



Students of Iganga Secondary School exhibit their agricultural products made under the new curriculum. PHOTO/FILE

Why rural private schools are struggling with new curriculum

While the new curriculum is intended to create a practical learning environment, many private schools are struggling to keep up with the new approach due to lack of resources, training and infrastructure.

BY MUDANGHA KOLYANGHA

In the quiet villages of Budaka and Bukedi, the sounds of student's voices reverberate from the many private schools that dot the landscape. These schools have long been seen as alternative for families that want more than what government schools offer.

Parents, many of whom are subsistence farmers, often view private schools as a ticket to a better future for their children, one that can lift them from the constraints of rural life and provide opportunities for success.

Despite this promise, private schools in Budaka are facing an uphill battle in implementing Uganda's newly adopted Competency-based curriculum (CBC).

While the curriculum is intended to create a more personalised and practical learning environment, many of these private

schools are struggling to keep up with the new demand—chiefly due to lack of resources, training and infrastructure.

The Competency-Based Curriculum was introduced with the goal to move away from rote memorisation and exam-focused learning, towards a model that prioritises the development of critical skills and deeper understanding. The director, Budaka progressive High school, Michael Kolyangha, acknowledges that the Competency-Based Curriculum is so good but has challenges, especially on the side of private schools.

He says the biggest challenge is question interpretation, where most of the students fail because they cannot interpret scenarios.

"Most of the students cannot compressively speak English and this makes it a big hurdle to interpret question," Mr Kolyangha says.

Budaka Progressive High school with an enrollment of 600 students and 19 qualified teach-

ers prides in outstanding performance in the just released UCE results. He explained that the school registered 79 candidates and all of them passed.

"The CBC is great reform but favours students who fast learners. What is crippling the programme in rural schools is comprehension. This is the dilemma schools many are facing" he said.

He added, "We appeal to government through the Ministry of Education to consider supporting private schools with funding, manpower as well ICT."

The teacher, Mr Emmanuel Wasukire said despite all students passing, there are still challenges that come with good performance.

He noted that private schools are facing a biggest hurdle in the implementation of CBC to the extent that all the burden goes to the parents to provide all the learning materials to their children.

"This turns out to be expensive for parents and yet they are low income earners. This then drives students away," he said.

Stephen Tagonankona, the director of studies said the continued lack of computers to facilitate the learning of students compounded with inadequate man-

power still stifles the implementation of CBC in private schools.

He further highlighted that interpretation is difficult because questions are scenario-based and some scenarios are too long.

He called upon the Ministry to support private secondary schools with computers and affordable internet to facilitate the teaching of learners.

He also noted that the schools faces inadequate learning materials. Budaka Progressive High schools is among the private-giants schools in the district.

The new model is considered to be a game-changer because it directs what the learners do-in terms of skilling.

Mr Nassif Kassujja, the head-teacher of Highlight Secondary School-Kadama in Kibuku District said most private schools lack computers and internet yet these are key in the implementation of various projects, especially sciences. He also observed that chemicals and equipment are too expensive coupled with language interpretation of questions. "From the rural background, many of our students cannot interpret these items because of lack of English Comprehension," Mr Kassujja said.

He said most of the parents are not willing to support their children and this increases the high rate of absenteeism and yet CBC requires students to attend and do projects individually.

Highlight Senior Secondary School-Kdama with an enrollment of 1,000 students is also among the giants of Kibuku in terms of academic performance. The school registered 242 candidates and out these, 240 passed in grade one.

The director of the school, Mr Kezeka Mbogo said the new curriculum is better than the old traditional curriculum.

"The new curriculum gives a variety of opportunities because learners acquire skills," Mr Mbogo explained, adding that, "The new CBC rewards innovation because through projects, students harness real life skills."

He observed that the new CBC mode of assessment should be reviewed because some teachers forge marks and submit them to UNEB.

In urban schools, where resources are more plentiful, the curriculum is challenging but manageable. Private schools, particularly in town, have embraced the new change with the support of government funding, modern teaching aids and teacher training programs.

But in rural areas like Budaka, private schools are struggling to implement the CBC because of lack of resources. The biggest challenge facing private schools is the lack of resources.

"We don't have enough books for every student" one teacher said, "Sometimes, five students have to share just one textbook. This makes it hard for them to learn or master the competencies they need to move forward."

The competency-Bases Curriculum relies heavily on access to a variety of learning materials including textbooks, digital resources and interactive teaching tools.

Mr Azuizi Walumoli of Bugwere High School, a government aided secondary school, said CBC skills learners. The just released UCE results showed that most of the candidates passed under this new model. In 2024 UCE results, many parents and teachers struggled to interpret the new grading system.

Whereas most teachers in these schools are adapting to the new system, they are not adequately trained in the CBC's pedagogy, which requires a shift from traditional lecture-based teaching to a more student-centred approach.

"We used to teach students the same way we were taught," said one of the teachers at a private school in Budaka, "Now, with the new system, we are expected to assess each student's competencies, but we have not been trained. We are not equipped to assess each student's skills in a personalised way."

The struggles of private schools in Budaka have a ripple effect on learners and their families. For many parents, private schools are the best option because they offer smaller class sizes, quality teaching and a chance for their children to receive an education that can lead to a brighter future. But with the challenges that come with implementing the new CBC, many parents are starting to question whether their children are getting quality education.

The Competency-Based Curriculum holds immense potential for the children of Uganda, including those in Budaka. However, for this potential to be actualised, rural private schools must be equipped with tools and necessary support to succeed.

KEY

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