experiences were reported verbatim and analysed thematically under 11 themes to draw meanings.

### Sampling

The population for this study included university graduates in Uganda, in particular graduate teachers because of their training and knowledge of curriculum-related issues. Owing to lack of a comprehensive national database of graduates and the practical constraints associated with accessing graduates across different cohorts and regions, the study adopted purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on their experience of the CBC and their accessibility. To achieve regional representativeness, accessible districts from the four regions of Uganda, namely Bushenyi in Western, Mbale in Eastern, Gulu in Northern, and Kampala in Central, were selected. From the accessible pool of graduates, 16 graduate teachers (GTs) were purposely selected for interview guides. The study also relied on the 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) and one focus group discussion (FGD) with 10 university students. In total, the

number of the participants on the CBC were thirty-seven. This ensured information-rich participants in line with the study objective.

## Data sources

This study utilised both primary and secondary sources. Primary data involved six categories. First, five KIs were conducted with a policymaker like a National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) official (KII1), a Professor of Philosophy at Gulu University (KII2), an *Uwezo* official in Uganda (KII3), and a university lecturer and Head of Department at Uganda Christian University (UCU)-Mbale Campus (KII4), a university lecturer and Curriculum Specialist at the College of Education and External Studies, Makerere (CEES)(KII5). Second, six in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted involving different categories – one parent in Kampala (IDI1) and one parent in Bushenyi (IDI2), one teacher in Bushenyi (IDI3), a head teacher in Bushenyi (IDI4), a Director of Studies (DOS) at Mbale S.S (IDI5), and an educationist who also doubled as a teacher in Kampala (IDI6). In addition, in-depth interviews (IDI 7-22) were carried out specifically with 16 GTs across Uganda. Fourth, observations were made by the researchers in real classroom situations and during FGDs. Fifth, one FGD involving teacher trainees of Gulu University was conducted. The sixth category included grey data, which was obtained from archival documents from the Makerere University Library, as well as official documents. The secondary data included a review of NCDC students' syllabus books, journal articles, and books.

## Data collection instruments

This study employed multiple qualitative data collection tools including interview guides to get knowledge on the subject matter on CBC and explore the participants' rich, detailed perspectives, feelings and experiences on CBC. An FGDs guide was used to gather data from a group of teacher trainees and an observation checklist. A documentary review guide was used to collect secondary data from relevant documents including reports, textbooks and journal articles on Uganda's education trajectory.

## Data quality control

The quality of qualitative data was controlled by ensuring trustworthiness, focusing on dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability



(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data from participants was cross-checked against each other during thematic analysis and cross-examined with archival and documentary reviews to ensure that the correct data was reported to ensure dependability. Credibility was addressed through the use of multiple qualitative methods, such as the use of interview guides for KIIs and IDIs, an FGD guide and observation checklist, and archival and documents analysis that was later triangulated. Confirmability was ensured by controlling the researchers' bias through constant note-taking in the field and with an observation checklist to be transparent enough and peer debriefing the research team before interviews. Finally, regarding data transferability, this study provides readers with different rich contexts verbatim to enable readers to judge the findings and apply them to other situations.

## **Data analysis**

The analysis began in the field with daily debriefings. This was followed by transcribing information into field memos and transcripts. The data from the transcripts was then categorised into themes and analysed manually by comparing interviews and archival documents. The codes used were KIIs from 1 – 5 and IDIs from 1– 22 as highlighted in section 2.4. Themes were derived from data, presented and discussed with thick verbatim voices of the respondents to visualise the views on the knowledge on education and the CBC to analyse the continuities.

## **Ethical considerations**

The study was approved by the Makerere Social Science (MAKSS) Research Ethical Committee (REC) under number MAKSSREC 01.22.527. This approval enabled the study to be cleared by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) under research clearance number SS1312ES. The study was authorised by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) on 30 June 2022, the Department of Religion and Peace Studies (RPS), as well as the local authorities in the study areas visited. Data collection observed the ethical principles of good research practice. Before commencement of any interview, the researchers sought consent from the respondents and participants by signing the informed consent form. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by using no clue identities and avoiding



direct names or the titles of the respondents. Balancing risks and benefits were achieved by a clear explanation of the objectives of the study, which was essentially for academic purposes. All aspects of ethical considerations such as compensation were done as per the protocol guidelines contained under UNCST SS1312 ES.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings. The section is organised according to the themes that emerged from the aims of education, structure of education, school requirements, expected skills, subjects, periods and pedagogy. The study discusses the comparison by showing some elements that changed and others that have remained constant, ascertaining that the current CBC has not significantly changed as opposed to the popular expression about curriculum overhaul.

### Aim of education in the 1920s and 2020s

The education system in the 1920s, known as European education (EE), had various names, such as missionary education, colonial education, Western education, and, after Uganda gained independence, formal education (Khadidja, 2014; Rodney, 1973; Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998; Wandira, 1972). The EE was not designed to benefit Ugandans, but rather to serve European interests. It was introduced by colonialists across Africa to create a labour force that would support and enforce colonial rule (Kalema, 2019; Rodney, 1973). This was achieved through missionary schools funded by the government. Education was used as a means to instill obedience in Ugandan learners and prevent them from questioning European authority (Rodney 1973; Tiberondwa, 1998).

Regarding the general aim of education at various levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary, university/tertiary), three groups of participants consisting of those subjected to in-depth interviews (IDIs), namely the GTs, and KII1, who is a policymaker, and KII2, who is a policy informer, were consulted. These individuals provided varying responses and expressed mixed views on the same topic across different districts. For instance, IDI7 in Kampala remarked thus: “When you ask the aim of formal education in Uganda, I would first ask, whose education system

are we using?” (IDI7, personal interview, 12 September 2022). Almost a similar response was echoed by IDI12 in Bushenyi: “Talk of the aim of Uganda’s education, does it reflect Ugandan’s aspirations?” (IDI12, personal interview, 14 August 2022). Relatedly, IDI16 in Mbale confirmed IDI7’s and IDI12’s suspicions about the aim of education thus: “Since we got independence, we are still following the British’s aim of education-to form a graduate suitable for colonialism. In fact, we are no better than when we were colonised” (IDI16, personal interview, 18 June 2022). However, a fourth IDI – IDI20 in Gulu – evinced uncertainty about the aim of education, as he remarked: “Definitely we have the aim of formal education in Uganda though I cannot easily state it” (IDI20, personal interview, 7 July 2022). It is clear from these four GTs that they confirm that we are following the old British education system with its aim intact, and the fourth one showed the difficulty even of knowing the aim.

However, in an interview with KII1, the imprints of the aim of education were implicitly stated while explaining the aim underlying the CBC as:

... to produce a holistic learner with complex skills, knowledge, and attitudes; this way, we have taken care of the three learning domains. We have packaged the curriculum to enable the teacher to assess the learners’ attitudes through observation and promote skills through practical subjects with generic skills. (KII1, personal interview, 24 October 2022).

From these two categories of findings (IDIs 7,12,16, 20 and KII1), it is clear that there is a gap between the policymakers and the implementers of the CBC (teachers). The aim of education does not seem to be understood by its stakeholders, especially the teachers, who are expected to directly implement the curriculum. This suggests that the implementers of the curriculum were uncertain. IDI16 stated clearly that the aim of education in Uganda is largely informed by the British, as he added: “As teachers, we take up what we are given. We were trained from the British system and we are still teaching in the same system even with the change of curriculum to CBC” (IDI16, interview, 18 June 2022).). The same view was shared by KII2 in a personal interview (23 July 2022), where he observed: “We seem not to understand the education we are in; what is the purpose and plan for education in Uganda?” This policy

informer poses a philosophical question that nudges us towards the literature.

The literature in this area presents the aim precisely by Bwangato (2015, para. 12): “The Missionary education in Uganda was guided by two primary objectives: To Christianize and promote Western civilization through formal education.” This goal was pursued through evangelism efforts to uplift and civilise the nation through education (Wandira, 1972), aligning with the aims of European missionaries to civilise and uplift the people of Uganda in a manner they deemed appropriate (Wandira, 1972; Rodney, 1973). Education was part of a larger colonial agenda, which gradually led to the segregation and elevation of a select few from the masses (Tiberondwa, 1998, p.61). Teachers played a crucial role in fulfilling the objectives of formal education in Uganda and throughout Africa (Rodney, 1973; Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998). The underlying goal of European education (Western education) introduced in Uganda was to impart Western culture, achieved through teaching literacy to enable Ugandans to contribute to the colonisers’ agenda. We still rely on the main aim of European education that extends its denomination through colonialism, neo-colonialism and empiricism (Rodney, 1973). However, the continuity of this aim even in the CBC hampers learners from realising their full potential in the image of God, hence new wines in old bottles.

### **Structure of education in the 1920s and the 2020s**

The structure of education is important in any discussion of curriculum for it lays the structure upon which the formal curriculum operates (Kelly, 2004). The structure of education in Uganda starts from a theoretical layout of European philosophy to a practical structure executed by the missionaries in the form of built schools as church-founded structures for formal education. The introduction of formal schooling came with well-organised education structures and trained teachers. The first schools were church-oriented and primarily housed under trees next to the church or in the church itself, and were commonly referred to as “bush schools”. These were further structured into boys’ and girls’ schools with the intention of preparing the wives (girls’ schools) for the chiefs (boys’ schools (Wandira, 1972). The schools were further classified

differently within the same education system; there were elementary vernacular schools as well as general and specific ones (Education Department, 1925). According to the Education Department (1925, p.4), schools were classified “A” and “B”, with “A” being the existing central and high schools, and “B” being Budo, Kisubi and Namilyango. This kind of classification bred different classes of products and treatment within the system that used the same curriculum.

The current structure was a 3-7-4-2-3/5 tier system. Students spent three years in the nursery section, seven years in the primary section, and then four years at Ordinary level. At this stage, they had the option to pursue different exit routes, such as Primary Teachers College, a Technical Institute, or Government Department Training Colleges.

Compared to the 1920s structure, the current education structure has classified schools into different categories of traditional schools, church-founded schools (Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998; Wandira, 1972), public schools (government- aided schools which are under universal education (Inter-Regional Inequality Facility, 2006; MoES, 1998; Mwesigye, 2015; National Planning Authority [NPA], 2018; Ward et al., 1997), the good private schools (those that pass highly) and the bad private schools (those that do not pass well) and, recently, there has been a rise in the number of international schools that use international curricula (International School Database, 2015). KII4 at Uganda Christian University, who also doubled as a parent, commented thus: “If our Ugandan education system does not change, we will look for other avenues to educate our children” (KII4, 7 June 2022). Such a comment explains the need for turning to the existing options for education. It is evident that the structure of the system has not changed since 1920s and this challenges its relevance, as it does not help a learner to be creative and multiply the gifts, talents that were bestowed upon him by the creator.

### **School requirements for curriculum enhancement**

School requirements were very important in facilitating a school curriculum. In the 1920s, school requirements depended on the needs then, and the same applies to the 2020s. The sample of the school requirements list from the 1920s that was accessed from the archives at

Makerere University Library indicates that they cut across all the schools in the Uganda Protectorate. However, the school requirements in the 2020s varied across public and private schools, or even rural and urban schools, and bore other distinctions and so were not necessarily uniform, much as they were related. Hence, for purposes of comparison and illustration, the requirements by Ndejje Secondary School were conveniently selected. The school requirements selected were from the newly admitted students at the entry level, namely upper secondary (Senior Five) and lower secondary (Senior One). The students were met during fieldwork while they were reporting to school. These school requirements reflected elements of continuity in the curriculum requirements save for a few well-known discontinuities such the requirement of ICT-supported learning materials like telephones and computers, which are still not widespread. Indeed, these school requirements were related as summarised in the table below.

**Table 1:** *Comparing the materials needed in both curricula*

Materials in 1920s	Materials in 2020s
Mathematical set	Mathematical set
Furniture	Money is requested to cater for furniture
Writing materials	Books, pens, pencils, artbooks
Maps and Atlases	Contribute money to buy the maps and atlases
Globe	Contribute money to buy the globes to use
	Teachers and learners asked to provide the requirements of the CBC

Source: Adopted from Education Reports (1925) and a school checklist from Ndejje Secondary School.

The above table clearly shows that the requirements have not greatly changed, and the same goes for the competence. Regarding the same scenario, one parent, who was in Kampala and who also doubled as a board member of three big schools in Uganda (Gayaza High School, Buddo and Wanyange Girls) revealed some loopholes about the CBC. He stated:

We have been asked to carry out the field trips for our children like taking them to the market and contribute 160,000/- for CBC where my children study from. Honestly, why does not the government prepare and plan for new changes within the education system? (IDI1, personal interview, 13 November 2022)

The above quotation is supplemented by a headteacher in Bushenyi, who pointed out that in her view, the MoES was not ready to embark on the CBC because the educational materials such as connectivity to the internet across the country, teachers' and learners' guides, and generally materials to use in activities of integration were lacking. She remarked:

We took two terms without CBC teachers' guide. Later we received five learners' guide books for Senior Two who were 200 students. This was a mockery! How would a 200-student class use the five books? Now, what about schools in these rural areas without electricity and internet connection? I actually do not understand why the government hurried to implement this CBC. (IDI4, interview, 4 August 2022)

The citations provided by the two respondents align with the findings of scholars such as Kembabazi (2023) and Kidega and Khaing (2023), who previously identified the planning challenges hindering the implementation of the CBC, leading to lack of adequate materials, including textbooks and general kits, to support the projects. The lack of sufficient materials renders the CBC solely theoretical, lacking any substantial difference from the curriculum it seeks to replace, thereby maintaining continuity with the previous educational framework.

## **Continuity of European curriculum in the 1920s and the 2020s**

The European curriculum is described as a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum. It was guided by the aim of Christianising and civilising Ugandans. In order to civilise, the curriculum pivoted around the 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic. Such a curriculum led the EE be criticised "for preparing Africans only for white collar jobs" (Tiberondwa 1998, p. 60). In comparison, the same curriculum has stayed in place for years even when there have been attempts to review it in 2007 and 2020. The National Planning Authority (NPA) (2018) argues that such changes do not attract ownership, leaving most stakeholders behind, without being

able to make much contribution. For instance, data from KIs, IDIs and a student FGD in different regions pointed to how the failure to hold consultations with the stakeholders undermines the sense of ownership of the curriculum, which, in turn, does not lead to any real changes in the education system as a whole. “Talk of the new curriculum – the CBC; whom did they consult? The NCDC officials trained teachers in Kampala. We were then trained by other teachers who were more confused and did not know what to do” (IDI4, interview, 4 August 2022). The same concern was unanimously also raised in the university FGD as:

The problem with the government is that it designs the curriculum without considering the implementers, mainly the teachers. Out of all the teachers in the country, only a few were given curriculum training, which did not reach some of the regions due to problems they knew best. (FGD, Gulu University students, 15 July 2022)

The same concern of ownership was re-echoed by the Makerere Curriculum Specialist at the College of Education and External Studies (CEES), who remarked:

Curriculum review requires stakeholders’ engagement in the details. Have we had enough consultations? Sometimes, NCDC has, but the consultations have not been comprehensive enough. You are supposed to ask me what I think about the curriculum so I can own it, but with CBC, there is no ownership. (KII5, personal communication, 10 November 2022)

Because of inadequate consultations nationwide to involve the stakeholders, there was limited change in the CBC, to which some KIIs pointed. For instance, a teacher in Bushenyi-(Bweranyangi Girls School) commented thus: “...the curriculum has been the same since our time. Even when they say, they reviewed, it is not going to change because many things in the bigger structure of education have not changed” (IDI3, personal interview, 17 August 2022).

Similarly, a Director of Studies in Mbale decried the lack of change. She commented:

The new curriculum was brought to us to implement. I did not see anybody coming at school or even calling for needs assessment meetings for curriculum review. We received the revised curriculum to implement. A series of workshops were organised when the curriculum was already enrolled for a year! (IDI5, personal interview, 10 June 2022)



The two quotations are also related to the views of the educationist in Kampala, who commented thus:

As an educationist and trained teacher that has been in the education system for long, I do not see a significant change from the previous curriculum to CBC. There seems to have been ‘copy and paste’ of the old curriculum with change of themes but the content is the same. Take an instance of Political Education and History; apart from the change of the name, the content is the same. (IDI6, personal interview, 19 October 2022)

These views are consistent with those of previous scholars such as Kembabazi (2023), Kidega and Khaing (2023), Musiimenta (2023), and Muwanguzi et al. (2023), who dealt with CBC challenges at length, especially the question of lack of stakeholder engagement, hence continuity of the old curriculum.

From the above citations, it is clear that whereas the “review” was done with good intentions, it fell into the hands of the stakeholders who were neither involved nor engaged. Indeed, the “new wine” made the “old bottle” break into the challenges of implementation. One of the challenges that the CBC faced was failure to retool the teachers – the direct implementors of the school curriculum in connection with both the thematic curriculum (Altinyelken, 2010) and the CBC (from interviews). Specifically, in interviews, it was highlighted that teachers nationwide were not re-tooled, and that those who were, underwent training only for five days and came from Kampala and surrounding schools. The students of Gulu University unanimously pointed out the failure to retool all the teachers in the country yet they play a critical role in the implementation of curriculum thus:

The problem with the government is that it designs the curriculum without considering the implementers, mainly the teachers. Out of all the teachers in the country, only a few were given curriculum training, which did not reach some of the regions due to problems they know best. (FGD, Gulu University students, 15 July 2022).

Meanwhile, the CBC official attributed this inadequate training to lack of enough funds, “...one of the major challenges we face while reviewing curriculum is lack of enough funds” (KII1, 24 October 2022). Retooling teachers was one of the concerns that the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) recommended in the Government White Paper while implementing a new curriculum:

The quality of education has further deteriorated by attempts to introduce curriculum reforms without ensuring the availability of sufficient number of qualified and trained teachers to handle the new aspects of the change, besides the lack of instructional materials for the innovations. (EPRC, 1989, p. 6)

The EPRC’s emphasis on retooling the teachers whenever there were curricular reviews was not effected, and this resulted in implementational challenges, leading to the retention of the old curriculum by non-retooled teachers, especially in rural areas. This has resulted in many schools maintaining the old curriculum because it is more easily understood than the CBC (Masaba, 2022; NTVUganda, 2023). Such continuity of the old curriculum in the new one does not enable a learner to reach their full potential because the natural abilities are not the focus within the bigger formal education system.

### **Continuity of expected skills from the provided curriculum**

Both curricula had expected competences to be developed in the learners. In the 1920s, learners were expected to have specific skills, mentioned earlier, to serve the interests of colonial rule and domination (Rodney, 1973; Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998). Ssekamwa (1997) notes that the curriculum used could not enable its graduates to rise above the colonialists’ level. With this in mind, the expected skills were not intended to benefit the learners but the system in place, enhancing oppression. In comparison, the CBC envisages that learners will have 21st century generic skills, as shown in Table 2 but, in actual reality, many schools are still using the old curriculum:

**Table 2:** *A summary of the expected skills from 1920s curriculum and 2020s curriculum*

Skills expected in 1920s	Skills expected in 2020s (generic skills in the 21st century)
Drawing and measuring skills	Critical thinking and problem solving
Reading skills	Communication/co-operation and self-directed learning
Writing skills	Communication/co-operation and self-directed learning
Gardening skills	Gardening skills
Handwork skills	Creativity and innovation
Drawing skills	Creativity and innovation
Arithmetic skills	Mathematical computation and ICT proficiency

Source: Adopted from two educational reports (1925) & NCDC (2019).

The above comparison indicates that skills and competencies such as gardening and problem solving, among others, expected of learners cut across both the 1920s and the 2020s curricula. There is, therefore, little change. The curricula reflect the same practical skills embedded in activities included in handwork such as carpentry, basketry, and carpet-making, among others, which are found in the 2020s CBCs activities of integration. Additionally, the mode of delivery and other factors within the larger education system have not significantly changed. This results in individuals being equipped with basics that do not help them develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills promised by the CBC. While the above skills are emphasised, the mode of delivery, namely dictation in the 1920s and in the 2020, undermines students' ability to think beyond the teachers' knowledge and prevents learners from achieving the objectives of harnessing the local environment in the context of EE and developing competencies in the CBC perspective.

### **Continuity of subjects studied within the curriculum**

The study shows continuity in the subjects that were studied in the 1920s and those of the 2020s. Among the subjects studied in 1920s were

handiwork, which was compulsory in the course of four years. In handwork there were themes comparable to today's CBC themes. For instance, carpentry, which included native manufacturing, gardening and care of animals, is emphasised in the CBC. Below are the main subjects that were taught in the vernacular schools during the 1920s.

**Table 3:** *The subjects taught in the vernacular schools*

	1 <sup>st</sup> class	2 <sup>nd</sup> class	3 <sup>rd</sup> class	4 <sup>th</sup> class
Religion	5	5	5	5
Luganda	6	6	6	6
Arithmetic	6	6	5	5
Hygiene	-	-	1	1
Theory of Agriculture	-	-	2	2
Geography and History	12	12	10	10
<b>Total Periods</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>

Source: Adopted from Education Report (1925), elementary vernacular schools.

**Table 4:** *The subjects that were taught in both "A" and "B" schools*

Subject	A				B	
	1 <sup>st</sup> class	2 <sup>nd</sup> class	3 <sup>rd</sup> class	4 <sup>th</sup> class	5 <sup>th</sup> class	6 <sup>th</sup> class
Religion	5	5	5	5	5	5
English Language (including Translation)	9	9	9	9	9	9
English Penmanship	2	2	1	1	-	-
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	7	7
Geography and History	2	2	2	2	4	4
Science	-	-	-	-	3	3
Hygiene	1	1	1	1	-	-
Luganda Composition	-	-	1	1	1	1
Drawing	1	1	1	1	1	1

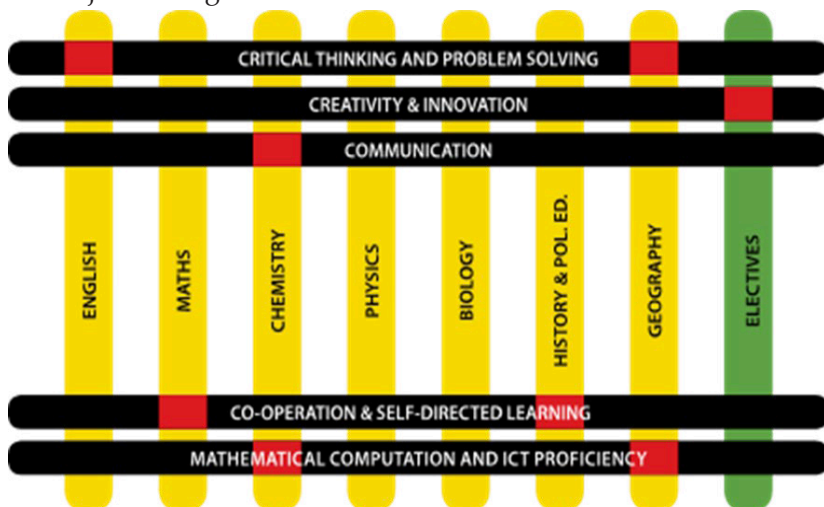
Hand or Outdoor work	5	5	5	5	5	5
Optional	-	-	-	-	1	1
<b>Total Periods</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>

Source: Adopted from Education Department Report (1925), intermediate schools (A&B): Provisional Syllabus of Studies.

From these two tables, it is clear that the intermediate schools had a more expanded curriculum than vernacular schools, but the “A” and “B” schools had the same curriculum.

The syllabus for Ordinary level by 2020 had these subjects: English Language, Mathematics, Geography, History, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Religious Education, Entrepreneurship, Foreign Languages, Local Languages, Kiswahili, Information Communication and Technology, Nutrition and Food Technology, Technology and Design, Performing Arts (Music, Dance and Drama), Fine Art, Physical Education, Agriculture, and Literature in English (Kiva, 2022; Reporter, 2018). These subjects have been restructured, compressed and reduced to almost those of the 1920s. The subjects studied under the CBC are as shown on page 8 of the NCDC Mathematics Syllabus Book summarised in the table below.

In comparison, the subjects in Tables 3 and 4 are related with the latest subjects in Fig. 1 below.



**Figure 1: The current core subjects taught under CBC**

Source: Adapted from NCDC, 2019, p. 8.

The two curricula in Tables 3 and 4, as well as in Figure 1 do not differ very much. The compulsory subjects are maintained as English Language as the main subject; and sciences are emphasised across the curricula. The implication of compulsory subjects is that some learners are assessed as having failed yet their fashion and abilities did not fit within the one-size-fits-all curriculum. However, because they have no option, they continue doing the curriculum but are not enabled to realise their DM.

### **Continuity of period allocation for curriculum delivery**

Both curricula had a period for delivery whether in the classroom or outside the classroom. According to the “time sheet”, a number of periods were allocated for various subjects of the curriculum, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, and allowance was made for local adjustment (Education Department, 1925). In comparison with the 2020s curriculum shown in Table 5, the same number periods are allocated for the subjects even when students are expected to do the activities of integration to promote the learner-centred approach. The issue lies in the lack of sufficient time allocated for learners to fully engage in and derive meaningful conclusions from the assigned activities, ultimately hindering their educational progress. As a result of the overcrowding of conflicting subjects on their timetables, students may overlook their individual strengths and talents, causing them to experience feelings of inadequacy and a diminished sense of value for their own abilities, ultimately hindering their ability to reach their full potential.

**Table 5:** A sample of the current timetable based on the CBC

NDEJJE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL TIME TABLE FOR TERM 1-2025 (2B)																			
PERIOD	1	2	B/ FAST	PA- RADE	3	4	5	6	BREAK	7	8	9	LUNCH	10	11	12	13	14	PREP
TIME	6:00 - 6:40	6:50 - 7:30	7:30 - 8:00	8:00 - 8:20	8:20 9:00	9:00 9:40	9:40 10:20	10:20 11:00	11:00 - 11:30	11:30 12:10	12:10 12:50	12:50 - 1:30	1:30 - 2:20	2:20 3:00	3:00 3:40	3:40 4:20	4:20 5:00	5:00 - 6:00	7:30 - 9:30
MON	C	58	B	P	R	33	L/V/Z	B	KH	HQ			L	H	92	F/A/J/T	ASSEMBLY	P	
TUE	M	115	F	A	E	120	O	114	R	G	13		U	33		DIT	DISCUSSION		
WED	H	92	A	R	B	83	X	98	E	E	120		N	M	115	TALKS		E	
THUR	E	120	S	A	P	72	G	13	A	M	115	T	C	C	58	L/V/Z		P	
FRI	P	72	T	D	O	114	F/A/J/T	K	Y	35			H	B	83	CLASS MEETING			
SAT				E															



From the sample timetable in Table 5 above, it can be seen that the periods are insufficient for meaningful activities of integration for learners, as promised by the CBC. The periods allocated are related with those of the 1920s, as shown in Table 3 and 4. The element of change and discontinuity is yet to be achieved through the CBC.

## Language of instruction

Mode of instruction refers to the language in which the curriculum was/is instructed. The introduction of European education brought with it a change in the mode of instruction from indigenous languages to English as an official language in formal schools from the 1920s (Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998; Wandira, 1972). WaThiong'o (1986) observes thus in connection with the imposition of the English language as a medium of instruction in schools: "English was the official vehicle, the magic formula for elitedom" (p.12). He adds:

The Berlin 1884 was affected through the sword and bullet. But the sword and bullet were followed by the morning of chalk and classroom. The physical battlefield was followed by psychological violence in the classroom. In this view, language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was a means of physical subjugation. The language was a means of the spiritual subjugation (p.9).

As WaThiong'o's comment shows, what happened throughout the Anglophone colonies was reflected in the French colonies, as the French language became the mode of instruction (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Rodney, 1973). This resulted in loss of identity on the part of Ugandans.

By comparison, one of the reasons why there was a curriculum review which led to the adoption of the thematic curriculum in 2007 in Uganda was the facilitation of comprehension at lower primary level. This is summarised below:

This is the curriculum used for P1-P3 classes. It is called Thematic Curriculum because its content is arranged around themes that are familiar to the learners. Teachers are expected to use a familiar area language as the medium of instruction. This may be Local Language for the learners whose first language is not English, English or any language that the learners are able to understand. However, English should be taught in English. (NCDC, 2020)

This was concluded by introducing the local languages in lower primary from Primary One to Primary Three (P1 – P3) and Primary Four (P4) became the transitional year in which the learners took up English language. However, this, too, encountered a lot of challenges as many stakeholders did not buy the idea (Altinyelken, 2010). Many elite parents opposed the policy, thinking that it was intended to elevate Kampala learners above their counterparts in the villages; they reasoned that examinations are always set in English. This was illustrated well by the researchers' observation in the field in Bushenyi. A mother was found doing Runyankore-Rukiga homework for her child, and when asked why she did so, she responded: "The examinations are always set in English, so why bother us with Runyankore-Rukiga?" (IDI2, personal interview, 6 July 2022). Proficiency in indigenous knowledge is still marginalised because of the dominance of the English language and its British context, rather than being integrated into the local environment as a primary mode of communication. This has resulted in the perpetuation of English usage which promotes the old way of doing things, hence new wine in the old bottles.

### **Pedagogy continuities in the 1920s and the 2020s**

Pedagogy refers to the way in which curriculum content is delivered. *Before comparing the different pedagogies of these periods, it is important to first explain what it is. Pedagogy comes from the Greek word paidagōgos, a word that originally meant "an enslaved person who brought children to school" (Webster, 2024a). It is a combination of two English words – "pedant" as a noun to mean a tutor, one who makes a show of knowledge, and pedantic, an adjective that formerly meant "relating to teaching" but that now is more commonly used to mean "unimaginative or dull" (Webster, 2024b, 2024c). The same word has been applied in education to refer to the way in which content is delivered to the learners, such as methodology. Such a method is usually designed within the bigger education system to allow formal teacher use. Because the EE had its own aim of education, when it was transferred to Uganda, it was designed in such a way that the teacher trained under European rule delivered the curriculum content in a certain way, and this involved lesson plans and schemes of work, with the delivery supervised by seniors in education.*

*Pedagogy in 1920s was centralised by the Christian missionaries and colonialists (tutors) who presumed they were the only people who had knowledge required to teach Ugandan learners. Wandira (1972) clearly states that the missionary tutors focused on converting Ugandans to Christianity through teaching them how to read the Bible. The “readers” of the Bible later became the learners at mission stations (Wandira, 1972; p.114). When the mission stations at the churches evolved into bush, central and high schools, learners were taught how to read, sing and pray (Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998; Wandira, 1972). The learners under the tutorship of missionaries learnt by repetition. As Wandira (1972, p.119) puts it: “The readers learned their letters by heart and by frequent chorus repetition.” It was this reading that later changed into the commonly 3Rs of arithmetic, reading, and writing that laid the foundation for formal education in Uganda. This mode of delivery was restricted to missionaries, colonialists who were not even trained properly but considered competent owing to their skin colour (Ssekamwa, 1997). The same mode of delivery remained in place up to 2020s, even despite the curriculum reviews of 2007 and 2020, respectively. The pedagogy is still the same despite the theoretical consideration of a learner-centred curriculum as borne out by the aim of the CBC. The teacher is still central and in control of the class. The same observation was made by a university student at Gulu in an FGD (July 15, 2022), who commented:*

The teacher-centred education system is not ideal because only the teacher is expected to know the content delivered to the students. On the contrary, the students do not know what to take, so when they reach at higher levels of education, they are still uncertain about the subjects to take.

This university student raises an important observation of failure by learners to take part in the construction of knowledge, which affects their future studies and eventually career. She shares the idea with a secondary school student who disclosed to the mother: ‘Even if I am forced to go to school, I am not learning. I have shut my mind off to any teacher because whenever I ask for clarification, they feel challenged and eventually harass me’ (IDI1, personal interview, 11 September 2022). With such a disclosure, the student was indirectly requesting the mother

to find an alternative but also exposing the boring aspect and dullness of the teacher-centred pedagogy.

Central to the teacher pedagogy is to the tendency to pack the learners with a lot of academic information, denying them the ability to think outside the teachers' knowledge. This denies them the ability to be human – to be creative, fruitful and to multiply. As KII3 observed: "... They pump them with much academic work, and learners get completely lost and lifeless. Generally, the higher we go, the more they lose it" (KII3, interview, 30 June 2022). When a learner has lost the sense of humanity, he/she feels dehumanised, does not come to realise the Godly capabilities and, finally, loses their purpose of creation.

*According to Freire (1970), pedagogy designed by the colonialists is an oppressive tool to dehumanise the learners that are at the receiving end. With its emphasis that the teacher is the source of all knowledge, it makes the learners dull and suppresses the elements of creativity that the Creator bestowed on them in Genesis (1: 28). This reduces education to "a banking concept, where knowledge is perceived as "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing"(Freire, 1970, p. 72). There is no creation of knowledge, as promised by the CBC.*

### **Continuities in curriculum assessment**

*For a curriculum to achieve its objectives, it has to be assessed and evaluated in terms of learner outcomes. In the case of the 1920s, the curriculum was assessed with the use of final national examinations. During colonial times, "students were assessed at the primary level, Ordinary Level, and then sat for O'level with Cambridge School Certificate Examinations (CSCE)" (Ssekamwa 1997, p. 154) and Advanced level. The same mode of examination has continued even with the curriculum reviews. Learners have to sit for national examinations prepared by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) at the end of each level – primary, Ordinary, and Advanced levels – to determine their transition to the next level. Moreover, the approach taken by the CBC review does not pay much attention to the need for competence assessment. First, guidance by the NCDC on how to assess the learners came three years after commencement of the implementation of the CBC by the NCDC (NCDC, 2023) and the MoES (Kitubi, 2023a,*

2023b). It emphasised formative assessment with 20% versus summative assessment with a high percentage of 80%. In reality, the latter is still pursued because of its high percentage, yet the CBC's intention is to produce a learner with competences. Given such guidance by the NCDC, the learners' abilities are not attended to, and this does not enable them to produce, and be fruitful in the world of work. Some learners who cannot successfully navigate summative assessment remain frustrated. This is echoed by what one of the candidates in 2022 wrote to the Executive Director of UNEB via the *New Vision*:

Dear Mr. Examiner, you are still wasting time on me when there are more serious candidates. Now, listen to my story in a short poem: 'I am the stone, the builder rejected...' Then the candidate listed some famous musicians' names and songs. (Atukunda, 3 March 2023)

Such a response reveals that UNEB examines what it wants without considering the needs of the learner. Because it is the norm, every student has to be examined. It follows that the standard examinations are set and everyone must sit them to move to the next level. However, such an arrangement does not consider the learner's abilities, and thus does not guide and assess accordingly to enable them to fit in the purpose for which they were created.

### **Envisaged products from the two curricula**

In the 1920s, the curriculum targeted training the learners according to the needs of the employers, namely to produce clerks, teachers, and bankers (Tiberondwa, 1998). The same was emphasised by Walker in his letter dated 30th August 1906, as reported by Wandira (1972, p. 163): "We do not at present contemplate turning out artisans at Budo, but men as clerks, school masters, clergy and teachers of the religion. But we wish to train all these to use their hand and eyes." Tiberondwa and Walker in Wandira clearly show the kind of products that were expected from the 1920s' curriculum, a notion which has been transferred to the 2020s. A Gulu University student commented on the curriculum in terms of its irrelevance and being too theoretical while being entrenched in the European philosophy of education in the face of an evolving Uganda. "The Ugandan education is a lot more theoretical; they teach you things that are not applicable in the field. They never teach the actual things, a problem we face in Uganda" (Gulu University student, FGD, 15 July

2022). This clearly shows that the curriculum cannot be any better than its system itself.

In comparison to the 2020s, the motivation for changing over from the old curriculum to the CBC was to help the products acquire the generic skills that would enable them to develop critical skills and problem solving, creativity and innovation, communication, co-operation and self-directed learning and mathematical computation and ICT proficiency (NCDC, 2019). All these were envisaged to produce what the employer wants, since "...they are sought by employers and unlock the world of work..." (ibid, p.8).

Whether in the 1920s or 2020s, as borne out by the two scenarios, a graduate of this curriculum was/is not trained for his own but for his employer's satisfaction, which hampers the graduates from finding purpose in life, hence failing to do according to their God-given potential. The difference is that the products of the 1920s were readily absorbed into the formal employment by the colonial state as they were already planned for. Unfortunately, in the 2020s, graduates are not sure of unlocking the world of work when they are trained for employers' satisfaction resulting in uncertain products that face rampant unemployment (Admin, 2022; Mwesigwa, 2014), leading to disillusionment and making them question their image in God. The curriculum of the 1920s resulted in a stratified society, where individuals' career aspirations were largely determined by their employers. Conversely, the current curriculum seems to be generating a similarly divisive outcome, with elite individuals struggling to find employment opportunities.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the continuity of the previous curriculum is still evident within the CBC. Continuity is seen when the foundational structures, philosophies, and practices remain unchanged despite surface-level modifications in the curriculum. These aspects are reflected in various elements of the curriculum, such as the aim of education, the structure of the educational system, school requirements, expected competencies, the subjects taught, the language of instruction, teaching methods,

assessment practices, and expected outcomes. This amounts to rebranding of the previous British education system, likened to “new wine in old bottles”, without a thorough assessment of the entire educational framework. Consequently, students are not adequately equipped to think innovatively and instead passively accept the curriculum. This lack of preparedness impedes their ability to achieve fulfilment and realise their full potential, ultimately hindering them from fulfilling their Divine Mandate to be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth.

## Recommendations

First, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) should undertake a comprehensive philosophical reexamination of Uganda’s education system. The current CBC, while nominally learner-centred, continues to operate within structures largely similar to those prevalent in colonial education. A genuine transformation requires articulating an indigenous educational philosophy that enables learners to realise their full potential as God created them to, aligned with the Divine Mandate of Genesis 1:28. Second, curriculum reviews should involve fundamental structural changes rather than superficial rebranding. The findings demonstrate that changing curriculum content without transforming the underlying system including school classifications, assessment methods, and pedagogical approaches produces “new wine in old bottles”. Future reforms should address the entire educational ecosystem simultaneously. Third, adequate resources should be allocated for comprehensive teacher retooling before implementing curriculum changes. The findings revealed that teachers nationwide were inadequately prepared for CBC implementation, with training limited to five days and primarily reaching only Kampala and surrounding areas. This undermines curriculum objectives and perpetuates old practices. Fourth, there is need to shift from teacher-centred to genuinely learner-centred pedagogy. Schools should create environments where learners actively participate in knowledge construction rather than passively receiving information. This requires transforming classroom dynamics, reducing class sizes, and providing appropriate instructional materials.



Fifth, assessment systems should be reformed to recognise diverse learner competencies and abilities. The current emphasis on summative examinations (80%) over formative assessment (20%) contradicts the CBC's competency-based objectives. Finally, there is an ethical need to enable learners to realise their full potential to fulfil God's purpose for creation. Curriculum design and implementation should recognise that learners are created in God's image with an inherent potential and purpose. Education systems should help learners be fruitful, multiply their gifts, and fulfil their Divine Mandate (DM) rather than producing graduates primarily for employer satisfaction.

## Limitations

While the sample provides valuable insights into curriculum continuities, the findings may not be generalisable to all teachers across Uganda's diverse educational contexts. In any case, the study did not categorise respondents basing on the university from where they graduated. The qualitative component involved eight KIIs and one FGD, which, although it provides rich data, represents a limited number of perspectives. Second, the study was conducted during the early years of CBC implementation (2020 –2022), when the curriculum was still being rolled out. The continuities and discontinuities identified may evolve as implementation progresses, teachers may become more familiar with the curriculum, and supporting resources may become available. Third, the study's theoretical framework, grounded in continuity-discontinuity, while appropriate for examining curriculum evolution, may privilege aspects of educational change such as skills development as the CBC advances. Alternative theoretical lenses might reveal different dimensions of the curriculum transformation. Fourth, the ethical-theological lens employed in this study, particularly the concept of Divine Mandate (DM) derived from Genesis 1:28, represents a specific worldview that, while very important for examining educational purposes, may not resonate with all stakeholders in Uganda's pluralistic educational landscape.

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