




Research Article

Teachers' Perception on Implementing the Revised Lower Secondary Curriculum in Selected Schools in Uganda: A Focus on Emerging Issues and Coping Strategies

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Abstract: This study explored teachers' perception on the implementation of Competency-based Curriculum (CBC) in lower secondary schools in Uganda that was rolled out in 2020. The shift from the Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC) to CBC caused a cultural shock to those who had been nurtured in a purely teacher-centred curriculum! Teachers got challenged over their authority and autonomy in the delivery of instruction. Discussion was centred on teachers' readiness to implement; pedagogical competences to plan, facilitate and assess CBC. In this phenomenological study, data was collected from 12 randomly selected secondary schools in urban, semi-urban and rural areas of Uganda. The population comprised teachers of Lower Secondary, Directors of Studies and Headteachers. Data was analyzed qualitatively through codes and themes and reported thematically, backed with verbatim quotations and statements from participants. Majority of the teachers were struggling with gaps in planning and content delivery, CBC stimulated hands-on-learning, teachers' preparedness was considerably low due to lack of prior training, ICT integration was still an uphill task, majority of teachers were still stuck to traditional methodologies. CBC is too demanding and ambitious! NCDC should, therefore, design retooling packages for continuous capacity building, schools should promote peer mentorship, collaboration and Network initiatives.

Keywords: perception; curriculum-change; revised lower secondary curriculum; competency-based curriculum

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1. Introduction

All countries across the globe, are competitively journeying towards the direction of Quality Education. The only difference is the fact that some countries are definitely ahead of their counterparts. For the 193 member countries under the United Nations, this arrangement is anchored on the preparation for sustainable development 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2014). Promoting quality education worldwide is an important goal which cannot be underestimated in as far as improving lives of people is concerned (Chinapah et al., 2013). It is through quality education that knowledge and skills in the workforce can be acquired to break the cycle of poverty and live desirably. Among other countries which are globally considered to accord first priority to quality education is Finland, in that, access to high quality education by all children is their cardinal target, coupled with provision of desirable working conditions to the teachers (Federick, 2020). In an initiative to borrow a leaf, Japan, Canada, South Korea and Singapore are also competitively meaning well in terms of quality education provisions to their citizens.

Similarly, a country like South Africa which used to be characterized with crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teachers, has also since 1994, exerted a

lot of weight on quality education with a focus on a national qualification framework, focusing on improving the teaching of Mathematics, and Science as well as the promotion of food, nutrition programs to poor secondary schools, alongside South Africa's number one priority to promote Early Childhood Development (Department of Education, 2010).

According to Uwezo (2017), Tanzania has also recently come up with a lot of concern to raise the standards of science subjects, particularly in their junior secondary schools, after being challenged by the results of the Uwezo annual reports in the previous five years ago. In Uganda, the ongoing transformation to achieve quality education is also in line with the fulfillment of Uganda Vision 2040 and SDG number 4, target 4c (MoES, 2019). Uganda has finally revised the lower secondary school curriculum into competency-based, targeting skills that are sought by employers and which unlock the students' world of work. The RLSC in Uganda focuses on four key learning outcomes, namely; Self-assured individuals, Patriotic citizens, Lifelong learners and Positive contributors to society (NCDC, 2019). Given that in the promotion of quality education, teachers play a pivotal role because they are always at the steering. As a result, Uganda has for that matter, come up with a significant paradigm-shift to aggressively revise the lowest qualification of a teacher to a Bachelor's Degree, come 2029 (MoES, 2019).

1.1 Contextual background

National Curriculum Development Centre (2019) makes reference to UNESCO Education Strategy (2014-2021) whose advocacy is for a humanistic and holistic vision of education as a fundamental human right that is essential to personal and socio-economic development. The recommendation of UNESCO is therefore, to promote societies that are just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable by 2030. Relatedly, the Uganda Vision 2040 aims to transform Uganda into a modern and prosperous nation. However, the NDP recognises the existing weaknesses in education, including the low efficiency and variable quality at the secondary level and yet, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 advocates for inclusive and quality education. Consequently, a review was conducted on the lower secondary curriculum in Uganda, basing on the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 -2020 (MoES, 2017) which set out strategies to improve the quality and relevance of secondary education in Uganda.

As a result, the review focused on: 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. The review also aimed at reducing the content overload and contact hours in the classroom so as to create time for research, project work; talent development and creativity; allowing for emerging fields of knowledge across all learning areas and doing away with outdated information, and changing the trend of concentration from the cognitive domain to holistic development (NCDC, 2019). Consequently, the current reviewed lower secondary school curriculum in Uganda focuses on specific learning outcomes which include making the graduates lifelong learners, positive contributors to society through practical and production skills, responsible and patriotic citizens (MoES, 2019).

In the CBC content, emphasis is on what a learner can do instead of what a learner is required to merely know. It is therefore, the ability of the learner to translate knowledge into action through practical means. The focus is on problem-solving, critical thinking and creative thinking skills which are generated through practical activities such as drawing, writing, grouping, measuring, playing situational games, conducting projects, participating in co-curricular activities and taking turns.

1.2 Conceptual Background

In this study, the RLSC from subject-based into a learner-centred curriculum (NCDC, 2019) is being referred to as CBC. A CBC emphasizes what learners are expected to do rather than what they are expected to know in order to be competitive in the job market (Tumuheise et al., 2023). Competency-Based Curriculum Pedagogy (CBCP) therefore, refers to the level of pedagogical experience or knowledge or competence employed by a teacher in implementing the CBC. Pedagogical competences refer to the minimum professional standards, often specified by law, which should raise a person in fulfilling a particular role of the teaching profession (Suciu & Mata, 2011).

In the study conducted by (Wambi, 2021), pedagogical competences encompass various aspects, including the teacher's methodological knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) utilized to effectively deliver subject matter to students. This includes, but not limited to, engaging learners in lessons, employing positive reinforcement, implementing appropriate groupings,

facilitating participatory plenary sessions, organizing task-oriented activities, fostering productive discussions, and providing constructive feedback to students. Additionally, pedagogical competencies encompass classroom management skills such as maintaining control over the class, demonstrating awareness of students' needs, mastering students' names, offering individualized support, and addressing the requirements of special needs learners. Communication skills are also considered, encompassing elements such as audibility, voice modulation, facial expressions, eye contact, body language, comprehension, interpretation, articulation, and fluency (Suciu & Mata, 2011).

Moreover, within a CBC framework, pedagogy extends to the utilization of a diverse array of approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques conducive to the learning needs of young learners. These may include eclectic approaches, phonic methods, oral drills, listening and speaking activities, visual recognition methods, teacher-led demonstrations, collaborative learning activities, situational games, panel discussions, expert interviews, dialogues, guided discovery exercises, storytelling, think-pair-share activities, role-playing, and dramatization (Wambi, 2021). It is emphasized that the pedagogical competence recommended in a CBC should prioritize placing the learner at the core of the learning process, thus emphasizing learner-centered methodologies (Hartini et al., 2018).

In a related development, in Kenya, Owala (2021) makes special reference to (Mulenga & Malambo, 2019) who observe that, the fast and complex changing world coupled with dynamic technological advancements and great need for skilled manpower in the labour market within an ever-growing world economy has brought new challenges and new requirements in the education sector, thence, the need for a CBC.

In addition, Competency-Based Assessment typically adopts a Scenario-Based approach, which is a prevalent trend among systems implementing CBC. It calls for continuous assessment which requires a lot of time of the teacher to learners in the spirit of individual assistance. The most crucial challenge for example, in Kenya is large class sizes which complicate the aspect of individual assistance and follow up to individual learners. In this same direction, in the study of Owala (2021) it was reported, large class sizes, which are classes that have more than the optimum number recommended by government which pose a challenge to the implementation of the CBC in Kenya and arise due to the policies of provision of access to education and free primary education/free secondary education. In the CBC, there is focus on each individual learner and if the learners are many it is very difficult to have individualised attention to the learners (Amunga et al., 2020). With these high enrolments coupled with understaffing in schools, the teachers find it difficult to teach classes which at times they handle alone and teach all the nine subjects in a class; a situation which consequently make scenario-based continuous assessment difficult. The gap between the study which was conducted in Kenya and this current one in Uganda is that this study goes ahead to address coping strategies to emerging issues.

1.3 Theoretical Background

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism theory was adopted to underpin this study. This theory was found relevant to the study of CBC on grounds that learners are not passive recipients of knowledge but construct their own knowledge and the teacher is but a facilitator (Tumuheise et al., 2023). The theory places the learner at the centre of learning and the teacher (facilitator) provides assistance and guidance as the learner takes an active position in the creation and practical application of knowledge. Based on the concept that learners are creators of new knowledge, the theory exerts its weight on the idea that learning takes place through social interaction and the assistance of others [peers] is critical. The relationship between Social Constructivism theory and this study is that NCDC in Uganda reviewed the teacher-centred curriculum into CBC focusing on the idea that the teacher's role is not to be a monopoly of knowledge but to help learners construct and build their own knowledge, oversee the learning process, mediate, prompt, help and create a collaborative environment for meaningful learning.

Aims and Research Questions

The study was aimed at establishing teachers' preparedness in implementing the RLSC. Three Research questions were employed to guide the study as follows:

- (1). To what extent is the CBC implemented in the lower secondary classes in the schools under study?
- (2). What CBC implementation methodologies are employed in the lower secondary classes?
- (3). What Challenges are associated with assessment of CBC?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Implementation of CBC in lower secondary classes

Implementation of a CBC is not a new undertaking in the world because many countries are already in their advanced stages of the same initiative globally. For example, Finland is already at the pitch of implementing the 21st century competences in all schools and teacher education departments through a well-designed national core curriculum at both local and national level (Tiago, 2023). What seems to make a unique difference in Uganda is that the implementers (teachers) of the CBC in countries like Finland, Japan, Germany, Singapore, China and Canada are given number one priority and attention in terms of facilitation and recognition. The major gap in Tiago (2023)'s assertions is that teachers' experience in the implementation of the CBC in Finland is not reported on, thereby, making it imperative to conduct this study in the context of Uganda to explore the perception of the teachers who are implementing the revised lower secondary (competency-based) curriculum.

Relatedly, Nigeria puts much weight on the Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) whose curriculum development is based on occupational standards. In Nigeria, the major concern is to solve the challenge of skills mismatch. On that note, before curriculum is developed, institutions/bodies concerned with its design and development first consult with industry and the business world to put into serious consideration the cause to the prevailing unemployment as a public outcry which must be addressed. Under that arrangement, a specification lays down the Level, Quality and Scope of the performance that must be achieved by the learner. The Standards set out in the Learning Unit Specification must also reflect national standards of achievement which ought to be appropriate to the target group (Ayonmike et al., 2014).

Additionally, Nigeria's deliberate adoption of CBET system is an initiative to respond to the challenge of youth unemployment and an effort that would improve quality and relevance of Technical and Vocational Education because of the numerous benefits. Furthermore, CBET is believed to enable employees not only to increase their knowledge and skills at the workplace but also to gain nationally accredited certificates for workplace-based learning (Ayonmike et al., 2014; Deissinger & Hellwig, 2011). The only gap however, the entire arrangement of CBET in Nigeria is silent about teachers' perception, thereby, making this current study very necessary particularly in Uganda at such a time when the implementation of CBC is at its pitch.

In a related development, Kenya's approach to the implementation of a CBC was unique in that special arrangements were made by Kenyan government to provide utmost support to their teachers. The Kenyan government in close partnership with Finland, the University of Helsinki and the University of Nairobi under the coordination of Professor Seija Karpinnen from the faculty of educational sciences, at the University of Helsinki was employed to train the teachers of Kenya on the implementation of the CBC and application of the learner-centred approach (Karpinnen & Wanjala, 2020). The gap identified in Kenya's arrangement however, is that teachers' perception on the implementation of the CBC is not clearly shared, also, the study was conducted in Kenya, hence, making this current study deemed necessary in Uganda's context in the lower secondary classes.

2.2 CBC implementation Methodologies in lower secondary classes

Otukile-Mongwaketse (2018) conducted a related study on selected secondary schools in Botswana and his study findings reported majority of the teachers using teacher-centred methods of teaching. In his explanation, Otukile-Mongwaketse commented that the teacher-centred approach is sometimes paraphrased to be the "Sage on the Stage" style because the teacher is considered as the champion who ensures that concepts flow from a more knowledgeable to either the ignorant or less knowledgeable individual. For that matter, therefore, since the learners are at the receiving end, the arrangement is always through direct instruction. This kind of arrangement places the learners to be perceived as, "empty vessels!" The learners' major role is listening in and absorbing information as much as possible. The teacher-centred approach encourages the mentality of 'Jug-mag' in that the teacher is considered to be the jug to fill the small mugs! However, in the context of Uganda, NCDC (2019) recommended the Learner-centred methodologies to be employed in the implementation of the CBC, thereby, making this study relevant.

Nevertheless, the same study reported that for a few teachers who employed the learner-centred pedagogy, learners proved to be the primary, unique and central agents of learning. Consequently, the learning engagements were very lively, interactive and productive as

opposed to teacher-centred methodologies and mindsets which tended to view learners as passive recipients of knowledge. In summary, the gaps in Otukile-Mongwaketse's study however, were based on the fact that it was conducted in Botswana and the study findings do not clearly indicate that teachers were implementing a CBC, hence, making this current study imperative in the Ugandan context.

Furthermore, a similar arrangement is also in Nigeria's CBET almost the way it is in Botswana but what makes a difference from the arrangement of CBC in Uganda is that in Nigeria, specific methods of teaching are specified and teachers are deliberately trained on how to employ those methods in the implantation of the CBET. The specified methods of teaching and learning include; Discussion method, Small Group method, Problem-solving method and Research method among those that are key and the implementers (teachers) first undergo special training to gain the required pedagogical experience as a way of building their capacity (Anane, 2013).

2.3 Challenges associated with assessment of a CBC

In a study on the successes and challenges of implementing the CBC in Kenya, Owala (2021) asserts that Kenya implemented the CBC in 2016 to help her citizens obtain appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes through education with a focus on providing learners with the ability to obtain, improve and use knowledge, values and attitudes which would then lead to the use of skills acquired (Mulenga & Malambo, 2019). However, inadequate learning and teaching materials as well as inadequate quality textbooks were identified as very serious impasses affecting the implementation of the CBC in Kenya. In agreement, (Akala, 2021) emphasizes that there have been gaps during the preparations of books and also delays in the publication of books and sometimes it is not easy to get particular books for a certain class and this has worked negatively on the implementation of this curriculum as it frustrates both learners and teachers who are in dire need for such materials. The main gap in Owala's (2021) study is that his study was in the Kenyan system whose implementation of CBC runs from ECCE to advanced levels of learning whereas, in Uganda, it currently ends at lower secondary classes, thence, making this study relevant.

Similarly, in an effort to ensure quality education in the secondary schools of Rwanda, the government facilitated the paradigm shift from the knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC) to the CBC since 2016. The major challenge reported however, was that after a period of time, it was discovered that much as the CBC was reported to be desirable in terms of practicability, well organized with well-designed learning activities, the CBC in Rwanda is still overloaded just like the former KBC, a situation which poses a challenge to the implementers (Ndihokubwayo & Habiyaemye, 2018). The identified gap in the study was that it was conducted in the context of Rwanda not in the context of secondary schools in Uganda as per the arrangement of this current study, hence, making this study imperative.

In a related development, following the growing public outcry regarding the pseudo-baked graduates from primary teachers' colleges in Uganda, a deliberate study was conducted to establish the cause. Teacher Educators in primary teachers' colleges were investigated and results indicated that majority were stuck to the traditional methods of teaching contrary to the methods recommended in the implementation of the Primary Teacher Education Curriculum (Wambi, 2021; Kagoda & Ezati, 2013). The gap in Kagoda and Ezati's (2013) study was that it was carried out on tutors not teachers of lower secondary classes, thence, making this current study necessary.

Teachers have failed to acknowledge that the CBC is easier to implement than the KBC. Relatedly, (Mabonga, 2021) conducted a study almost similar to that of Kagoda and Ezati. In Mabonga's study on thematic curriculum which is also competency-based in the lower primary classes of Uganda, issues of methodologies, were reported on that teachers referred to CBC as tiresome and problematic in terms of preparation and instructional materials' development! That kind of attitude grossly affects their efforts towards implementing the intended curriculum. What they have not known yet, is that the CBC is much easier than the KBC in terms of implementation, since CBC places a learner at the centre of the learning arena. They are still interested in old approaches, and some prefer to retain the same teaching materials from previous years rather than adopting them to the new methodologies. What makes a difference between Mabonga's research study from this current one is that whereas that of Mabonga was in primary section and specifically on thematic curriculum, this study is on the RLSC, thus, making this study relevant.

3. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a Phenomenological research design with qualitative data collection methods and analysis. Phenomenological research designs are useful in understanding a phenomenon's universal nature by exploring the views of those who have experienced it. In addition, it illuminates the specific to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a given situation (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, with phenomenological studies, lived experience is critical (Smith, 2017).

Table 1. Composition of participants, sampling techniques and methods

No	Category	Number (N)	Sampling technique	Data Collection method
1.	Headteacher	12	Purposive	Key Informant interviews
2.	Directors of Studies	12	Purposive	Focus Group Discussion (Zoom)
3.	Teachers	48	Random Sampling	Focus Group Discussion (Blended)
Total		72		

Source: (Primary Data, July, 2023)

As indicated in Table 1, a total sample of 72 participants were selected to include; 12 headteachers, 12 Directors of Studies and 48 teachers from all the participating secondary schools. Headteachers and Directors of studies were purposively selected whereas, teachers were randomly sampled. Informant Interviews were used to gather information from headteachers whereas focus group discussions (FGDs) were employed to collect information from both Directors of Studies and Teachers.

Data for this study was drawn from both school administrators (head teachers and directors of studies) and teachers who had been in -service for a minimum of five years. Teachers with five years working experience were preferred for this study because they had facilitated learning in both curricula (KBC and CBC). Specifically, they had at least facilitated KBC for two years prior to Uganda's roll out of the CBC in lower secondary education. Headteachers were purposively selected because they possessed the right attributes that qualified them to provide relevant information on the problem under investigation since they were the topmost supervisors and chief finance officers who sanction budgets/ requisitions as regards resources needed for successful implementation of innovations at school level.

Consequently, Headteachers being busy people who could not be easily found in one place at a time, informant interviews were found convenient to apply and obtain the required information from them. On that note, 12 interview schedules were organized for the Headteachers. In addition, Directors of studies were also purposively selected because of their direct involvement in the management of academic affairs in schools. They supervise heads of department and subject teachers in their respective schools in Uganda. We therefore, needed to get their perception in adopting CBC in Uganda's secondary schools. They were considered key in successful adoption of innovations. We, therefore, needed to allow them share their experiences in adopting CBC in Uganda's secondary schools.

Consequently, 12 Directors of Studies, therefore, were selected to provide firsthand information about the topic under study, give their account of what teachers and secondary schools go through as they adopt and adjust to the CBC requirements in Uganda. Given that teachers were many in number, it was prudent to select them using systematic random sampling by use of the departmental lists in order to increase opportunities for their participation and also avoid bias. Consequently, 48 subject teachers were selected to participate in the study by the help of departmental lists which helped in the inclusion for different subject areas to be taken care of. Given that most teachers possessed smart phones, it was convenient to employ an on-line interaction in form of FGD because their schools were clustered in catchments of rural, semi-urban and urban respectively, therefore, the FGDs also followed that arrangement accordingly in order to generate relevant data from the participants. FGDs also saved on time and unnecessary expenses in terms of transport and other costs. Care was taken to ensure subject representation from humanities, sciences and vocational departments.

In addition, in the selection of schools also, careful consideration was put on urban, semi-urban and rural for purposes of balancing opportunities for obtaining participants' data regarding their experience and perception as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Selection of participants according to location of the participating schools

S/n	Schools by location	No. of Headteachers & their school pseudo IDs					No. of Directors of studies & their school pseudo IDs					No. of teachers & their school pseudo IDs					Total
01	Urban	4	A	B	C	D	4	A	B	C	D	12	A	B	C	D	
02	Semi-urban	4	A	B	C	D	4	A	B	C	D	12	A	B	C	D	
03	Rural	4	A	B	C	D	4	A	B	C	D	12	A	B	C	D	
	Grand total	12					12					48					72

Source: Primary Data, July 2023

Miles and Heberman (1994), posit that valid analysis is immensely aided by data displays that are focused enough to permit viewing a full data set in one location and are systematically arranged around the research question. In this study, the transcribed data were organized based on the research questions which made it easier to identify words and phrases that frequently emerged from the responses to each question by participants. These recurring ideas were later translated into themes that link participants with their settings during the analysis.

In all situations during the study, ethical issues were addressed by seeking consent from the participants before data collection and protecting the identity of institutions and participants by use of pseudonyms. To further increase the validity of the data, immediate feedback was received from participants after approving their transcribed interview reports.

4. Results

The results of the study were also presented following the specific objects and research questions respectively:

4.1 Implementation of CBC in lower secondary classes

The first specific objective aimed at establishing the extent to which teachers of lower secondary classes implemented the CBC in the selected schools. For purposes of generating responses from the subject teachers, the following research question was posed, “To what extent are you implementing the RLSC in your school?”

Following the frequently provided responses from the Headteachers, from a general perspective, majority indicated that the CBC was being implemented in their schools but to a smaller extent contrary to the expectations of the ministry of education and Sports as well as that of the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), given the time it had existed since it was rolled out nationally in 2020. Data from the Headteachers, therefore, implied that the current situation on ground could not meet national expectations! Through the researchers’ direct interaction with the Headteachers, on that matter, it was discovered that CBC implementation is undergoing a lot of back and forth in the lower secondary classes. Generally, by the time this study was conducted, majority of the schools were still struggling to measure to the expected level of implementation of the CBC by the desired national standards.

During further interactions at individual level, a headteacher from school ‘B’ (see Table 2) in a semi-urban location explained that one teacher from a popular school was invited to support the staff, particularly on how to handle the science related subjects which required a lot of practical experiments. Fortunately, the facilitator turned up and provided the expected support. For the rest of the subject areas, the school encouraged the subject teachers to read the available documents from the NCDC and try to interpret them as they teach. In the subsequent engagements with the same Headteacher, more pertinent information was provided as indicated in the following quotation:

...for subjects like Biology, Physics, Agriculture and Chemistry which demand much practical work we are encouraging the teachers and learners to improvise. We also sometimes request parents to make some contributions to purchase the chemicals and other equipment to ensure that the practical work as specified in the syllabi is conducted depending on the response from the parents. The arts related subjects which also demand a lot of instructional materials teachers and learners are advised to utilize the local environment as much as possible... (Informant interview with a, Headteacher of school B in a semi-urban location, July, 2023).

Basing on the verbatim statement of the Headteacher from school B, it implied that the

implementation of the RLSC turned out to be dependent on the creativity of the Headteacher, teachers, learners and support from the parents as opposed to the general assumption of the nation.

Without ignoring the perception of the minority, the researchers discovered that the only schools which were somehow comfortable with the implementation of the CBC, were mainly those that charged parents/guardians/students very high tuition. The general claim was that CBC was so demanding that the financial weight had to rest and be balanced on both the school and the concerned stakeholders for improved facilitation and consequently, expected better results. In one of the informant interview sessions, a Headteacher from school D in the urban reported (see Table 2) as quoted:

...some stakeholders always complain that our school charges high tuition and some parents think it is a deliberate effort to punish them, which is not true. What actually compels us to make such demands is the nature of the CBC. If proper implementation is to be realized, adequate facilitation is indeed inevitable most especially on the side of the sciences and vocational subject learning areas including human resources...(Informant interview with a Headteacher from school D, July, 2023).

Following the verbatim statement of the participant, it was very clear that for one to make meaning of the CBC, it was not easy to escape high charges of tuition as the saying goes, 'value for money!' The dilemma, therefore, would remain with those who could not afford to measure to the expectations of such schools and yet, the desire for quality education through proper implementation of the CBC remains a serious demand across the country. This situation was also beginning to water-down the intentions of Universal Secondary Education.

Further still, it was also reported by another Headteacher (see school A in a rural location in Table 2) that for learners with special education needs, practical work of subjects like Biology, Physics and Chemistry (sciences) could not happen, therefore, an alternative in form of General Science is provided for in the RLSC. That is an indication that much as science subjects with practical work may be considered difficult to SNE learners, to a greater extent, in general science, there are specific science related concepts that such learners may not miss on unlike in the former traditional subject-centred curriculum. Such arrangements make the RLSC to be democratic and highly objective in nature. Furthermore, the provision for the electives at both lower secondary and higher secondary level also make the RLSC more flexible to a greater extent than ever before. The RLSC provides a specific grouping of learning areas from which students both at lower secondary and higher secondary level are always able to select their elective subjects.

In a related development, the researchers engaged with Directors of Studies who were considered to be at the frontline of implementing the CBC in the schools under study. The intention was to establish the extent to which the CBC was being implemented in the lower secondary classes. During a FGD session on zoom, the Directors of Studies (DoS) shared a lot of their experience and firsthand information. Majority of the DoS reported that instructions from NCDC to learners in senior 1 & 2, directed them to select only two (2) subjects from the grouping of Electives and add onto the eleven (11) compulsory subjects to make a total of thirteen (13) subjects. In addition, for learners with Special Needs Education, the option to Biology, Physics and Chemistry was General Science because of their inability to do certain practical experiments.

In the subsequent interactions with DoS, it was also reported that among the compulsory subjects in Senior One and Two (S.1 & S.2), a lot of struggle was frequently reported by teachers and learners around science subjects (Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Agriculture) and Kiswahili Language in terms of facilities, equipment and competent human resource. In addition, among the elective subjects, Foreign Languages, Agriculture, Nutrition and Food Technology were the least selected by students. This same dilemma was also applicable to learners in Senior three and four (S.3 & S.4). In probing the participants further, it was revealed that such subjects were too demanding in terms of logistics and above all, finding a competent human resource to appropriately handle was also yet another uphill task.

Additionally, NCDC, still instructed learners in senior 3 & 4 to select either two (2) or three (3) subjects from the grouping of Electives and add onto the seven (7) compulsory subjects to make a total of either Nine (9) or Ten (10) subjects. In addition, for learners with Special Needs Education, the option to Biology, Physics and Chemistry was General Science because of their inability to do certain practical experiments to the expectations.

Consequently, during further interactions with the same DoS it was reported that much as learners were supposed to be given freedom to make individual choices for the electives,

individual schools could always limit their freedom depending on the availability of the subject specialized teachers and space occupied by the school coupled with facilities and equipment. One of the Directors of Studies from school A in a rural location (see Table 2) described what was done at their school as indicated in the following quotation:

... it is not practically possible to allow learners make choices of the elective subjects as they feel like, the way it is instructed by the NCDC because if it were done that way, it would turn out to be very expensive for the school. For example, our school is private and it is very costly to pay teachers and yet, even under the circumstance where only one or two learners select a specific elective subject, a hired teacher demands full pay because the amount of time is spent according to the recommended time-table dictated upon by the ministry of education and Sports (MoES). In addition, we cannot allow our students to select elective subjects which are very expensive in terms of space, equipment and facilities, e.g. Agriculture, ICT etc. due to the financial burden associated with such subjects... (FGD session with a Director of Studies from school A (private rural setting), July, 2023)

Following the information in the quotation, it implies that much as NCDC in conjunction with the ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) would have loved the CBC to be implemented uniformly, the conditions at individual school level dictate what is practically possible and what is not, thereby, causing a lot of disparities in the implementation of the CBC to an extent contrary to what is expected at national level.

Similarly, during another zoom FGD session with teachers, a lot of experience was shared purposely to establish the extent to which the RLSC was being implemented in the lower secondary classes in their schools. During the zoom FGD session, teachers shared a lot of shocking experiences regarding science and other practical learning areas. From the general point of view of the teachers, majority reported that the extent to which CBC was being implemented in their schools could not even measure to 50% of what was desired by national standards and expectations! In expressing some of their individual perceptions during the subsequent interactions with the researchers, a submission was made by one of the teachers as indicated in the following quotation captured during a zoom session:

...for ICT, our school is located in a place where electricity is a real dream! Our Headteacher took an initiative to purchase a small solar panel for the sake of those students who had wished to offer ICT but it was stolen the night of the very evening it was installed before the school could start using it! In addition, for subjects like Biology, Chemistry and Physics, our Headteacher took an initiative to negotiate with one of the 'well to do' schools in town to allow our students in a rotational arrangement on specific days to go and use their science laboratories on conditions of paying some little money always contributed by some parents. Unfortunately, not all parents are willing to pay and some of them are totally unable to pay...! (Informant interview session with a teacher from school C in a rural location, July 2023)

The results based on information obtained from the teachers as indicated in the foregoing quotation is very worrying in that for learners whose parents fail to contribute towards the arrangement of conducting experiments of the practical subjects, are totally at a loss! Unfortunately, those practical subjects that require a lot of experiments are compulsory!

Data obtained from Headteachers who headed schools located in the urban areas shared a general perception indicating that CBC was being implemented to an extent much greater than the ones from semi-urban and rural locations. A Headteacher from a school located in the urban (see Table 2) was interviewed on the advantages of the CBC over the traditional subject-based curriculum and the following individual perception was shared as quoted:

...in my personal opinion, a CBC promotes Hands-on-learning, makes a teacher to be more of a facilitator than a monopoly imparters of knowledge, it promotes the application of participatory methods of teaching and learning, it encourages continuous assessment on what a learner can do other than what they merely know, it promotes collaborative and co-operative learning, it is activity-based in nature, it reduces on the pressure of unnecessary competition among learners because it is not all about positions in class but how much and how well an individual learner can perform and achieve in terms of learning attainment. CBC respects individual differences among learners; it takes care of the highly gifted and the time-takers. CBC places the learner at the centre of the learning arena unlike the traditional content-based curriculum which is anchored on the mentality of 'master and novice.' CBC also encourages the use of the local environment and participation of the different stakeholders in contributing to learning. It promotes Active Teaching and Learning (ATL) unlike the traditional-content-based curriculum which treats learners as passive receivers of knowledge... (Informant interview session with a Headteacher from school D in an urban location, July 2023).

Following the statement in the foregoing quotation, the participant shared a personal

perception about CBC in terms of advantages over the traditional subject-based curriculum, giving an impression that for those who were positive to the change, CBC was already providing appropriate answers to the call of Hands-on-learning that the country; Uganda had been in dire need of over the past decades.

4.2 Methodologies employed in the implementation of the RLSC

Through an interaction with a group of teachers during a FGD session, the second research question was posed to them, ‘What methodologies are employed in the implementation of the CBC in the lower secondary school classes?’ In response, teachers started with what was expected of them by national standards. Generally, teachers shared that the new CBC demands for a shift from ‘knowledge transmission mode to a more ‘active-learning’ approach in which learners are challenged to think for themselves, draw conclusions, solve problems and make their own judgments, the recommended approach is learner-centred with a variety of participatory methods and techniques of teaching. On a further analysis of the RLSC, it was discovered that the recommended methods for implementing the ongoing CBC in Uganda included but not limited to: Story telling, Debate, Small Group Discussion, Role Play, Demonstration, Simulation, Dramatization, Research, Excursion, Field trips, Observation, Guided Discovery, Brainstorming, Inquiry, Expert interview (NCDC, 2020).

In addition to the ideal situation of methods recommended by NCDC in the implementation of CBC, data obtained from the teachers indicated mixed feelings about the use of learner-centred methodologies. Almost 60% of the teachers claimed to be using learner-centred methodologies whereas, 40% confessed that given the nature of overcrowded classes coupled with limited time for the nature of activities, teacher-centered methodologies were many times found convenient in implementing the CBC in the schools under study.

For purposes of cross-validation of data, researchers engaged with a Headteacher of school D (see Table 2) located in a semi-urban area to share an experience on the common methods employed by teachers of lower secondary classes in the implementation of the revised curriculum, the participant shared a perception as indicated in the following quotation:

...to be sincere, much as the RLSC is competency-based in nature and it requires learner-centred methodologies, the truth on ground is that teachers are still stuck to the traditional methods of content delivery which they think are convenient, e.g. the commonest being Lecture. Instead of talking in terms of lessons, teachers refer to them as lecturers. When you enter any of the lower secondary classes, the seating arrangement of the learners alone is enough to give you an impression that the most obvious method of teaching-learning is automatically, lecture, question and answer coupled with ‘chalk and talk’...(Informant interview session with a Headteacher from school D in a semi-urban location, July 2023)

Basing on the shared experience of the Headteacher in the foregoing quotation, it is very clear that the ongoing implementation of the RLSC is not being treated in commensurate with the specified pedagogy as recommended in the official curriculum documents from the NCDC. That kind of situation leaves a lot of questions to be desired.

Furthermore, Directors of Studies were engaged on the issue of methodologies and majority reported that teachers were using learner-centred methodologies in implementing the CBC. Consequently, as the discussion went on, a Director of Studies from school C located in the urban (see Table 2) in a FGD session shared a perception which was quoted verbatim:

...following the nature of proposed content and activities specified in the CBC documents, teachers are compelled to employ learner-centered methods of teaching. In addition, for those teachers who have tested the use of learner-centered methodologies, their testimonies are very positive, testifying that such methods are very convenient and so much involving ...(FGD session with a Director of Studies from school C, in July, 2023).

Data obtained from one of the Directors of Studies as indicated in the quotation was positive about the use of learner-centered methods of teaching as an approach being used in implementing the CBC in the schools under study by the time this research was conducted. However, the information sounded like more as an assumption than the reality on ground because it somehow contradicted with data from some of the teachers and Headteachers who shared information about the prevalent use of traditional teacher-centered methods of teaching which were still in existence and in use by some teachers.

Generally, on the positive side, participants who reported to have engaged with learner-centered methodologies in implementing the CBC in the schools under study, estimated at a rate of 5 out of 10, in terms of enhancing student’s critical thinking skills, creative thinking, practical skills’ development and problem-solving skills in comparison with the formerly

revised traditional KBC. At the same time, majority of the teachers perceived the key benefits associated with the use of learner-centered methodologies in the direction of yielding high opportunities of transfer of knowledge and skills to real-life situations, enhancing Active Teaching and Learning (ATL), promoting Hands-on-learning, enriching teachers' and learners' research skills, promoting co-operative learning, peer support, team spirit, promotion of future career opportunities and employable skills. In addition, CBC was perceived as being so engaging to students compared to the formerly revised traditional KBC.

4.3 Challenges associated with assessment in a CBC

In an initiative to generate responses from the participants, a question was posed during a FGD schedule, 'as a subject teacher, how do you perceive your level of preparedness and pedagogical competences as you handle assessment in a CBC?' During the discussion, the researchers kept probing the participants to share a lot of their lived experiences in handling assessment in their specific learning areas and their coping strategies to the ongoing emerging issues which arise during the implementation of CBC. Among the frequently shared experiences majority reported inadequate training provided to subject teachers on scenario-based assessment, difficulty in accessing appropriate resources to assess practical skills most especially in the physical science subjects (Physics, Chemistry & Biology), coupled with assessment of generic skills. As the discussion intensified, one of the teachers from school B (see Table 2) in a FGD session made a statement as quoted:

...the scenario-based assessment which is encouraged in the RLSC is very unclear not only to some of us who conduct it but also to the learners who are assessed and the parents who always demand feedback about the performance of their children. Learners and parents are more interested in marks and scores than descriptive statements. The competition among learners in terms of position in class has gone low as a result of employing the new approach of scenario-based assessment on the performance of learners in lower secondary classes...(FGD schedule with teachers of lower secondary in schedule B, July, 2023).

In view of the verbatim statement made by one of the teachers as quoted above, it is very clear that appreciating the approach of scenario-based assessment which is emphasized in the revised lower secondary CBC is still an uphill venture. Unfortunately, the teachers who would be the ones to stand in for its advocacy, don't show adequate preparedness and readiness to market it to other stakeholders, a situation which leaves the new approach of scenario-based assessment in a real dilemma.

In another development, the researchers continued to interact with teachers of schedule D in schools located in a semi-urban setting to find out their views on issues of Assessment. The researchers begun with moments of comparison of the old traditional subject-based with the revised CBC and how the two match and or differ in terms of assessment. Teachers shared a lot of experience since majority of them had been in the teaching profession for at least not less than five years. Among the ideas shared on assessment, some of them aired out statements which the researchers captured verbatim as indicated in the following quotations:

...assessing Critical Thinking is very challenging because it has a subjective nature and it therefore, possesses a difficult nature of determining a standardized instrument that can accurately be used to measure to reflect an individual's ability to analyze, evaluate and synthesize information as required! In addition, assessing Project Work is also still a hurdle! First and foremost, it is cumbersome to assess all aspects of a given project work comprehensively because of the diversity of skills displayed by learners in the different projects. As if that is not enough, some learners obtain external assistance, thus making the authenticity of the assessment results very tricky... (FGD schedule with teachers of lower secondary in schedule D, July, 2023).

Following the shared experience with teachers on challenges associated with assessment in the CBC of lower secondary, the researchers deemed it necessary to explore different Coping Strategies, the same teachers suggested the following Coping Strategies:- Designing diverse assessment methods, incorporating real-world scenarios in the learning experiences, ensuring clarity in the assessment criteria, providing retooling mechanisms for teachers and examiners for purposes of determining consistence in evaluation etc.

Similarly, the Directors of Studies from rural secondary schools were also interacted with in one of the FGD sessions to provide views on competency-based assessment and had the following to say as quoted:

...given the large classes in most secondary schools, assessment of project work is always challenging. In addition, Project work is at the same time very expensive especially with complex projects in terms of finance and time. In addition, continuous evaluation on the overall ability of learners as demanded by the competence-based assessment is too challenging to implement. It

is also cumbersome for teachers to choose projects with tasks which reflect real-world scenarios. This is what influences authentic assessment. Furthermore, untrained assessors and examiners (teachers) coupled with limited resources and inadequate clear guidelines also compromise the effectiveness of assessment of project work... (FGD schedule with Directors of Studies of lower secondary in rural areas, July, 2023).

Basing on the challenges aired out by the Directors of Studies, a number of coping strategies were shared which included:- the need to develop clear rubrics that outline the expected competences, designing specific CPDs training packages and retooling mechanisms to build the capacity of examiners (teachers), encourage collaboration and team-work for shared responsibility in Assessment, design assessment tools that are real-world responsive, design formative assessment instruments that can be used to track ongoing progress, identify gaps and provide timely feedback. More still, document evidence of competency-based development overtime, showcasing on a holistic view of individual student's abilities.

Majority of the participants from a draw-back point of view reported that teachers' level of preparedness was considerably low as regards effective implementation of the RLSC most especially in schools located in the rural setting. In addition, CBC deprived teachers of their full authority and autonomy during the instructional process. At the same time, CBC was reported to be too demanding in terms of instructional materials and time for preparation before and during the instructional process. Since it demands individual closeness to learners, CBC was challenged by overcrowded/large classes which practically made teachers' initiative to provide individual assistance to learners an uphill task. Furthermore, issues of inadequate funding and delayed release of grants by government coupled with inadequate staffing due to unnecessarily prolonged wage bill, putting the implementation process of CBC to a standstill were reported by mainly school administrators during the informant interview sessions.

Additionally, issues of inadequate support supervision to the implementers and poor monitoring mechanisms coupled with failure to follow up those who implement CBC at class level, inadequate retooling opportunities to teachers and other key stakeholders as well as inadequate provision of relevant instructional resources to the implementing schools were also reported as yet other crucial challenges. At the same time, failure to provide a national platform for teachers (implementers) and other stakeholders to share their implementation experience, pseudo training and poor orientation arrangements to the implementers (teachers), as well as minimal opportunities for the involvement and participation of key stakeholders, e.g, parents and community members in the implementation of the RLSC were also frequently reported. Finally, majority of the participants commented that the expectations and objectives of NCDC regarding the learning outcomes of the RLSC were too ambitious and unrealistic given the underfunding of schools by government.

Perceived Coping Strategies to the immersing issues during the implementation of the CBC in the schools under study:

Majority of the participants shared their coping strategies as follows:- Administering scenario-based assessment activities to pairs and small groups of learners instead of to individuals due to large classes and time constraints was reported as one of the workable coping strategies in the schools where the study was conducted. In addition, for stakeholders who found it hard to appreciate the narrative /descriptive learners' assessment feedback, a provision for scores and teachers' remarks were indicated on the student's report card or assessment report. Additionally, joint preparation to develop relevant instructional materials, construct schemes of work, lesson notes and preparation of lesson plans by teachers. At the same time, initiatives were made in borrowing and returning materials that were found at certain schools but missing at others. More still, majority of the teachers reported that team-teaching was found to be a powerful arrangement in which teachers built their confidence and support to one another. Finally, collaborating with schools that possessed well equipped science and ICT laboratories to provide opportunities to learners whose schools missed such facilities was practiced as a coping strategy through local arrangements and mutual basis. Consequently, the same coping strategy was found true with space, facilities and equipment for Physical Education lessons.

Perceived Lessons Learnt basing on the implementation of the CBC:

Majority of the Headteachers shared a general experience on CBC that; What students were able to do was always found better than what they were able to know and memorise, Team-work, networking, collaboration and peer support were indicative of successful implementation of the RLSC. In addition, Scaled-down CPDs, seminars, workshops and conferences at subject-area, departmental and school-based levels were observed as crucial

aspects in retooling teachers' capacity to effective implementation of the RLSC. Furthermore, teacher's competence and expertise in a specific subject area coupled with positive attitude had a strong bearing on effective implementation of the RLSC. Generally, Bottom-Top coping strategies to curriculum implementation in CBC emerging issues were crucial and more applicable than the Top-Bottom strategies.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study were discussed in this section following the specific objectives as indicated in the subsequent paragraphs.

5.1 Implementation of CBC in lower secondary classes

According to the key findings, it was established that due to the inadequate training of teachers, the RLSC implementation had gaps in that whereas, some teachers (implementers) had been fairly empowered to confidently and ably implement the revised RLSC, some teachers were not able to access proper training on how to go about its implementation! In other words, some teachers were struggling! In such situations, some schools took the initiative to hire experts to provide support to their teachers along local arrangements. On the contrary, what makes a unique difference is that the implementers (teachers) of the CBC in countries like Finland, Japan, Germany, Singapore, China and Canada are given number one priority and attention in terms of training and facilitation (Tiago, 2023). As a matter of fact, it is possible to observe that the implementation of the curriculum depends on how much attention is given by those in top management to the implementers. The implication is that in Uganda, the implementers (teachers) are not given first priority. In addition, the implementation of the RLSC is not uniformly done. It is also possible to imagine that the entire process of curriculum design and development may be very successful but may unfortunately get finally strangled and it collapses into the hands of the implementers (teacher) whose orientation or induction on the change is inadequate!

By policy, all schools in Uganda whether public or private, the RLSC is supposed to be implemented. No single secondary school under whatever circumstance is supposed to continue with the former traditional KBC. However, on ground, the truth of the matter is that whereas CBC's implementation is assumed to be at its pitch in all schools, the study findings reported a good number of existing struggling schools and teachers who were found with mixed feelings and serious implementation gaps. The extent to which such schools were performing was very low. The situation reported in this study is very contrary to what takes place in countries like Finland where CBC is already at the pitch of its implementation in commensurate with the 21st century competences in all schools and teacher education departments through a well-designed national core curriculum at both local and national level (Tiago, 2023), making the gap between Uganda's system and that of Finland very wide, a scenario which may be attributed to the degree of attention accorded to curriculum by the state.

5.2 Methodologies employed in the implementation of the RLSC

Much as Ministry of Education recommends learner-centred methods of teaching in the implementation of the RLSC which include: - Story telling, Debate, Small Group Discussion, Role Play, Demonstration, Simulation, Dramatization, Research, Excursion, Field trips, Observation, Guided Discovery, Brainstorming, Inquiry, Expert interview (NCDC, 2020), majority of the teachers in the schools under study reported that such methods were time consuming, most especially in dealing with large classes. This gives an impression that majority of teachers are still stuck on employing the traditional methods of teaching which deprive the learners of their power of authority and ownership of the subject-matter according to the tenets of the RLSC (NCDC, 2020). The findings of this study are very similar to what Kagoda and Ezati (2013) reported on the area of pedagogy which was also consequently reported on by regarding teachers getting stuck to traditional methods of content delivery. It is therefore, possible to attribute such teachers' practice to either attitude or training but more on training (Mabonga, 2021).

Relatedly, a related study was conducted by Otukile-Mongwaketse (2018), on selected secondary schools in Botswana and his study findings reported majority of the teachers using teacher-centred methods of teaching. In his explanation, Otukile-Mongwaketse commented that the teacher-centred approach is sometimes paraphrased to be the "Sage on the Stage" style because the teacher is considered as the champion who ensures that concepts flow from a more knowledgeable to either the ignorant or less knowledgeable individual(s). Similarly, in

Uganda, since majority of the current teachers were nurtured in a purely KBC implemented through teacher-centred approaches, a lot of training and patience may be required to achieve the expected outcomes of the CBC in lower secondary classes. On that note, therefore, concerted effort is required to ensure success of the ongoing paradigm shift in terms of teachers applying the desired pedagogy.

5.3 Challenges associated with assessment in a competence-based curriculum

Among the frequently captured responses of teachers regarding challenges, the point of unpreparedness by teachers due to ill training and pseudo-orientation sessions on the RLSC implementation were reported by majority as the most crucial issue among others. As a matter of fact, some teachers were candid enough to report that whenever they got stuck with the new scenario-based assessment mode, they ended up getting back to the assessment mode of the formerly revised traditional KBC. Just like the situation was reported about CBC in Kenya, teachers in Uganda and particularly in schools where this study was conducted also attributed their difficulties in dealing with the scenario-based assessment to large classes (Owala, 2021, Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). Those who conducted this study wondered why some teachers could boast over successful implementation of the RLSC whereas others kept lamenting over the same!

In a competitive situation, individuals always feel good to be rated in comparison with others. Following such a fixed mindset, majority of the teachers, learners and other stakeholders were still so much used to the kind of assessment results which indicated real scores in terms of marks and or percentages coupled with positions in terms of actual performance indicating the first and last position in class, an arrangement that the assessment mode in CBC is opposed to.

General Observation

This study revealed that teachers are the cornerstone of a vibrant and sound education system and their; competencies, work ethics, motivation, expertise are key in guaranteeing quality of learner outcomes. We learned that, educational reforms in any educational system are a continuous process as witnessed from studies conducted in Finland, China, Brazil, Netherlands, Ireland, Norway and Singapore. It is worth noting that, educational systems are living systems, whose internal and external environments are constantly changing and hence, inducing the new demands for reforms in order to have the sector remain competitive and guarantee the desired outcomes. It has emerged that there is a paradigm shift in educational systems with the emergence of digital dynamics from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning, and accordingly the roles of teachers are increasingly shifting from instructions to coaching, facilitating and mentoring. The new roles of teachers require new skills, attitudes and incentives to succeed. The Paradigm shift in education is very critical in Uganda as well; hence the need to rethink on how we train, recruit, deploy and maintain motivated teachers in the education system remains a matter of fact and urgency.

5.4 Recommendations

1. MoES, NCDC and School Managers should provide for adequate training of teachers, an arrangement which is very crucial since they are the key implementers of the curriculum.
2. Resource allocation: Government and School Proprietors should allocate adequate resources including text books, teaching materials, technology equipment/facilities, and infrastructure, to support the implementation of the curriculum. Lack of resources can hinder effective implementation, so it's essential to identify and address resource gaps. This is a very serious responsibility in which even various partners in development should be attracted to provide a supporting arm.
3. Collaboration and support networks: Encouraging collaboration among teachers, both within the school and across different schools, to share experiences, resources and best practices related to the curriculum implementation. Establish support networks, such as mentorship programmes or online forum. This can be spearheaded by school managers and teachers themselves.
4. Flexibility and adaptability: acknowledging that the implementation process may encounter unforeseen challenges and setbacks. Foster a culture of flexibility and modification as necessary. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and make improvements based on feedback and evidence. This is the work of MoES in conjunction with NCDC.
5. Parents and community involvement: School managers and administrators should endeavor to involve and engage parents and the wider community in the curriculum

implementation process. To communicate and engage with parents regularly, keeping them informed about the curriculum changes and clearly defining their roles in supporting their children's education. Seek community partnerships and collaborations to enhance student learning opportunities outside the classroom.

6. Monitoring and evaluation: Ministry officials, Directorate of Education Standards officials together with School Inspectors at various levels should establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress of curriculum implementation. They should regularly assess student learning outcomes, gather feedback from teachers and students, and use the data to make informed decisions and improvement.

7. Emotional support: to recognize that the implementation of a new curriculum can be stressful for teachers and students. School administrators and senior staff should provide emotional support to teachers and students, most especially, the junior staff through counselling services, mentoring programs, to help manage stress and build resilience as well as positive attitude among the participating individuals.

8. Celebrate success: School managers and top administrators, should always recognize and celebrate the achievements and milestones of students and teachers throughout the curriculum implementation process. They should also acknowledge the efforts of teachers, students and other stakeholders, and highlight success stories to sustain motivation and enthusiasm.

9. Another recommendation is to ensure that Headteachers and Directors of Studies should encourage subject teachers in their areas of specialization to keep on making corrections of some errors made by the writers and publishers in some of the reference materials. This ensures continuous use of those materials as teachers need them in the teaching-learning process.

6. Conclusions

Since one of the main findings of this study was that majority of the teachers implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in the lower secondary classes in Uganda missed adequate orientation and induction on the current curriculum, it is therefore, hereby concluded that teachers' preparedness is considerably low. On that note therefore, the extent to which CBC is implemented in the lower secondary classes is below the desired national standards and expectations.

In addition, it was also found out that whereas almost half (50%) of the teachers employed learner-centred methods of teaching, it is hereby concluded that another half of the entire population of the teachers is still stuck to the traditional teacher-centred methodologies as opposed to the approaches recommended for the implementation of the CBC.

Furthermore, another main finding of this study indicated that CBC was reported to be too demanding in terms of facilities, equipment, space and human resources. It was also found out that majority of the schools under study were compelled to charge high tuition in order to meet the high demands of the curriculum. It is therefore, hereby concluded that the expenses associated with the implementation of the CBC may consequently challenge the arrangements of Universal Secondary Education, the only opportunity for the financially crippled citizens.

Research Agenda

Other areas which may seriously require further research include:

- (i). Influence of Stakeholders' participation and implementation of the Competence-Based Curriculum in selected secondary schools in Uganda.
- (ii). Assessing effectiveness of instructional materials on implementation of CBC in selected secondary schools in Uganda.

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Constructivists' Teacher-Preparation Strategy for Crossover to the 21st Century: A Case of Eastern Uganda

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the constructivists' teacher-preparation practices in selected Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) in Eastern Uganda as leverage to derive a strategy that enables crossover to the 21st Century. A qualitative research design using purposively sampled Primary Teachers Colleges and 15 participants informed the study. Data were collected using multiple in-depth interviews and observations and analyzed following Moustakas's (1994) procedure. Data analysis and results revealed that teacher educators continue to rely on traditional approaches in instruction and supervision of school practice. This phenomenological study established the lived experiences of teacher educators and students in light of constructivists' teaching. Colleges are nascent in implementing modern constructivist practices in education moving away from being stuck to traditional instructional practices and the lack of motivation and knowledge among teacher educators to adopt modern approaches. This research study adds to the existing pool of knowledge, suggesting how constructivist teaching can support teaching effectiveness and promote students' learning by amplifying the need for pedagogical enhancement and digital fluency through integrating ICT and reflective practice in instruction. The study recommends establishing and setting up a Reflective Practice Laboratory at the Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education (UNITE)- Another Degree Awarding Institution in Uganda, and the affiliated Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) for Teacher Educators and trainees' induction on several constructivist practices that include systematic reflection, clinical supervision, use and integration of ICT and other interventions in congruence with the Education Agenda 2063 and 21st Century Skills.

Keywords

Constructivism, teacher-preparation, reflective practice.



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Introduction

Education is critical to the global integrated framework of sustainable development goals (UNESCO, 2015), which raises the demand for a stronger focus on teachers and educators as change agents across the board. According to Kasule *et al.* (2016), teachers are essential agents in shaping students' education and bringing about change and innovation in educational practices. Teacher education is, therefore, the most important and known way of preparing change agents because success in educational reforms depends on the teachers' awareness of the new changes, their attitudes toward them and how they situate the reforms in the daily operations (Gusango *et al.*, 2021; Snoek *et al.*, 2010).

Literature Review

The 21st Century demands effective teacher - preparation where theory and practice are linked effectively and a new progressive and innovative approach to teaching and learning as a way to break away from the traditional and conservative approaches (Gusango *et al.*, 2021; Pitsoe&Maila, 2012). The literature review on the educational philosophies and instructional designs revealed a move from the traditional-behavioral approach to the progressive-constructivist approach (Taneri, 2010). To attain quality pre-service teacher preparation, the priority is to prepare teachers who can deliver high-quality pedagogy and provide all learners with enriched learning experiences (Ssegantebuka *et al.*, 2021). The quality of a teacher largely depends on the quality of pre-service teacher education. The quality of pre-service teacher education highly relates to the quality of instruction, curriculum, environment, inputs, processes and products of teacher training. The teaching competencies that have emerged and are highly desirable in the 21st century include cultural preparation, critical analysis, reflective ability, technical knowledge, adaptability, teamwork and cooperation, organizational capacity, and administrative competence (Barrios, 2021) while from the market perspective, the desirable competencies demand the ability to; use information, use communication technology, solve problems, supervise and lead, undertake continuous learning and having a capacity for teamwork.

To develop competencies in education, UNESCO (2014) states that tutors need to know how others learn and how to teach, and they need to integrate a growing body of knowledge on learning into their teaching practice, aware that learning to learn is an essential trend today. In Uganda, tutors face great difficulty transmitting their knowledge to students in class, which is unrelated to tutors' subject knowledge or mastery of content, which is generally considered decent. Tackling Primary Teachers Colleges (PTCs) efficiency requires a comprehensive approach, starting with tutors' practices (Gusango *et al.*, 2021; Kagoda&Ezati, 2013). The role of teacher educators today is to mend the existing system with a vision to help teacher education grow as a profession and produce quality teachers for schools (Gusango *et al.*, 2021; Banerjee, 2013). Practice must be at the core of teachers' preparation and entails close as well as detailed attention. Quality and effective pre-service teacher preparation, teacher education should be anchored on theories that offer learners as well as tutors the opportunity to construct their knowledge through social interaction, communication, inquiry learning and respect for the environment (Ssegantebuka *et al.*, 2021) to enable the desired "learning how to learn." According to Chabra *et al.* (2013), constructivism has progressively expanded its dominion from just being a theory of learning to becoming a theory of teaching and the theory of education. It is a theory for the origin of ideas and a theory of both personal and scientific knowledge. Therefore, constructivism is the best theory to support this research.

The constructivist education philosophy envisions a school where students are empowered to learn how to learn, fostering a learner-centered environment that places a premium on learning through discovery and exploration, and on experiences in the development of problem-solving strategies

(Dimitris et al., 2009). In constructivist classrooms, students are encouraged to reflect on and discuss their activities, use inquiry methods to pose questions, set their own goals and means of assessment, investigate a topic, utilize a variety of resources to uncover solutions and answers, and take charge of their own learning process (Taneri, 2010). This approach, which emphasizes 'reflective practice', holds immense potential to transform the teaching-learning dynamic in schools and institutions (Aguti, 2010).

Recent education reforms require teachers to depart from the traditional practice of knowledge transmission and teach constructively, where students are encouraged to construct knowledge through inquiry.

The knowledge demanded in today's world is one that can be explored, researched, experimented with, and created to meet human needs, and this is only possible through constructivist approaches such as the application of technology in instruction and learning (Gusango *et al.*, 2021; UNESCO, 2015). According to Mensah (2015), different philosophical perspectives have sparked increased debate about contrasting beliefs regarding the nature of knowledge and truth. These disagreements stem from researchers' epistemological and ontological positions on what knowledge is and how it can be acquired. The objectivist and constructivist traditions mark the opposite ends of that continuum (Cronje, 2006). Unlike behaviourists, who view a learner as a blank slate, constructivists see learners as active participants in the learning process, understanding that knowledge is not received from the outside or from someone else but constructed or created as an outcome of the individual learner interpretation and processing of what is received through the senses. Good and Brophy (2007) argue that the construction of knowledge is facilitated when learners can relate new information to existing background knowledge, enabling students to develop a worldview that is authentic rather than learning accurate but meaningless or inert knowledge.

Constructivists emphasize situated learning, contextualized by learning activities that allow learners to contextualize the information. Learning is moving away from one-way instruction to the construction and discovery of knowledge. According to empirical constructivists, the best way to help students develop an authentic understanding of reality is to use reflective instruction and discovery learning that relates closely to students' prior or existing experiences (Edlin, 2008). Studies indicate that active participation is more effective in a learning environment that emulates an authentic and accurate world learning environment (Gusango et al.; Gupta, 2011). The characteristics of an effective teacher are grounded in constructivist theory, where teachers are facilitators who practice constructivist teaching and create a learning environment with technology that encourages learners to process and organize information actively by making internal cognitive connections.

Constructivist teaching portrays the shift in the role of teachers from the traditional teaching environment to settings that encourage active students' participation in the learning process (constructivist learning environment). Constructivist teaching involves learner-centeredness, engagement, inquiry, and knowledge construction within an appropriate, conducive learning environment. It embraces the use of e-learning and the integration of ICT in instruction. In this global technological development context, traditional teaching activities are under intense pressure from the rapid development of digital technologies (Tusiime et al., 2019; Säljö, 2010; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The constructivist teaching approach has gained tremendous attention, with e-learning taking up the baton of education and training from the traditional method.

Today, teacher education must consider the pedagogical use of digital technology to prepare student teachers for their future practice (Tusiime *et al.*, 2019; Krumsvik, 2014). Teachers should deliver a

competence-based education, emphasizing integrating skills that help learners in the competitive world (Olema *et al.*, 2021). This delivery requires effective use of information and communication technologies for teaching and to engage more in planning within evaluative and accountability frameworks. Computers and the internet provide immense possibilities for learners to explore learning independently. There is a growing demand for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in school education. Colleges, too, should orient, sensitise and equip the students with the skills to use ICT for their professional development. However, African countries such as Uganda need more knowledge and skills to use ICT when teaching to support student learning (Kasule *et al.*, 2016).

There is a pressing need to design, develop, and identify technology-based platforms such as social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook) that can effectively support the transition from knowledge-based to competency-based education (Olema *et al.*, 2021). This shift, a significant reform, calls for teachers' professional development as an integral component (Olema *et al.*, 2021; Nakabugo *et al.*, 2011). Effective professional development includes training, practice, and feedback with adequate time and follow-up support. Therefore, professional development programs encourage teachers to involve students in learning activities, enabling teachers and students to share their expertise and experience more systematically. The shift to a competency-based curriculum necessitates modern classrooms, smart boards, laboratories, creative centres, and technologies at all levels. This would enhance the face-to-face teacher professional development efforts, which alone may not be sufficient for an effective transformation. Such technology-enhanced platforms would encourage informal collaborative professional development activities such as discussions with peers, being mentored, informal peer review, and peer feedback well beyond the formal settings.

For the competency-based curriculum to be consistently, effectively, and efficiently delivered, teachers in Uganda need to be retooled with skills, values, and attitudes in blended learning approaches (Olema *et al.*, 2021). However, the current implementation of the teacher professional development program for a shift from knowledge-based education to competence-based education in Uganda is fraught with challenges. The inadequacy of material resources and infrastructure may hinder the proper implementation of the shift (Olema *et al.*, 2021; Kyobe and Rugumayo (2005).

Constructivist-informed teaching originated from methods used in ancient Greece and China. Socrates (470 BC-399 BC) used questions to draw out what was already within the students to enable them to reason and recognize their weaknesses in thinking (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Socrates firmly believed that ideas exist prior to experience (Jordan *et al.*, 2008). The constructivists have a different perspective on the source of knowledge, truth and reality. Like sophists, they believe in self-knowledge construction and the possibilities of multiple interpretations and realities. Olusegun (2015) states that the contemporary constructivist conceptions of learning and instruction have their historical roots in the work of Dewey, Bruner, Vygotsky, and Piaget. According to Chabra *et al.* (2013), Bruner and Piaget are the proponent theorists among cognitive constructivists, while Vygotsky is the primary theorist among social constructivists.

Bruner's theory of education in the 1960s and the 1970s directly influenced the education programs formulated during those decades. Bruner was a radical constructivist and central player in the cognitive revolution. Bruner developed the constructivists' theory on the Socratic tradition of learning through dialogue, encouraging the learners to enlighten themselves through reflection. Bruner believed that learning involves three processes: knowledge acquisition, knowledge transformation and knowledge review (Jordan *et al.*, (2008). Though the constructivist theory focuses on learning, the constructivist informed teacher enables the constructivist learning environment. There is a reciprocal

relationship between learning and teaching to the extent that it is tough to treat each process in isolation (Kellough&Carjuzaa, 2009). Aware that many scholars face challenges, using the constructivist learning theory from the teaching perspective was imperative, and it has attracted few scholars for a long. Bruner constructivist learning theory states that students learn best when they construct their knowledge based on prior knowledge (Bruner, 1961; Erizar, 2017). The theory transforms the teacher's role from that of a knowledge transmitter to that of a coach who must support students in meaning-making and knowledge-construction processes (Gusango *et al.*, 2021; Asgar& Huang, 2020).

Jia (2010) observes that the learning process of knowledge is also the construction process of knowledge where teachers are the helpers and the drivers for students constructing knowledge. From that perspective, teachers are designers of the teaching environment, guides for students' learning, and academic consultants for students. Teachers must become constructivist by providing a learning environment where students search for meaning, appreciate uncertainty, and inquire responsibly. It requires the teachers' philosophical orientation to shift from the role of purveyors of knowledge to facilitators and coaches who enable students' knowledge construction.

Jesus Christ has the reputation of being one of the most outstanding teachers ever (Fønnebø, 2011). This description of constructivism is equivalent to what Jesus did in his storytelling method. Jesus directed his teaching towards adults, whom he expected to interpret, understand, and learn according to their level of readiness. Jesus went out into the wilderness to unwind and meditate, thus recognising the human need for reflection to prepare for upcoming tasks (Mark 6:31, 47). Reflection is an integrative mental process, and its outcome is a more sorted-out and tidied-up cognitive structure, which is more valuable than before the reflection process started.

Proponents of Constructivism are exploring the potential of educational Technology to enhance constructivist teaching/learning strategies. The rapid digitalisation of education in the past decade (Tusiime *et al.*, 2019; European Union, 2013; Farrell *et al.* 2007) has sparked interest in integrating digital Technology into education. The assumption is that digital technologies have the power to significantly improve the quality of education (Toit, 2015; Tusiime *et al.*, 2019). However, studies in Africa by Tusiime *et al.*, (2019) and Aduwa-Ogiegbaen (2014) reveal that many teachers need technological knowledge, highlighting the need for extensive professional development in this area.

Teachers' preparations need to encourage the teaching of skills in using an array of constructivist teaching strategies and methods like cooperative learning, active learning, discovery, inquiry and project methods along with modern technologies, as this will increase effectiveness in working with students from diverse backgrounds. Twenty-first-century teachers must be familiar with and incorporate the new Technology in classroom teaching. Technology in learning helps the students interact with the contents, the programmed interface, the instructor, and other learners individually and in groups. Technology in classroom teaching requires prospective teachers to use the facilities and be familiar with ICT in their classes. Indeed, teachers need to have skills in operating particular technologies, which includes knowledge of operating systems and computer hardware, and they must also use standard sets of software tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, browsers, and e-mails. It is essential to use Technology to support new social arrangements in teacher education. It may be helpful for teacher preparation institutions to think of one of their responsibilities as the need to produce technically literate teaching professionals.

According to Kasule *et al.* (2016), participation in professional development activity not only enhances the capability to use ICT as a tool to meet the teaching and learning needs of a large number

of students but also helps them to expand their opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and collaboration beyond the classroom activities. Teachers should deliver a competence-based education, emphasizing integrating skills to help learners in the competitive world (Olema *et al.*, 2021). This delivery requires effective use of information and communication technologies for teaching and to engage more in planning within evaluative and accountability frameworks.

In Uganda, teachers seem to be neither innovative nor creative, and they rarely use learner-centred methods in the classrooms (Olema *et al.*, 2021; Malunda, 2017). While primary school teachers use a mix of methods to deliver lessons, they use more of the teacher-centred method (NPA, 2018), implying a gap between training and practice exists. In most educational institutions, teachers transmit ready-made knowledge to the learners to help them pass national examinations. Several lecturers and tutors contradict themselves by teaching about learner-centred methods using the lecture method (Otaala *et al.*, 2013; Aguti, 2010). If the tutors are not innovative and creative, they cannot expect their students to be different. It is a concern that most universities in Uganda are accused of producing graduates who are irrelevant to the country's labour market needs and are ill-prepared for the ever-changing and competitive knowledge economy (Kasule *et al.*, (2016).

Although Uganda, like other nations, has been recognised for its efforts to integrate digital technology in teacher education, the teachers lack adequate knowledge and skills to use ICT to support student learning (Kasule *et al.*, 2016; Tusiime *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO, 2015; 2014). Most teachers need help to use the available digital resources as instructional tools due to inadequate digital skills (Bagarukayo, 2018; Wamakote, 2010; Nakabugo *et al.*, 2008). Digital resource use is still embryonic due to a need for more effective policies, basic infrastructure (electricity, devices, Internet), financial resources and teacher capacity (Ndiwalana&Tusubira, 2012). For almost ten years, studies in Uganda continue to reveal a gap between the technology available in classrooms and teachers' abilities to use this technology in teacher education programmes (Tusiime *et al.*, 2019; Nakintu&NeemaAbooki, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Educational practices require regular reviews due to the growing proportion of information communication technology, social changes, globalization of education, and the pursuit of quality (Dorit, 2016). These renewal needs require developing updated instructional practices that could integrate knowledge with personal transferable skills (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). By using constructivist-informed teaching in teacher preparation, the students are likely to emulate it and be able to use it when teaching in primary schools. However, despite the growing attention paid to constructivist pedagogic challenges in the context of learning environments, the instructional principles of this theory, which aim at directing the nature of educational processes, still need to be actualized (Dorit, 2016).

Uganda's education system challenges include providing quality curricula and preparing quality teachers (Ssegantebuka, 2021). Teacher education is confronted by a prevalent gap between theory and practice, as students need help to translate what they learn into practice readily. This prevalent gap does not give students the confidence and creativity to handle daily problems with a theory-guided action. Though the tutors are aware of constructivists and other modern approaches for the 21st century, implementation faces challenges due to the tutors' fixed mindset and conservative tendencies, which manifest in failure to demonstrate or guide students. According to Maani (2013), many teachers use teaching methods that promote regurgitation of content due to the emphasis on passing national examinations. Inappropriate pedagogical methods in PTCs lead to poor pedagogical methods in primary schools, which should be corrected. The fixed mindset has perpetuated the

traditional transmission model while hindering the pace of reforms in the sector and consequently leading to low teacher competence and quality of education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Lin, 2013; Wang, 2016; Mbugua, 2011; Kablan&Kaya, 2014).

The emergence of ICTs as learning technologies has coincided with a growing awareness and recognition of alternative theories for learning, of which the most significant sway today are those based on constructivist principles. These principles posit that learning is through actively constructing knowledge supported by various perspectives within meaningful contexts. ICT is instrumental in shifting emphasis for learning environments from teacher-centered to learner-centered. When teachers move from being the essential source of information and transmitter of knowledge to students, the role of students changes from passivity to activity. ICT changes the concept of learning within the four walls as the introduction of technology breaks the boundaries of colleges and offers students an opportunity to learn irrespective of place and time. Individuals can access the data whenever and from wherever they are learning. However, lack of awareness towards technology and utilization of technology with improper knowledge add complexities to the successful implementation of ICT in colleges.

Methodology

The research Methods for the constructivist philosophical paradigm include:- Narrative Study, Case Study, Ethnographic Study, Grounded Theory, Descriptive Study, and Phenomenological Study (Kim, 2005). A unique commonality of all these methods is that comprehending is a significant phenomenon studied within natural contexts. Phenomenology was appropriate for this study because it gives scholars a humanistic outlook towards man and the world. Phenomenology based on constructivist philosophy premised that the phenomenon is analysed by a cognitive subject, which is a human being. The constructivist view is that the subject constructs what it knows, while the phenomenological view is that the subject knows what it constructs. The researcher utilised the qualitative research design to undertake this review. Interviews and observation analysis were employed to review the literature on the subject while highlighting the relevance of the qualitative research approach.

Data Collection and Instruments

The study was conducted in purposely selected Primary Teachers' Colleges in Eastern Uganda and involved 15 respondents. According to Padilla-Diaz (2015), the sampled group should consist of 3 to 15 members who must be able to articulate their lived experiences and the guiding principle should be the concept of saturation (Mason, 2010). The selected Teacher Training Institutions manifested well the phenomena under study, mainly the focus on the instructional process and pedagogical preparation. The target population consisted of three School Practice Coordinators, six tutors, and six year-two PTC students as primary respondents.

Data analysis

Phenomenological research does not prescribe specific techniques in data analysis since imposing a method on analysing a phenomenon stifles its integrity (Groenewald, 2004). This study analysed data following all data collection and transcription using the framework described by Padilla-Diaz (2015) and Moustakas (1994).

Study findings and discussions

ICT integration

The integration of ICT is a constructivist' practice that enhances students' engagement, research, critical thinking and creativity. The integration of ICT in instruction is evolving and gradually

unfolding as both tutors and students see its relevance. The study probed the use and integration of ICT in instruction. The integration of ICT is a constructivist practice that enhances students' engagement, research, critical thinking and creativity. Unfortunately, the level of integration is deficient, and it is limited to surfing the internet and using phones. The colleges have internet access to enable tutors and students to access information. Students use the computer laboratories as well as their phones. Unfortunately, students spend more time on e-mails, WhatsApp and Facebook, which they find free when they use the college internet. The tutors need to gain digital literacy and fluency, which makes them unable to adapt well to the current pace and the 21st-century world stance.

On the concern of ICT integration as a constructivist practice, majority of the respondents reported that colleges experienced a challenge of students chatting more with friends on Facebook and What's-app than utilizing the internet for productive concerns. SC2 comments as in indicated in the quotation;

I have never used technology here at college. By the way, we can use phones to research things we cannot find in textbooks. We can use that smartphone.

When integrating ICT in instruction, majority of the participants (tutors) expressed that it is mildly evolving as tutors and students see its relevance. TB2 reveals that the internet can provide all required information in case of uncertainties and misconceptions.

TB2 states that; *A clique on Google will give robust information.*

TA1 reported that; *The internet in colleges and permitting students to have phones in colleges has enhanced their (students) research and sharing of information.*

Consequently, on the issue of how lessons were conducted, it was reported that majority of the teacher educators (tutors) could prepare their own content in form of notes and read as their trainees copy. That situation demonstrated clearly that the trainees were treated under the 'master and novice' mentality and not given an opportunity to contribute to their learning, a situation which contradicted with constructivist practices!

Reflective practice: The only practice in colleges related to reflection is self-evaluation. Unfortunately, students do not give more thought as many write "successfully taught" as a routine remark or comment. Reflective practice is not familiar to students, even the tutors, yet it gives them the privilege to act and think about their actions. Reflection as an activity is not a common practice in colleges since neither the tutors nor the students had any form of structure to follow when reflecting on sessions. The experience of this practice was limited to the component of self-evaluation on lesson plans while needing to be made aware that reflective practice is structured formally and routinely in modern teaching. The use of reflective journals and post-observation records is outside practice. Records like reflective journals and journal wheels have never been used and are therefore not known. Reflective practice requires formalized self-observation and self-evaluation, articulating areas of weakness during a presentation and options or remedies for improvement in the following sessions. Reflective practice is significant and has a high potential to bring about desirable improvements and changes in the teacher's instructions. The researcher wished to scrutinize any document as evidence for reflection or reflective practice for tutors and students. Besides comments on lesson plans under self-evaluation, reflective practice is strange to the tutor and students. Anticipated reflective practice records needed to be more present.

Challenges that affect tutors' application of the constructivist principles

The tutors give students less but expect them to think more and construct their own knowledge. The tutors revealed inadequate awareness of constructivists' informed teaching, knowledge construction, and the applicability of constructivism to many of the concepts. Many tutors have experienced a traditional instruction orientation and background, which strains their adaptation to emerging shifts in teaching. Tutors faced challenges in assuming new roles (facilitator), integrating ICT into instruction, and taking on reflective practice.

Although constructivist principles are essential, the tutor's acceptance is minimal. There is difficulty in translating a theory of learning into a theory or practice of teaching, a conversion that has always been difficult. Sufficient acquaintances by the tutors and students on constructivist teaching are required. Tutors rely on teacher-centred methods as they largely lectured and dictated notes to students and rarely used instructional materials. Tutors defended using teacher-centred methods that save time and give students good grades in the final examinations. The tutors used learner-centred teaching methods such as demonstration, group work, practical, and instructional materials. The college administrators who assume that all tutors know what to do are unaware that many of these are not grounded in primary school methods, the use of ICT and integrating constructivist principles. Student teachers spend most of their time learning theory at college rather than learning how to teach. The tutors have a task to transform students' engagement in content from rote recall and comprehension to more meaningful analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation via constructivist teaching models and methods. The study reveals that tutors rarely get feedback on their teaching performance. Reflection is not a feature of all constructivist practices, yet modern teaching vividly improves individual and group performance. Student evaluations provide direct feedback to teachers so that they can refine their courses and teaching practices to provide students with better learning experiences (Kasule *et al.*, 2016). For teacher attitudes and practices to change, tutors should employ pedagogical strategies that establish a two-way conversation, foster reflection, and actively involve learners in instruction (Edlin, 2008).

Implementation of ICT in colleges is a big challenge due to the high cost incurred for acquiring, installing, and replacing the latest software. In addition to that, there are various opportunity costs for colleges to develop infrastructure. Besides the lack of infrastructure to accommodate the technology, problems with electricity, network availability, lack of awareness towards technology, and utilization of technology with improper knowledge add complexities to the successful implementation of ICT in colleges. The development of e-content and its dissemination, selection, and evaluation requires large-scale networking among users and producers. Intellectual property rights among the stakeholders are also a significant concern for the holistic integration of ICT in education. The colleges are nascent in integrating ICT into education because many are accustomed to traditional learning practices and need more motivation and knowledge among tutors to adopt ICT in teaching.

Final reflection

ICT is an essential curricular resource and an important part of education. They are taking a critical perspective on ICTs and promoting constructivist approaches that privilege participation and cooperation over mere access to principles that the course will help teachers explore. Managers of TIET institutions should encourage teachers and students to acquire ICT skills. The benefits of such skills are enormous. All managers of education institutions should have acquired a copy of the ICT policy and internalize its provisions (MOES, 2010). Obtaining a copy of the ICT policy and its acquaintance is not a justification for implementation. The levels of ICT integration in colleges still need to be higher, as evidenced by the almost no interaction during the COVID-19 lockdown, unlike other sections of the system that manage online teaching. ICTs are technologies.

Along with developing such understanding, the course will help student teachers to learn by integrating technology tools for teaching and learning material development, developing a collaborative network for sharing and learning. Addressing the inherent challenges of teacher education and the need for adequate and appropriate learning material is very important. ICTs can be adapted to support decentralized structures and processes and build the 'digital public' to make education a participatory and emancipator process. Tutors should integrate ICT in assessment practices and the preparation of teachers for primary schools. Introducing teachers to new technologies for teaching and learning can support a change in teaching practices (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research

Aware of the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the experience of the instructional challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown, the researcher recommends an in-depth study on the use and integration of ICT in education, particularly in colleges and higher education. According to Abdelhafez (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted how teachers learn and professionally develop, which has also hastened the coveted digital transformation. Four strategies have proved effective in providing remote teaching support during the COVID-19 pandemic: virtual professional learning, video conferencing, global webinars, and safe texting. These require comprehensive research in teacher preparation.

The current educational aspirations and instructional shifts must align strongly with constructivists' ideologies, of which reflective practice has emerged as a prominent strategy to effectively address desired practices and realize the aspirations of the 21st century. The study reveals that reflective practices are not yet common in colleges, despite their vital role in constructivist-informed teaching, which is also relevant in the 21st century. The researcher proposes a reflective practice laboratory for UNITE and all affiliated colleges to accelerate the instructional shift to adapt to the demands of lifelong learning in our current times and realize future aspirations as illustrated in **Figure 1: The Reflective Practice Laboratory (RPL)**

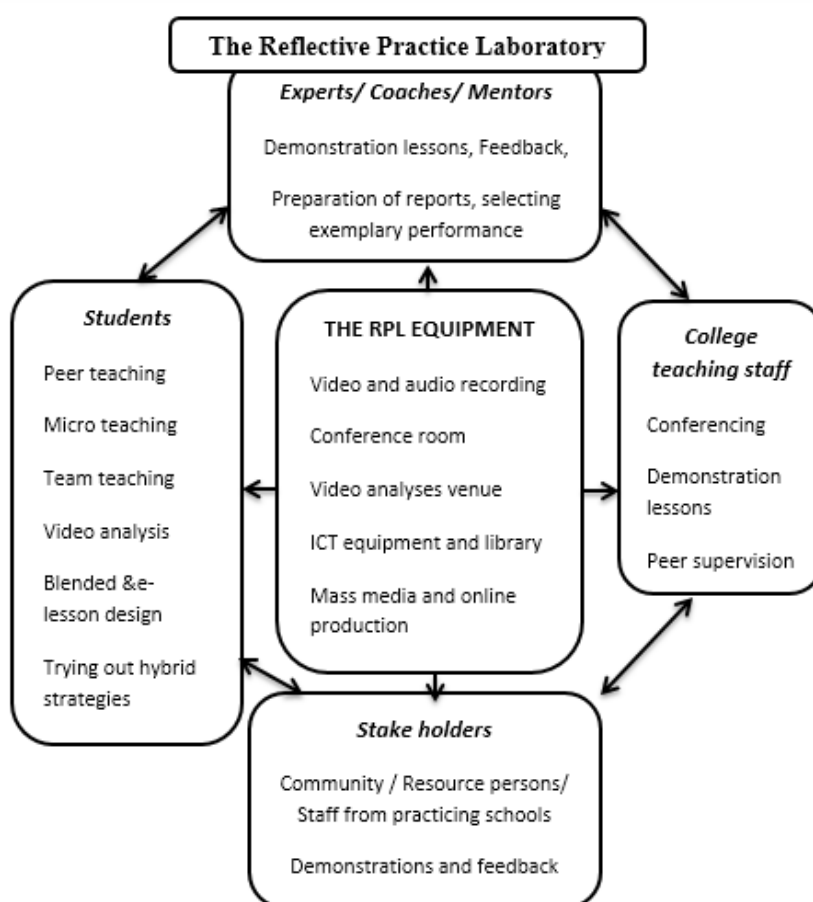


Figure 1: The Reflective Practice Laboratory (RPL)

Source: (Gusango, 2023).

In many ways, reflective practices in education have shown value as these allow students to reflect on their learning experiences within a blended learning environment. Reflective practices are a learning strategy whereby professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base (Herrington et al., 2010). The reflective practice laboratory conference room will be an appropriate venue for attending professional conferencing practices, inductions, seminars, demonstration sessions and practice using educational technology, the Internet and other digital forms, which are effective when developing a teacher. The RPL will make teachers capable of using digital technology and learning resources in productive ways to transform their knowledge into discipline-specific didactics, classroom management techniques and assessments of how students productively use available digital resources.

Teachers need training on using and integrating new digital technologies into their practice. Gudmundsdottir (2010) calls for a policy focus on addressing the severe digital inequalities within and outside of the school environment to increase digital competence and ensure that technology is perceived not as an add-on but as an integral part of the curriculum (Tusiime *et al.*, 2019).

ICT and reflective practice integration will allow active participation, collaboration and engagement (Gachago *et al.*, 2013). The knowledge and skills needed in a digital age, where all 'content' will be increasingly and freely available over the Internet, require students with expertise. Technological and electronic media should be integrated with student-centred technological approaches that are

meaningful and conducive to how today's learners engage with life-world environments (Bozalek *et al.*, 2013; Herrington & Kervin, 2007).

Relevant ICT skills to acquire through the Reflective Practice Laboratory

The 21st-century teacher who is evenly grounded in constructivist' teaching must possess several skills that the reflective practice laboratory is likely to offer, which include word processing skills, spreadsheet skills, database skills, electronic presentation, Web navigation, website design, skills for audio recording, skill of using digital camera, e-mail management, computer Network knowledge applicable to teacher education system, file management & windows explorer skills, downloading software from the web (knowledge including eBooks, Installing computer software onto a computer system, web ICT or blackboard teaching skills, video conferencing skills, computer-related storage devices, scanner knowledge, knowledge of PDAs, deep web knowledge, educational copyright knowledge, computer security knowledge.

The Relevance of Video and Audio Recording in the Reflective Practice Laboratory

According to Mayer (2021), recording devices allow students to observe and re-observe their own performance. Through a process of video and audio recording, describing, analyzing, and interpreting the teaching, both the tutors and student teachers can develop an awareness of and learn more about their own teaching. With this approach, the student and teacher together can learn equally from each other. While the teacher provides guidance and insight, the student creates new ideas and approaches. The relationship between student and teacher has a co-teaching arrangement where the student is the primary teacher, and the teacher is a guide towards the student's complete autonomy (Mayer, 2021).

De Monte (2013) supports this practice. His research affirms that student teachers who received specific feedback on videotaped teaching shared with an instructional coach had higher achievement gains than students' teachers not receiving coaching

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The 'Self' of Hearing-Impaired Learners and their Transition from Primary to Post-Primary Education in Uganda

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Keywords:

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In Uganda, post-primary education is one of the milestones in a child's education. It is characterized by many challenges, particularly faced by learners with hearing impairments attempting to transition from primary to post-primary level. The transition has long been recognized as one of the most challenging issues for learners with hearing impairments, yet it has not been resolved by impeccable empirical scrutiny. This quagmire prompted the researcher to use a phenomenological investigation to explore the significant self-concepts affecting the learners' transition from primary to post-primary studies. Interviews and group discussions with randomly selected learners who had joined and those who had failed to proceed to post-primary schools were involved. Also, corroborative views and opinions were obtained from preferred teachers and parents in interviews and discussions. It was discovered that the transition of learners with impaired hearing from primary to post-primary level was substantially influenced by family socioeconomic status, gender, age, health, and the learner's cultural issues – validating the applicability of Schlossberg's Theory of Transition to provide person-centered answers to transition deterrents, inhibiting the learners from joining and or staying in post-primary schools. It was recommended that self-advocacy training at the primary level be enhanced to help learners develop the skills they need for confidence growth in their abilities before, during and after the transition to post-primary educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary to post-primary school transition is a distinct upward moment in learners' education which often reduces feelings of anxiety, stress, and excitement. Zeedyk et al. (2003) described the transition to secondary school as "one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers." Moving from the smaller, more personal primary school environment to the larger, more demanding secondary school environment is complex and requires individuals to negotiate several changes (Tobbell, 2003; West et al., 2010). Most children adapt quickly and successfully to this transition following an initial decrease in well-being and attainment. The transition process is more challenging for children with hearing impairments, resulting in long-lasting negative consequences. In Uganda, the Act of 2006 on Persons with Disabilities conceives disability as a substantial functional constraint to daily natural life activities. The learners with hearing disabilities are just a fraction of those children, often referred to as children with disabilities (CWDs). The challenges CWDs face while at school are wide-ranging. Therefore, the need for dependable support systems to enable prudent transitioning need not be over-emphasized.

Problem Statement

Uganda, like many developing countries in Africa, has embraced International Conventions, including ensuring primary education to all children without discrimination, according to Macharia (2018). Uganda also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008. Despite the entrenchment of the international and even local policy frameworks, children with hearing impairments appear to face increasing challenges, especially in education. However, Population and Housing Census plus Education Ministry's information system (EMIS) revealed that more

than 90% of People with Disabilities (PWDs) did not go beyond primary education. From 2012 to 2016, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports recorded that the primary-level learners with hearing impairments ranged between 28% – 30% of the national total enrolment. The enrolments at the secondary level during the same time dropped to a mere 18% from 21%.

Despite the availability of extensive research on the issues and challenges faced by children with disabilities (gender issues, family socio-economic status, ethnic mentality, talents and personal values) - (Van *et al.*, 2018; West et al., 2010), almost no studies have been published on the transition of learners with hearing impairments (Van *et al.*, 2018). No detailed studies have evaluated this issue to establish the predominant causes and, at the same time, suggest remedial measures to the quandary. This research *lacuna* compelled the researcher to delve into this study. This paper explores the experiences of these learners, focusing on their transition from primary education to post-primary education in Uganda. It intended to evaluate the outstanding self-concepts among learners with impaired hearing that affect their transition from primary to post-primary schools.

RELATED LITERATURE**Self-Concept and Transition of Learners**

Schlossberg's transition theory conceives of self with three antecedents: personal and demographic characteristics plus psychological resources – which was also upheld by Troiano et al. (2010). According to this researcher, personal and demographic characteristics shape how an individual perceives what happens in his or her life. This perception has also been underscored by other researchers, such as Merriam (1998) and Schlossberg et al. (1995). The scholars inferred that the relevant factors in the self-component were socioeconomic status, gender, age, life stage, health, ethnicity, and culture (Milsom & Hartley,

2005; Troiano et al., 2010). In other studies, nevertheless, particularly Walpole & Chaskes (2011) and Coccarelli (2010), such students were found to be heavily relying on their parents, teachers, and counsellors to advocate for them while in high school. Most of the underpinnings of the self-concept variable were investigated or implied in this study.

Extant-reviewed literature on the issue of self-concept and transition of learners has highlighted several factors that affect an individual with hearing impairment. Hintermair (2018) identified poor parental communication skills, inadequate maternal bonding, feelings of mistrust due to a sense of inequality and negative attitudes toward people with hearing impairments. Also, poor sign language skills, lack of appropriate role models, social isolation, negative body image, lack of a strong cultural identity, and rejection from family members and society in general were put by Hintermair (2018). In relation to Hintermair (2018), another scholar, McIlroy & Storbeck (2011), found that people with culturally deaf and bicultural identities could be expected to have higher self-esteem. In a recent study, Hintermair (2018) examined 629 DHH people and showed that those with marginal acculturation collectively have lower self-esteem and less satisfaction with life than those with a stronger cultural identity.

To Ashton (2019), self-concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself. However, its measurement was simultaneously problematic due to its multifaceted nature - people can perceive themselves in dozens of ways. One aspect of self-concept that is important in the school years has been the academic or learning self-concept (Burden, 2008). Academic self-concept includes enjoyment and involvement in learning and problem-solving, a sense of agency, feelings about the nature of learning, general feelings of competence/ability and feelings of learned helplessness and anxiety. These also may vary based on whether the student is disabled or not.

Galton et al. (1999) highlighted that all learners experience opposing transition-related challenges, and for many, the post-transition anxieties may

reduce within the first term of starting secondary school. However, although the anxieties may reduce, most pupils can experience some degree of concern well into the first year at secondary school (Stradling & McNeil, 2000). For many students, the transition is an overwhelming process where adequate support is essential (Bloyce & Fredrickson, 2012). This is particularly important given that anxiety disorders typically have age differentials in childhood and adolescence - something that can result in significant disability in social and occupational functioning (Van Ameringen *et al* 2002).

This study used qualitative phenomenological analysis to investigate the firsthand self-concept experiences of learners with hearing impairment transitioning into post-primary education. The aim was to gain in-depth insight into first-hand experiences to identify remedies to help the learners get a predictable transition.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

This research adopted the *self*-component from Schlossberg's transition theory for its conceptual framework. Schlossberg's *self-factor* is split into *personal* and *demographic* characteristics and *psychological resources*. Personal and demographic characteristics shape how an individual perceives what happens in his or her life (Merriam, 1998). Schlossberg's *self-factor* shows the components that can directly affect the transition of learners with hearing impairment from primary to post-primary level of education. The relevant factors in this grouping are socioeconomic status, gender, age, life stage, health, ethnicity, and culture. These are alleged to affect transition through enrollment and non-enrollment for and completion or lack of completion of post-primary education by learners with a hearing impairment (Bonanni, 2015).

Although students with learning disabilities anticipate the academic transition from primary to post-primary school, they remain unprepared for many social and emotional situations they encounter in the transition process and while in the post-primary educational institution. Many of these learners must cope with life lived by family,

friends, and other valued support groups. They must also adjust to new social settings and environmental challenges, according to a study by Barnett (2014). Learners with disabilities compare themselves with non-disabled pupils in respect to their academic and social needs, though they differ substantially. Try to have particular limitations and experiences - requiring them to use exceptional devices. This is not the case with the non-disabled peers. So, to help these learners successfully transition to and stay in post-primary

education, specialists working with this student population must understand these unique challenges. This must be followed by incorporating appropriate resources in school programmes to help the learners overcome their predicament. Worryingly, though, insignificant efforts have so far been invested in the Ugandan setting to pave the way forward using the learner self-concept information to craft more relevant interventions and remedies.

Conceptual Diagram

Investigated Variable LEARNER'S SELF
✓ Family socio-economic variables
✓ Age & gender

The conceptual diagram presents two general variables (family socio-economic variables, age and gender) of the learner. These guided the case study through open interviews to extract further underpinnings of the 'self' of learners. These are revealed in the findings of the study, hereinafter.

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition

This study was supported by Schlossberg's theory of transition (1981). Schlossberg first came out with this theory in a periodical called '*The Counseling Psychology*' in 1981 and then reviewed it in 1995 in a work named "*Counselling Adults in Transition*" (Estrella & Lundberg, 2006). Although the theory was initially applied to adult transitions, learners' development theorists have adopted it to present comprehension of primary to secondary learners' transition challenges, among others. Generally, Schlossberg's Transition theory was propounded to expedite a shared appreciation of how people progress from one stage to another (Schlossberg, 1981). The theory embraces the classification of transition, diverse forms of transitions, transition progression and the factors that impact transition (Schlossberg *et al.*, 1995). According to this theoretical basis, *transition* is defined as any event or non-event that results in altered relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg *et al.*, 1995). This

phenomenon also focuses on the advantages and disadvantages a candidate carries to the transition phase, according to one of the inferences of Powers (2010). On the contrary, though, Evans *et al.* (2009) concluded that the phenomenon would involve personal and demographic characteristics - socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and the learners' ethnic variables.

The theory embeds various elements: transition characterization, transition forms, transition process and other factors influencing transition (Estrella & Lundberg, 2006; Schlossberg *et al.*, 1995). These determinants are said to be lacking or missing in Uganda's education system, as many vulnerable groups, such as children with impaired hearing, are detoured from continuing with schooling when they complete their first level of primary education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A constructivist paradigm was adopted to utilize a multiple research design to gather qualitative information from the participants to answer the research question. A purposive research sample of 36 participants was involved in interviews and discussions for the desired qualitative data, respectively. The research sample of 36 was used in the study in 4 randomly selected schools (one from each of the four regions of Uganda). The

research stratified sample comprised four randomly selected upper primary section learners, one from each region, and four conveniently selected learners who represented those who had graduated from primary education and had joined post-primary schools. The sample also included 8, selected by snowball sampling technique to

represent those who had failed to transit to the post-primary level. It included the purposively selected eight teachers, including H/M, eight parents and 4 District Education Officers, respectively. This information is summarized in Table I below:

Table I: Population sample, sampling technique and data collection techniques

Stratum	Sample	Sampling technique	Info/gathering method	Reason
In upper Primary	04	Random	Interview	Divergent locations
Transited to post-primary education	04	Random	Interview	Divergent locations
Failed to transit to post-primary	08	Snowball	Interview	
Parents	08	Purposive	Interview	Divergent locations
Teachers & H/M	08	Purposive	Interview	Ease to engage singularly
District Education Officers	04	Purposive	Interview	Found in places apart
Total	36			

Source: *School Records (2023)*

Data Collection methods

The researcher and another research assistant, an expert in sign language, used an interview guide to capture information from the research participants after informing them of the purpose of the study and its significance, getting their unconditional acceptance to participate, and recording their responses. The collected information was systematically recorded with codes to ease its analysis.

Data Analysis, Findings

The study sought to evaluate the influence of the self of learners on their transition to post-primary education. Through interviews, the participants produced several responses. These were subjected to strict cleaning and organization to identify those corresponding with Schlossberg's self-concept. Percentages were then manually computed to determine the significance of thematic frequencies. The significant percentages were 70% and above - Table II.

Table II: Key themes on RQ: 'How do the outstanding self-concepts among learners with impaired hearing influence their transition from primary to post-primary schools?'

Code	Substantial emerged themes	Frequency N=36	Percent
1	Gender issues	28	77.78%
2	Family socio/economic status	34	94.44%
3	Tribal/ethnic mentality	31	86.11%
4	Talents	27	75%
5	Personal values	26	72.22%

Source: *Interviews (2023)*

According to Table II, the participants' self-concepts revealed that the most outstanding factors affecting the transition of learners with impaired hearing from primary to post-primary education were gender, family socio-economic

status, ethnic mentalities, talents, and personal values.

Gender and Transition of Learners

It was revealed that NGOs were supporting more female than male learners, as participant PKI4 testified:

"I have seen that most NGOs are more sympathetic to girls than boys and thus some tend to enroll only girls or a higher number of girls than boys."

This revelation was accompanied by the assertion that boys, at the age of transition, start to make some earnings from little jobs and lose interest in continuing with studies, unlike girls.

Although the NGOs were extending more assistance to the girls than to their counterparts, the boys, the learners in the upper primary school, held that there are more boys than girls who continue with their studies after the primary school level. They argued that boys concentrate and revise, while girls misbehave due to sexual involvement, leading to unwanted pregnancies and dropping out.

Even the female participants who did not transit exclaimed that at the age they join post-primary education, they are taken advantage of due to gifts from males due to their failure to express themselves and poor self-advocacy. Consequently, they end up getting impregnated and dropping out of school.

Teachers and parents' experiences regarding gender disparities in transiting to post-primary studies varied though there was consensus that boys transited more than girls to secondary education; girls were more vulnerable to sexual assaults, cultural and attitude biases that endanger their progress into post-primary studies. They lack essential requirements like sanitary pads and trusted adults for guidance.

Family Socioeconomic Status and Transition

Based on this factor, and by learners in upper primary, it was found that poverty was a major hindrance to the continuation of studies by most of their colleagues, whom donor agencies and friends do not support, pay tuition fees, and meet other requirements.

Also, the participant learners who had transited to post-primary education said that they do not see their friends due to lack of school requirements, owing to poverty. This assertion was corroborated by the inference from one of the teachers, saying that parents' poverty has reached unimaginable heights; even those who enroll their children for post-primary education have reached the extent of hiding and changing phone contacts to avoid any possible follow-ups. It was reported;

"Due to poverty, many parents keep changing phone numbers, give learners to motorbike cyclists to bring them to the school; afraid of follow-up calls demanding school fees and requirements".

In any case, due to wanton poverty, parents opt first to pay for their other children who are not impaired – while thinking of more educational investment viability. Even to the extreme, parents of learners whose fees had been paid by donors could not afford to support their children when the donors pulled out.

Ethnic Mentality and Transition

From the study findings, the issue of ethnic mentality stood out prominently. Participants revealed that some cultures in Uganda were not valuing (and even discouraging) the education of children with disabilities, including those under scrutiny in this study. The participant learners who had not transited gave a response on it, and teachers and some parents re-echoed their expressions. One learner testified,

"My parents were not willing, but the Local Leaders came with some men with guns and spoke with force. They ordered them to bring money to take me to school".

Expressions of such a participant who did not transit indicated that parents had no intentions of educating their child with a hearing impairment. Authorities forced them, destabilising the home's peace, which disrupted the learners and discouraged them from transiting into post-primary education.

In a similar version, the teachers recounted the negative attitude of the parents in educating their children with hearing impairments, especially girls who are only forced into marriage rather than education. It is recounted,

"They do not care which level of education the young person is at provided they get a suitor, and the next thing is just marriage."

These girls are only considered a source of bridewealth; therefore, their families do not consider the values of their studies.

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The study revealed that some parents still hold negative attitudes towards education. Shockingly, some of these parents even curse their children who go to school. This hampers the child's educational journey and signifies a lack of familial support from the outset. Such instances underscore parents' crucial role in the education of children with hearing impairments and the need for their active involvement and support.

Talent and Transition

Findings from this study revealed that the talented and skilled learners had opportunities to transit into post-primary institutions. In this regard, a primary school participant indicated that their talented classmates transitioned to post-primary studies because they got sponsorships for school fees and school requirements. The learners further adduced that talented learners can continue since everything is always arranged for them by donors. Learners affirmed,

"Talents have helped some of our friends to be sponsored for further studies, especially those talented in football, netball, athletics, and MDD".

In a parallel vein, teachers affirmed that talents and skills play a pivotal role in continuing studies in post-primary education. They observed that skills derived from talents, such as time management, personal hygiene, and self-reliance, are instrumental in learners' development. Importantly, these talents also serve as a financial

resource, enabling learners to secure sponsorships for further studies, even when they initially lack the means.

Study findings revealed that talented learners were productive and generated income to finance their studies. Their productivity also attracts the attention of donors, who in turn render support. This eases their transition to post-primary education since sponsors are motivated. As reported, "Some sponsors are moved by learners who have been into growing crops and making arts/crafts. They can promote the learners as role models to inspire others in society."

Findings further show that parents agreed with teachers and learners regarding the influence of talent on transition. A Participant's parent revealed that their son, who was talented in football, was offered vacancies in several institutions because of his talents. Such learners get sponsorship, and the sponsorship is attached to further studies. Even those who had no intentions of transition get bursaries, and once everything is catered for, they have no reason but to transition to post-primary studies.

Personal Values and Transition

The primary personal values that emerged were good discipline and the fear of God. The learners' expressions underscored the pivotal role of discipline in their academic pursuits. They shared, "We adhere to instructions from teachers and others, as these guide our path to higher studies."

The learners also noted the negative impact of their peers' indiscipline on their academic records, hindering their transition to further studies.

On the value of loving God, the participant learners' expressions indicated that learners with hearing impairment seek God's guidance and trust in God to help them perform better in examinations so that they can progress to further studies. Learners expressed,

"We pray on Sundays, but during the week, some of us go for daily mass because, with God on our side, we can easily pass the exams and proceed to post-primary schools."

The teacher participant affirmed the learners' deep commitment to their faith. They reported, "Some are so devoted to God that they independently attend daily morning prayers (mass) at the church." This commitment to prayer further underscores the learners' active engagement with their faith.

DISCUSSION

By Schlossberg's component of self, five major themes emerged in this study - focusing on the individual involved in the transition process. In terms of his/her personal and psychological aspects. The findings indicated that gender, family socio-economic status, ethnic mentalities, talents and personal values were within Schlossberg et al. (1995) theoretical component of self.

It was established that gender, both girls and boys, face different challenges that sabotage their transition to post-primary studies. The males with a hearing impairment who opted not to transit were influenced by involvement in income-generating activities, which discouraged them from continuing with their studies. Conversely, their counterparts, the females with similar impairments, their opportunities for transition to post-primary education were found to be dwindling, owing to inadequate self-advocacy – allegedly making them sexually exploited and to unfortunate early marriages.

Interestingly, the females were attracting more donor attention than their male counterparts. These revelations aligned with what Luckner &

Sebald (2013) found: that female learners with hearing impairment lacked the self-advocacy to specify their needs and the ability to create appropriate solutions to address them. Other issues that stood out more prominently were domestic roles assigned to the female learners in the families. This aspect negatively affected their transition to post-primary studies, an issue also established by earlier researchers, such as Milsom & Hartley (2005) and Troiano *et al.* (2010).

The family's socioeconomic situation was found to affect the transition of these learners from primary to post-primary level of studies. Outstanding issues on this notion – as outright determinants were the failure of parents to visit their children at school and delegating transportation of learners to motorbike riders for fear of being demanded fee payments. Ntekane (2018) also reported earlier that parental involvement in the education of such children was owed to low family income. Other issues included the costs associated with post-primary education, which were anticipated to be prohibitively high. The findings re-echo research by Schmidt & Mawenu (2013) cited that poor parents in countries like Uganda could only enrol their children in UPE and USE schools.

Another factor related to Schlossberg's self-component was the mentality of the family background regarding the education of learners with hearing impairment. The findings established that some communities hide children with hearing impairments since they consider them a shameful occurrence. This is partly the reason why some of them come to school late. These findings were in line with Marschark *et al.* (2015), who had conducted a similar study and concluded that the achievements of children with impaired hearing were related to racial and ethnic mentalities in education. Further revelations were such that children with a hearing impairment failed to transition to post-primary schools because parents did not conceive the value of educating such learners. The negative mentality and attitudes aligned with the inference of Stone-MacDonald and Butera (2012), who found out that some families reached the extent of hiding these

children to avoid public shame. Others just saw them as a mere burden.

Conclusion

Based on the analysed information, it is concluded that:

- learners with hearing impairment lack constant and adequate training and support from those responsible for their academic growth and development, and more so, among the girls who were found not to match with their counterparts, the male learners
- It was discovered that the parents of impaired children were not aware of the benefits that accrue from supporting the wellbeing of these children to enable them transit to the next level of education from primary.
- It was further learnt that gender, socio-economic issues, cultural apathy, were serious deterrents to household wellbeing and in turn these issues were prohibiting these children to effectively cross from primary to the next level
- Lastly, the issue of favourable and preventive interventions on the alleged ramifications to better the transition of these learners was also identified in this study as being too scanty.

Recommendations

Based on the revelations, it is recommended that the learners be constantly trained and supported to remain their advocates—increasingly responsible for their academic growth and development. This will most likely bring on board more girls to match the numbers of their counterparts, the male learners at the post-primary level.

Greater involvement of stakeholders (particularly parents of impaired children) should be encouraged and supported to raise awareness on gender, socio-economic issues, cultural apathy, and others implied in the discussion of the findings. The intent is to create favourable and preventive interventions on the alleged ramifications to better the transition of these learners in Uganda and possibly beyond.

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