

# Why secondary teachers struggling with teaching languages

BY JESSICA SABANO

**MUKONO.** "The current situation where one teacher handles up to 100 students forces teachers to work extra hours, including weekends, where some get exhausted."

Those are the sentiments of Mr Joel Muwanguzi, an English teacher at Seeta High School, who exemplifies the struggle to manage the large class sizes under the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). He reveals that one teacher struggles to handle about 100 learners in a lesson.

Instead, Mr Muwanguzi emphasises that the ideal teacher-to-student ratio should not exceed 35 learners per teacher.

Charles Bwire, also a teacher in Mukono, says they teach the CBC from senior one to senior two, in most cases. However, after senior three, the teachers start to consider the strength of the students' grades and abandon the curriculum.

"Most of the talking stops at senior three first term, and we revert to our old system because we need good grades, to ensure the learners pass their O-levels," he says.

### Summary Writing

One of the areas of learning that is hard under CBC is Summary Writing is also a challenge; we are asking ourselves how this can be made competence-based.

Christine Gwokyalya, head of the English Department, at Seeta High School, says that although the new curriculum is more engaging and practical, time limitations and performance expectations make full implementation difficult.

"When we reach the Senior Four class, we tend to shy away from the new curriculum and go back to the old methods because of the pressure for good re-



Some of the teachers from greater Mukono area and a research team after a dissemination workshop in Mukono District on Wednesday. PHOTO/JESSICA SABANO

sults," she explained. She explains that it is too demanding, no enough time, and there is also lack of provision of enough textbooks, leading to gaps in the curriculum.

### FRENCH LANGUAGE IN CBC

Under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), French is taught using the Action-Oriented Approach, moving away from rote memorisation to active communication.

It is structured to help students build practical fluency rather than just passing written exams.

Emily Namale, an English and Literature teacher at Namilyango Secondary School, says teachers are sometimes forced to revert to elements of the old curriculum due to a lack of clear guid-

The key methods in teaching are: **Real-world simulations:** Here, students participate in role-play (eg acting as journalists or shopkeepers), creating menus, and acting out daily dialogues. **Four core competences:** The curriculum focuses on developing specific skills simultaneously: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

ance on CBC-aligned assessments. "It becomes difficult to assess learners effectively when the guidelines are unclear or delayed," she says, adding that large class sizes make it hard to evaluate individual competencies such as reading, writing, and listening skills.

The three teachers explain they they face even greater pressure from school administrators and parents to deliver high grades, often at the expense of competence-based learning.

They add that this disparity undermines the effectiveness of the curriculum nationwide.

### French language

Brian Mayanja, a French language teacher at St Balikuddembe SSS, Kisoga

in Mukono, says the number of students taking on the subject is in decline.

With French being optional, many learners drop it by Senior Three, forcing teachers to adopt creative strategies to retain interest.

He also says time affects languages and ICT integration as well as marketing. "You have to market and make the language interesting and lively to keep learners engaged," he notes.

### Limited grammar

Some teachers say there is limited emphasis on grammar in the CBC framework. They argue that without a strong foundation in grammar, learners struggle to communicate well.

"Grammar is core. If a learner lacks it, they cannot construct meaningful sentences," one of the teachers says.

They are calling on curriculum developers to revisit the framework and ensure grammar is adequately integrated. While some schools have access to computers and digital tools, others lack basic ICT infrastructure, creating inequality in implementation.

The lessons came out during a dissemination workshop for building teacher capacity for innovative foreign language instruction in English and French under the CBC, funded by the government through Makerere University Research and Innovation Fund. Since 2020, Uganda has been using the Competence-Based Curriculum to give children real-life skills.

Early this year, the Minister of Education and Sports, Ms. Janet Museveni, underscored the government directive to shift to the competency-based education model.

The minister urged Makerere University to lead in Curriculum reform, staff training, and infrastructure development to ensure graduates are equipped with practical skills, innovation, and problem-solving abilities.