

# **Ethical Impropriety in the Curriculum Review Process: A Case of Uganda’s Lower Secondary Curriculum**

*Naomi Namanya\**

## **Abstract**

This article delves into the ethical considerations of the Curriculum Review Process (CRP) carried out in Uganda’s Formal Education System (UFES) in 2020, with a focus on the well-being of the learner, made in the image of God. It employs the Kantian theory of the categorical imperative to posit that the revision of the provided curriculum did not align with the core principles of the CRP, leading to ethical shortcomings in the process. Through a convergent mixed methods approach, the article illustrates that the management of the CRP in formulating the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) presented challenges in its implementation, impeding students’ ability to fully realise their Divine Mandate (DM): “...be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28) NIV. The article underscores the significance of adhering to proper technical protocols in curriculum reviews to ensure that students derive maximum benefit from the process and that the resulting curriculum effectively enables them to reach their full potential.

**Keywords:** Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), Formal Education, Ethics, Divine Mandate, Provided curriculum

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\* Makerere University, +256 787849692, nmnamanya@gmail.com

## Introduction

This interdisciplinary article examines curriculum in theory, practice, and ethics. It examines the ethics upon which the Curriculum Review Process (CRP) was handled to develop a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Uganda, aimed at helping learners reach their full potential. The CBC focuses on applying knowledge, rather than just acquiring it, to meet the needs of individuals and nations as a whole (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2017). This approach, which prioritises skills, practical experience, and application, has been adopted in many educational systems globally to enhance educational quality and better equip students with the challenges of the twenty-first century, a move that Uganda embraced.

## Background

Historically, education in Uganda has been heavily influenced by colonial legacies, with the curriculum originally designed to meet the needs and interests of the colonial powers (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Khadidja, 2014; Rodney, 1973; Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998). Following independence, Uganda continued to use the British-designed curriculum, often referred to as the old/ provided curriculum, with some minor adjustments to few subjects of history and geography (Ssekamwa, 1997). However, this old curriculum, originally created during colonial times to train African clerks for the colonial

civil service, became outdated and no longer met the needs of Ugandans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This led to the necessity for a curriculum review, resulting in the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) (Chemonges, 2024; Gyagenda, 2023; Mwesigwa, 2014; NCDC, 2019; Ssekamwa, 1997).

The British-designed curriculum (provided curriculum) posed a challenge within the formal education system, leading to multiple educational reviews (Ssekamwa, 1997). The most notable review being the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC, 1989), which resulted in the Government White Paper (GWP, 1992) that has governed the education landscape in Uganda until the recent Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) in 2022. Among the issues raised by the EPRC Committee in was the necessity to enhance the quality of education through curriculum changes at all levels. This requires significant changes in the curriculum at all levels, as well as the provision of adequate number of textbooks and instructional materials (EPRC, 1989).

In response to EPRC's (1989) recommendation, partial curriculum reviews were conducted instead of comprehensive ones. For example, the primary curriculum was changed to a thematic curriculum (National Curriculum Development Centre [NCDC], 2008), followed by the recent transition to the CBC in lower secondary schools in Uganda (NCDC, 2020), and the Abridged

Curriculum that was developed immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic (NCDC, 2023). However, during the data collection phase of my doctoral research, respondents expressed anxiety about the newly introduced CBC curriculum in 2022, the results of which have influenced the content of this paper.

Before addressing the curriculum review process (CRP) and examining how the process was handled in Uganda to develop the CBC, it is important to first explore a few concepts: Education, Curriculum, and Divine Mandate. What is education? What is it for and for whom? What is curriculum, and how do most Ugandans understand it? These concepts create a context in which these essential questions help us assess the learners' ability to fulfil their Divine Mandate. Divine Mandate ideally means full potential, which is derived from Genesis (1:28, NIV<sup>1</sup>). Learners are created in the image of God with inherent potential. This implies that education in its aim under any curricula in place is to help learners fulfil their purpose of creation.

### **What is Education, What is it for, and for Whom?**

Education has varying definitions depending on its use. Etymologically, it is derived from the Latin '*e-ducere*' which means to 'lead forth' or 'bring out', to rise, 'to bring forth' or 'to train'

or 'mould' an individual's potential with proper care and nourishment as a lifelong process for social continuity (Dash, 2015; Dewey, 1916; Mukhopadhyaya et al., 2018; Parihar, 2017). It is a process of unwrapping the gem of the child to let the internal become externally visible (Froebel, 1895). So, education, in its aim, draws the inert potential of children to live to their full potential. In view of this, a curriculum is designed to enable learners achieve their full potential.

### **Meaning of Curriculum**

The term "curriculum" has both broad and narrow meanings, as well as prescriptive and descriptive definitions. Like education, it is defined differently by various individuals with different intentions related to the educational programmes to be achieved (Kelly, 2004; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Dewey (1902: 11-12), views curriculum as "a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organised bodies of truth that we call studies... studies are experiences". Accordingly, a child's present experiences are core to every curriculum, as Bobbit (1918:43) concurs with Dewey: "Curriculum encompasses the entire range of experiences, both directed and undirected, involved in developing an individual's abilities." For Kelly (2004:8), the curriculum is "the totality of experiences that the pupil has as a result of provision made." UNESCO (2017:5) defines curriculum as "how a country empowers its citizens with the

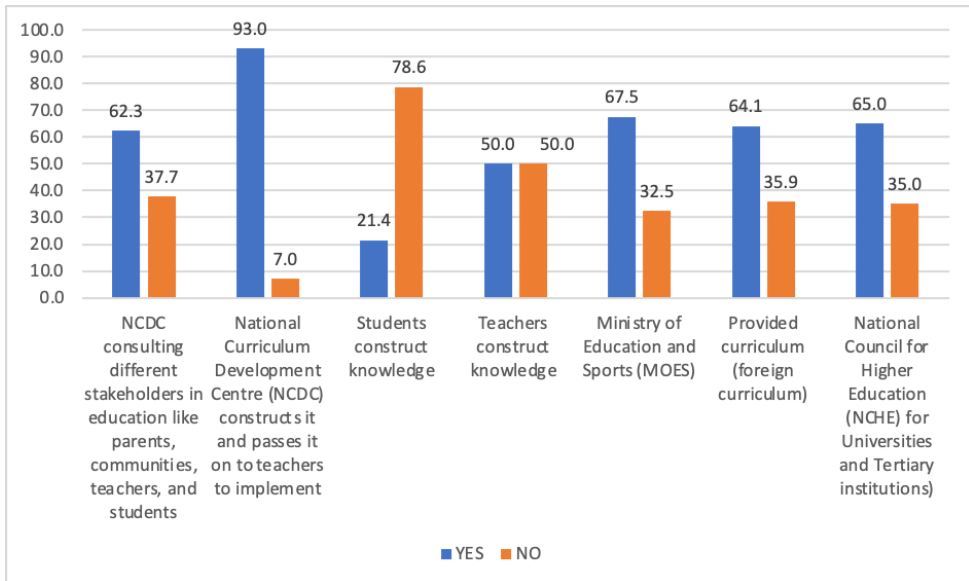
<sup>1</sup> New international Version

necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for social and economic engagement and empowerment, both personally and nationally.” However, in a narrower definition, curriculum is often limited to academic content that translates into a syllabus (Phenix, 1962). As a result, the intellectual planning, infrastructure, and philosophical perspectives that are central to the curriculum are not given much attention (Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). All of these definitions lead to the conclusion that curriculum

includes both planned and unplanned activities that a student experiences in life while considering the values and beliefs that contribute to a meaningful life in any society.

However, the curriculum in Uganda’s formal education system is defined narrowly, which raises questions about CRP. It is considered more as a syllabus, limited to academic content that is designed, developed, and reviewed by a specific group, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure.1:** Construction of Academic-Knowledge in Uganda



**Source:** *Adopted from my thesis: “Ethical Implications of Uganda’s Education System on Graduates”*

In a survey administered to Teacher Graduates (TGs) (n=78) to collect views concerning the Ugandan curriculum, they were asked, “How does the formal education system in Uganda shape academic knowledge?” This question aimed to assess their understanding of the curriculum

and identify the organisations and stakeholders involved in its review.

In response, the TGs displayed a limited understanding of curriculum as learning experiences primarily focused on academic content that is reflected in a syllabus. They also noted that different organisations

and education stakeholders were involved in curriculum development with varying levels of participation: National Curriculum Centre (NCDC) (93%), Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) (67.5%), National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (65%), Education Development Partners (EDPs) (64%), teachers (50%), and students (21%).

The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), which is responsible for curriculum design, received a high score of 93% in 1973. Figure 1 illustrates that the NCDC, Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), and Education Development Partners (EDP) all play roles in the curriculum construction process. However, this division of responsibilities leads to challenges with accountability, conflicts of interest, and overall impacts on the curriculum process.

Furthermore, the direct implementors, teachers and students, had the lowest scores of 50% and 21%, respectively. This indicates that teachers and students who interact with the curriculum daily are not receiving sufficient attention. The curriculum remains prescriptive as students do not have the autonomy to choose their own learning path, leading to passive participation and a perception of formal education as a banking system (Freire, 1970). Consequently, students are unable to fulfil their responsibility to engage and contribute to the expansion of

knowledge, hence denying them the opportunity to realise their Divine Mandate.

### ***Divine Mandate***

The term “divine mandate” refers to a particular task that God has assigned to humanity in order for them to bear His image on earth. It specifies the meaning of individual life’s and the purpose of contributing to the betterment of the universe in both being and doing. The concept is derived from (Genesis 1:28) “...Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...” In the context of education, learners are to be instructed to consider themselves as God’s representatives on earth to be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth. Thus, any curriculum should enable every learner to unleash their full potential without regard to social or biological origins.

### ***Problem Statement***

The curriculum plays a crucial role in providing the direction to achieve educational goals in any society; hence, its review process is important. However, the way the Curriculum Review Process (CRP) was handled in Uganda is questionable and raises serious ethical concerns regarding curriculum design. This is necessary to enable learners to achieve the intended objectives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to realise their full potential. Despite limited preparation, Uganda embraced this approach, leading to additional challenges within the

curriculum review education system. This article argues that the flaws in the CBC review process hinder the affirmation of learners' human capabilities and their potential to fully realise their Divine Mandate (DM), namely: "...Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:28) NIV. It presents empirical data that questions the effectiveness of CBC.

### **Literature reviewed and the gap**

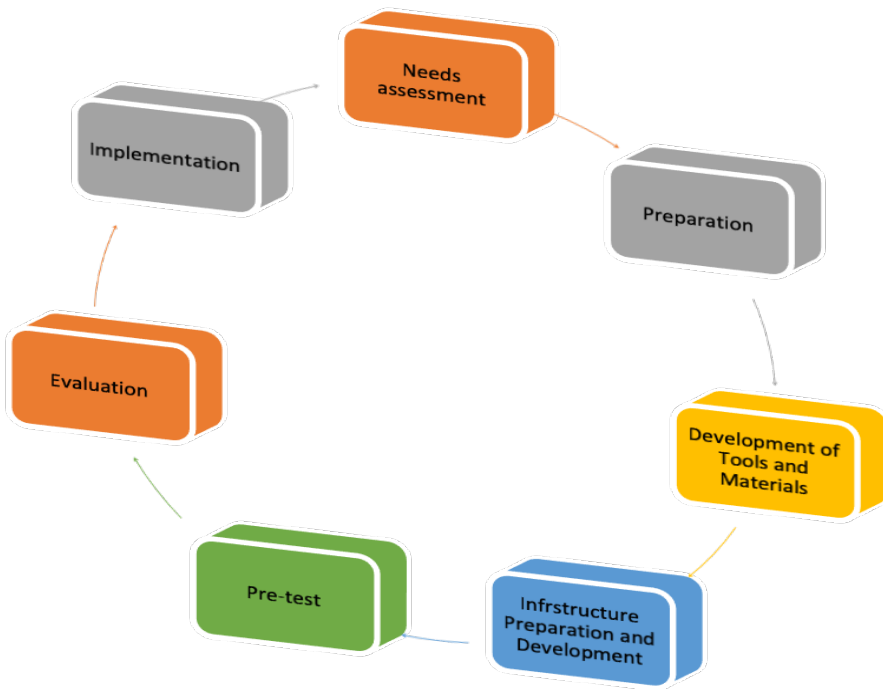
Currently, there are few researchers on the CBC in lower secondary schools in Uganda. Among these are, Kembabazi (2023) and Kidega and Khaing (2023) have focused on its implementation. Muwanguzi et al. (2023) studied the impact, Mayende (2022) handled gaps, Emuria (2023) looked at the challenges, and Tumuheise et al. (2023) assessed the factors affecting its implementation. Altinyelken (2010) and Mabonga (2021) researched thematic curriculum at the primary level. Other discussions on CBC include opinions from teachers and concerned educationists in newspapers and websites (Chemonges, 2024; Kiwalabye, 2023; Musimenta, 2023; URN, 2024). The way the process was handled and its resultant ethical implications for learners about their DM have not been thoroughly analysed. The rest of the article presents the theory, data sources, results and discussions, conclusions, and recommendations.

### **The Process of Curriculum Review**

The CRP is an evidence-based process used to address questions related to educational programmes (Dyjur et al., 2019). It aims to determine the current status of the programme and where it is headed in terms of educational achievements (UNESCO, 2015). Since curricula vary between contexts and countries, the review process may be shortened or extended; however, there are basic stages in the CRP.

This review takes two forms, namely thematic and full review. The former assesses the effectiveness of curriculum delivery, whereas the latter involves internal and external stakeholders. CRP involves the reviewer, content, instructional materials, and alignment with national and educational objectives. The process further involves stakeholder engagement through pretests and implementation. From the literature review and fieldwork findings, it is clear that a CRP follows specific interconnected stages of needs assessment, preparation, development of tools and materials, infrastructure preparation and development, pre-test, and implementation, and the cycle continues, as summarised in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Stages of Curriculum Review Process (CRP)



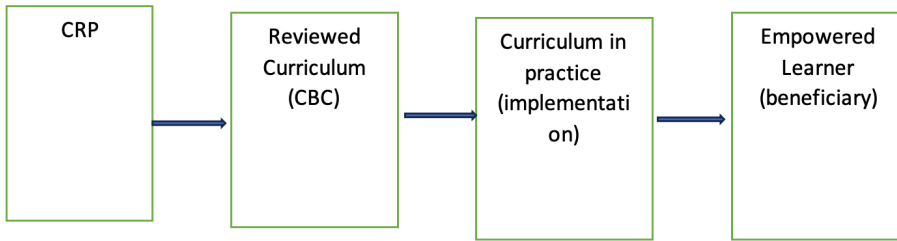
**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on a review of the related literature and collected data.

**Theoretical Framework**

This article is based on the Kantian theory of categorical imperative, which he referred to as the Ethics of Duty. According to this theory, it is our responsibility to act in a way that we would want others to act toward us (Pecorino, 2006). Kant believed that ethics consists of commands on what we should do, which he classified as a categorical imperative, translating it into a command of the self (Kranak, 2019). Kantian principles are applied to curriculum review, emphasising the duty of all stakeholders to act responsibly. This theory calls upon the universal acceptance of different stakeholders

to actively participate in the CRP to initiate new ideas and question the status quo, thereby providing a practical solution that depicts the ownership aspect in Uganda. When changes are proposed, stakeholders should be consulted to ensure the proper unfolding of one’s potential. All stakeholders must ensure that the beneficiaries understand the purpose of the curriculum review concerning their education. The CRP which led to the CBC is then translated into implementation: curriculum in practice, which finally empowers the learner to live to their full potential, as illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** A diagrammatical representation of theoretical underpinning of process of a linear CRP and the final beneficiary.



## Methodology

The data used in this article were obtained from a convergent mixed-methods study conducted in 2022. Qualitatively, the article utilised participant observation and seven interviews with education professionals, including a head teacher, professor of education, curriculum specialist from the College of Education and External Studies (CEES), NCDC official, a Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) official, teacher, and the *Twaweza*<sup>2</sup> East Africa, Country Director-Uganda. These interviews were supplemented by two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with lecturers (three females and five males) at Uganda Christian University (UCU)-Mbale Campus and Gulu University students (teacher trainees - six girls and four boys). In addition, an Education Group Specialist (EGS) was considered to provide further expertise on educational matters. It comprised of four male Heads of Department at

Gulu University (Head of Curriculum Studies, Foundations, Geography, and Psychology). Quantitatively, a survey was conducted among graduates (n=385) using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of samples. The sample included two categories of graduates: general and teacher graduates. A proportion of 80%:20% arrived at, leading the latter number of graduate teachers (n=78) that participated in the study in 2022. Relevant documents were reviewed to highlight the disharmony within the Curriculum Review Process (CRP) in the Formal Education system in Uganda. The results were thematically analysed along with document analysis and quantitatively analysed using univariate analysis.

## Presentation and Discussion of the Study Findings

The objective guiding the presentation and discussion of the study findings was to examine the ethical aspect of the Curriculum Review Process (CRP) of 2020 in Uganda's Formal Education System (UFES) with the intention

<sup>2</sup> *Twaweza* means "we can make it happen" in Swahili.

*Twaweza* works to enable citizens to exercise agency and government openness and responsiveness in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, especially in the area of education.

of benefiting the learners made in the image of God. This objective was accompanied by the following research question: To what extent did the CRP in Uganda adhere to ethical standards in meeting the needs of learners created in the image of God? Given the nature of the paper, the findings are presented following CRP and concurrently discussed at the same time. The discussion of the findings follows what CRP entails (stages) in comparison with what was done in Uganda before the 2020 implementation of the CBC.

### Needs Assessment Stage

Stage one is an evaluation phase that involves situational analysis. It evaluates the existing curriculum in relation to current needs by conducting a needs assessment to gather feedback from industry and employers (Dyjur et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004; Sedere, 2011; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Ideally, during the needs assessment stage, the reviewers design a needs assessment survey and conduct it among nationals with representative samples. The NCDC which is in charge of curriculum matters in Uganda (NCDC, 1973), prepares for this process by first reviewing the existing curriculum. The NCDC ought to have ensured that the curriculum is aligned with the country's priorities, underlying philosophy, vision, and feedback from industry. While realigning with Uganda's priorities, curriculum reviewers should have identified the country's needs from the relevant

documents with the existing philosophy and constitution to ensure that the curriculum content includes pertinent information (Assuring Quality in Higher Education in Sierra Leone, 2019; Dyjur et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). The Constitution, which outlines aspirations for Ugandans, is reviewed to capture Uganda's vision and aspirations. Ultimately, recommendations should be made for Ugandans to start a discussion on the necessity of CRP.

It was important to consider several relevant questions, including, but not limited to why are we reviewing? What is the country's focus? What are our goals? How practical is the programme? What is the feasibility of the new curriculum? What are the costs involved? What resources and infrastructure are needed for the new curriculum and who are the learners we are designing for? How will this be assessed? What content should be covered? What are the priorities of the schools and countries? What are the expected learning outcomes of the reviewed curriculum? Unfortunately, the clues from the respondents, such as *Twaweza* Director-Uganda, head teachers, teachers, lecturers, and university students whom the researcher interacted with in 2022, were still asking the same questions, pointing to the failure of the curriculum reviewers to address these questions sufficiently. The CRP that led to CBC did not follow a right procedure instead it was ignited by the directive from MoES, as echoed

by the NCDC Executive Director Baguma (2023) at a conference:<sup>3</sup> “The necessary procedures were followed to develop the CBC curriculum.” In clarification, the NCDC Executive specifically mentioned the initial stakeholder engagement and emphasised the directive by the MoES under Cabinet Minute 45 to review the curriculum in 2006. The NCDC Executive Director was in agreement with the NCDC official who stated in a personal interview (June 24, 2022) that “we followed a scientific method in reviewing the old curriculum.” However, a needs assessment tool was not availed to the researcher.

However, data from other stakeholders consulted did not agree with NCDC official’s assertion that the CBC procedure was followed in Uganda. They instead shared their views on the lack of a needs assessment stage and expressed mixed feelings about the future of the CBC. For instance, the Director of *Twaweza*, Uganda, when asked about how CBC came up, wondered: “Up to now, we have never had a scientific way of determining how some things should be done. The NCDC is talking about the new curriculum; what tools did they use? Whom did they involve?” (*Twaweza* Director, Uganda, personal interview, June 23, 2022). The same concern was pointed out by

the headteacher from Valley College in a personal interview (July 4, 2022): “Talk of the new curriculum, the CBC; whom did they consult?” If the headteacher in Bushenyi Town was not involved in the CRP or was not aware of the process, what about the schools in more remote areas? To this, the Education Specialist Group (July 16, 2022) noted that “the success of the curriculum review depends on implementation, and a situation analysis should address all concerns and integrate them at the implementation level.” The quotes clearly indicate that the fundamental questions and the scientific stage of needs assessment were not considered at the beginning of the review of Uganda’s CRP; hence, the needs of the learners were not given priority in the reviewed curriculum, and they were not enabled to realise their potential while using it.

Once again, the lower secondary curriculum review was not related to the needs- assessment stage. It was based on elitist principles that did not consider the needs of the curriculum beneficiaries, as stated:

The review was based on the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP, 2009-2018) which set out strategies to improve the quality and relevance of secondary education. The ESSP’s sub-objective 2.2 was to ensure that “Post-primary students [are] prepared to enter the workforce and higher education”. This is also in line with the current strategic plan for 2017-2020. To achieve this objective, one of the

<sup>3</sup> This conference was a stakeholders conference held on Munyonyo-date Available here: <https://youtu.be/wFeaEO6OPuE> On which the executive director clarified on the ‘o’ level curriculum was reviewed. This seemed to show that the curriculum review was a product of a directive other than a comprehensive needs assessment that should have been done by the NCDC.

Ministry's strategies was to revise the curriculum and improve instruction and assessment by eliminating the current curriculum's shortcomings. 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...(NCDC, 2020, p.3).

According to the long quotation above, various stakeholders were not involved in the CBC review process. It was left to the MoES and NCDC to improve the quality of education through curriculum review without necessarily considering the needs of the learners at hand to develop their God-given abilities. Because the reviewers were not given guidance on their needs prior to the review, this prevents students from benefiting from the reviewed curriculum and, therefore, reaching their full potential.

### Preparation Stage

At this stage, two major activities are carried out namely; benchmarking and stakeholder engagement (Dyjur et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Since it was a new innovation, benchmarking countries where the CBC had been implemented with minimal challenges in a similar context would have been helpful in this study. However, benchmarking was sought after facing numerous implementation challenges. For instance, the MoES Uganda visited Kenya for benchmarking from

September 24-30, 2023, in the third year of implementation (International Development Research Centre, 2024). Hence, the stage was skipped, and the resultant implication is that the learners are not guided on their competences, leaving their inherent potential untapped.

Benchmarking is related to stakeholders' engagement to determine what learners should be educated on (Sedere, 2011). Stakeholder involvement at various stages of the CRP is crucial. Representatives from different sectors, such as leaders of educational institutions, technocrats from the MoES, teachers, subject matter experts, administrative leaders, students, industry representatives, alumni, and parents, subject specialists from various levels of education are also included to ensure representation across the country are selected to participate in this process (Dyjur et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004; Sedere, 2011; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Curriculum committees have been formed nationwide, with preliminary meetings held to inform stakeholders of the need for review. The committees assess the current curriculum, instructional materials, facilities, and assessment methods, and explore the availability of new instructional materials (Assuring Quality in Higher Education in Sierra Leone, 2019). However, the availability of these engagements was minimal, as indicated by the *Twaweza*, Director- Uganda and the head teacher of Bushenyi (also see Secion 4.1).

Again, the inadequate consultations were identified by the lecturers at UCU-Mbale Campus who unanimously concluded that instead of consulting the stakeholders, the curriculum reviewers simply adopted a “copy and paste”/ “copycat” style.

The challenge in Uganda is to copy and paste. This has affected many Ugandan bodies, including the NCDC. The new CBC may have been copied from the Western world, which made education more practical and hands-on. In their case, education has facilities and amenities that may not be readily available in the context of this study. There is still a gap in preparing our learners for the new education curriculum (UCU Lecturers, FGD, August 22, 2022).

The views from this FGD quotation suggest that if stakeholders were consulted in different regions of Uganda, they would have addressed the issue of relevance and ownership which was further amplified by the College of Education and External Studies (CEES) Curriculum Specialist who underscored the importance of ownership, stating that: “When the stakeholders are not involved, there is no ownership and, therefore, challenges within the implementation process arise” (CEES Curriculum Specialist, personal interview, November 10, 2022). He added:

Curriculum review requires stakeholders’ engagement in detail. Have we done enough consultations? Sometimes, NCDC has, but the consultations have not been

comprehensive enough. If you are to do things with a review of the curriculum, you consult; you do not come up with a finished document and ask stakeholders to consider it. By the time you bring a document, you have already biased me. You are supposed to ask me what I think about the curriculum, such that I own up, but with CBC, there is no ownership. But handing over and saying things will work has been a problem. And this has been the mode of doing things in Uganda. I compare it to the police officer, who does not make laws but is supposed to implement them; maybe this could be counted on the existing education system (CEES Curriculum Specialist, personal interview, November 10, 2022).

The curriculum specialist at the CEES indirectly noted that the NCDC often informs stakeholders rather than consulting and involving them in the process. Because many people, including representatives from lecturers, were not involved or even aware of the review, the innovation was reduced to simply ‘copy and paste’, which does not allow the learners to realise their God-given abilities. This ultimately affects learners, who feel compelled to simply move through the curriculum to progress to the next level, hindering their ability to connect what they are studying to their life purpose and causing them to miss out on realising their full potential and being fruitful.

The data from the *Twaweza* Director and Head teacher in Section, 4.1 revealed that many teachers were not involved in the preparation stage, leading to difficulties in instructing the learners. Only a few teachers from certain schools in Kampala received five days of training (Kidega & Khaing, 2023). This relates to the results obtained from the Teacher Graduates in a survey when asked, *How is academic knowledge in Uganda's formal education system constructed?* In response, the teachers' consultations were scored at 50% and the learners' at 24.01%, on the lower side (see Figure 1 on p.30). The implication here is that stakeholders like teachers and the beneficiary-learners at the heart of CBC disown the new curriculum, other than the NCDC, which is responsible for designing it. This results in the failure of learners to meet their needs and leaves them feeling unfulfilled and disconnected from their purpose, ultimately dehumanising them. In addition, teachers and other stakeholders were denied their duty to participate in the CRP.

### **Development of Tools and Materials Stage**

Stage 3 of the CRP involves reviewing and developing materials, tools, assessment forms, and delivery methods (pedagogy) (Dyjur et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004; Sedere, 2011; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). The appropriate tools and materials for the revised curriculum were developed, along

with appropriate forms of assessment. These instructional tools include textbooks, teachers' guides, learners' guides, e-learning materials, and the necessary technology to support the reviewed curriculum (Sedere, 2011).

However, there is a lack of sufficient instructional tools and failure to retool all teachers on how CBC works (Kidega & Khaing, 2023). A few schools that received textbooks, which were meant to be working books, had far fewer than the number of learners, as reported by the head teacher in Bushenyi during the interview. "The CBC would be effective if it were given time to re-tool teachers, with the facilitation of the equipment needed for the projects. If we are concerned about what to use in towns, what about those in rural areas?" (Head Teacher Valley College, Personal interview, July 4, 2022). Many schools located far from the city of Kampala received inadequate materials, and some received none (Kidega & Khaing, 2023; Muwanguzi et al., 2023). The same challenge of inadequate instructional tools was experienced during the thematic curriculum discussed by Altinyelken's (2010) earlier argument about thematic implementation being rushed, which hindered its effectiveness. Without adequate resources, students cannot fully engage with the CBC and translate it into meaningful learning because the CBC does not enable drawing the best out of the learner to be fully equipped to fulfil the DM of being fruitful and subduing the earth.

In conjunction with materials, assessment tools are developed to accompany instructional tools to measure the expected learning outcomes of learners (Dyjur et al., 2019; Sedere, 2011; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). These assessment tools take various forms, depending on the goals of the reviewed curriculum (CBC). However, in Uganda, the assessment tools were not yet prepared when the researcher collected data in 2022, as the head teacher of Valley College responded:

We have always asked the UNEB officials how they want to assess the students using this curriculum, and it has now been two years, but with no apparent response as to how students will be evaluated. Therefore, we do not know the future of our students in Senior 1 and 2. (Head Teacher, Valley College, Personal communication, July 4, 2022).

This quote clearly indicates that the assessment materials were not prepared by the reviewers. It was later determined that formative assessment would be used, but it was not ready by the time the CBC was rolled out. This caused a great deal of pressure and uncertainty for many Ugandan schools accustomed to summative assessment, and they ended up adopting a dual curriculum to have clear assessment, as I observed while on School Practice Supervision in June/July, 2023, in the third year of CBC implementation.

In an interview with a UNEB official, it was clear that although learners were using CBC, there was no clear assessment roadmap in place. The official stated that “the relevant authorities are expected to prepare assessment forms towards the end of 2024, with the first students of the CBC expected to be in Senior four” (UNEB Official, September 15, 2022). This was followed by the NCDC Executive Director releasing the assessment guidance circular for Senior 1 and 2 in 2023 at the end of each year (Kitubi, 2023; NCDC, 2023). However, there is no clear assessment roadmap for schools to follow. Between 2020 and 2023, when the assessment circular was released, there was considerable anxiety among stakeholders regarding the assessment of students using CBC. This was particularly evident among private school owners with whom the researcher interacted in 2022. They were concerned about how the CBC assessment would be conducted. This anxiety was also felt by students, who could envision a future without guidance, leading to feelings of helplessness, hence being subdued rather than subduing the earth.

According to the assessment guidelines, summative assessment accounts for 80% of the assessment, while formative assessment accounts for 20%; however, formative assessment is at the core of the CBC. The 20% allocated to the projects does not receive enough attention to fully implement CBC objectives (NCDC, 2020). Focusing on 80% of

summative assessment neglects the learners' abilities and leaves many students ill-equipped for the revised curriculum. This issue is reminiscent of a situation in 2022 when a Senior Six (S.6) candidate wrote to the Executive Director of UNEB as follows:

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

After being declared a failed student with a score of 0%, such a statement highlights the unmet needs of the learners, the grumbling, and the inability to increase and fill according to his capabilities, leading to a disconnect between theory and practice, as well as descriptive and prescriptive curriculum (Kelly, 2004; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Despite changes in curriculum and assessment, learners are still limited to being evaluated through traditional high-stake examinations. However, the CBC is designed as learner-centred with a holistic approach, focusing on the head, heart, and hands (3Hs). This is not reflected in the reality and practice of CBC in Uganda (Kembabazi, 2023; Kidega & Khaing, 2023). This results in learners feeling

inadequate in areas where they may not excel naturally, suppressing their strengths and leaving them subdued, feeling useless, and dehumanised with no sense of duty.

Pedagogy which is the method of how teachers teach in theory and practice, is an important component of a reviewed curriculum because it addresses how learners are assisted in achieving the learning objectives (Kelly, 2004; Sedere, 2011; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Therefore, having an appropriate pedagogy is crucial for the successful implementation of the curriculum. However, since formal education was introduced in Uganda by Christian missionaries, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1877 and White Fathers in 1879 (Ssekamwa, 1997; Tiberondwa, 1998; Wandira, 1972), the teacher-centred pedagogy has been predominant in Ugandan schools for delivering curriculum content. This can be traced back to the missionary education of tutorship as a method for teaching and learning (Wandira, 1972). According to Wandira (1972, p. 119), "learners memorised their letters through repeated recitation." Over time, this evolved into literacy skills and eventually included the ability to write. Despite the curriculum being reviewed to CBC, the same methodology is still used, even though the lower secondary level curriculum is said to adopt a learner-centred approach, as stated by an NCDC official:

CBC is a learner-centred curriculum. By changing the curriculum, we have tailored it to cater to a holistic learner; we ask teachers to be observant of the attitudes of the learners, be practical, and have generic skills which integrate knowledge, behaviour, and practical skills. The teacher is tasked with coming up with an activity to integrate these three components to cater to the three Ks- knowledgeable, knowhow, and know-being of a learner (NCDC Official, personal interview, June 24, 2022).

While the reviewers intended to design CBC as a learner-centred curriculum, the reality is different, as revealed by the Gulu University students in an FGD who unanimously commented the following:

The education system is teacher-centred and is not so good because it is only the teacher who is supposed to know the content delivered to the students. On the other hand, students do not know what they are supposed to take; therefore, when they reach Senior Four, they are still confused about the subjects to take (FGD, Gulu University Students, July 15, 2022).

The response by Gulu students above was given in the third year of CBC implementation, as discussed by the teacher trainees. This demonstrates

that the traditional method of instructing students is still being followed even after the CRP. The same was also mentioned in the parliamentary watch as follows:

There is no way to obtain different results when things continue to be done in the usual manner. The dilemma is that presumed practical subjects such as ICT, woodwork, and metalwork remain being taught in theory. If learners are not exposed to actual practice in these subjects, it defeats the purpose for which the curriculum was reviewed (Chemonges, 2024).

This article discusses how the reviewed curriculum is delivered, using an old-fashioned approach to what Freire (1970) referred to as a banking system. When learners are not allowed to participate in curriculum construction and are continually subjected to theory presented by teachers, they are unable to fulfil their duty to be creative and innovative, which goes against the natural creativity given to them by their Creator.

### **Infrastructure Development Stage**

Stage 4 involves infrastructure development, which includes many things in the educational setting (Dyjur et al., 2019; Sedere, 2011). It includes professional infrastructure (re-tooling teachers), physical infrastructure such as building classes, laboratories,

libraries, and dormitories, as well as the general training setup (Emuria 2023; Kembabazi, 2023; Kidega & Khaing, 2023; Tumuheise et al., 2023). However, during the implementation of the CRP in Uganda, this stage did not receive the attention it deserved. A Professor of Education in a personal interview (August 31, 2022) noted that “for proper implementation of CBC, there was a need to change all the infrastructure, such as physical buildings, IT, and professional infrastructures.” Specifically, CBC, as a learner-centred curriculum, is expensive and requires many resources. However, with poorly equipped libraries and laboratories in the country that were not addressed before implementation as I observed, the focus shifted to pay raises for science teachers which compromised the newly reviewed curriculum. One student in an FGD had this to say: “The government is paying a science teacher in Palabek in Lamwo District 4 million and there is no laboratory and equipment, the hours of work have not been increased and have not upgraded their knowledge at school...” (Gulu University student, FGD, July 15, 2022). This quote indicates that certain infrastructure buildings, such as laboratories and workshops intended to support the CBC, were not prioritised before implementation. The overall condition of some government-aided schools in the country is not conducive to adopting the CBC (Mwesigye, 2015; URN, 2015).

Professional infrastructure is also a crucial element for the success of any curriculum, as stated by Akankwasa (1997) and Nakabugo et al. (2011). Teachers play a key role in implementing educational changes, and they should be retooled as stakeholders. They should also be given orientation on how to implement changes, use new approaches, and adopt new methods of teaching and assessment. However, in the case of Uganda's CBC, many teachers were not adequately retrained nationwide, as reported by the head teacher of Valley College: “The NCDC officials trained teachers in Kampala. We were then trained by other teachers who were confused and did not know what to do. The CBC would be effective if it was given time to re-tool teachers...” (Head Teacher Valley College, Personal communication, July 4, 2022). From this quote, failure to retool teachers was a concern, and it was further unanimously amplified by Gulu University students with a concern about leaving teachers out of the curriculum review, despite the critical role they play in implementing the curriculum.

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

government should be aware of this and find a way to train all teachers. The government complains about teachers not performing, but the problem lies in not providing adequate training (Gulu University Students, FGD, July 15, 2022).

The same point was further substantiated by a student in the same FGD as follows:

The people who reviewed the curriculum mainly trained teachers in schools in urban centres and left out schools in rural areas. Yet, the curriculum is for the whole country; they do not know the challenges that the schools in rural areas face (Gulu University student, FGD, July 15, 2022).

From these three consecutive quotations, it is clear that the retooling of teachers was not done adequately, leading to the continued use of the old curriculum pedagogy. This information is consistent with a report from MoES officials who confirmed that only 35% of teachers had been retooled by the end of 2023 (NTV Uganda, 2024). The gaps observed at this stage raise concerns about the quality of instruction in the CRP and the type of learners it produces. On the contrary, the NCDC official claimed that the failure of implementation was due to the teachers and school directors, as stated:

Teachers are scared because CBC is involved, especially in

private schools, although it cuts across public schools. Some private institutions are afraid of losing their jobs so, up to now, they are still teaching using the old curriculum. The directors of the schools have to follow what they are used to (NCDC official, personal interview, June 24, 2022).

This evidence shows that the CBC is not running smoothly in lower secondary schools in Uganda because they are not adequately equipped to implement it. Their role in implementing the programme is underestimated, resulting in a failure to help students benefit from the CBC and become fruitful.

In a subsequent interview, an official from the NCDC revealed that the limited resources available made it impossible to retool all teachers nationwide. The official stated, “We rely on the government for resources to do our work. We work when the budget allows, and when it does not, we wait” (NCDC official, personal interview, June 24, 2022). Despite the Minister for Higher Education urging teachers to embrace the new CBC, many schools still preferred to stick to the old curriculum. This reluctance was mainly due to a lack of understanding of how the new curriculum worked in practice. As a result, many teachers were unprepared for the change, leading to confusion among learners, and hence, hindering their ability to reach their full potential. Some teachers also

struggled to adapt to their new role as facilitators in the CBC, raising ethical concerns about how effective it is to educate students.

From observations, it was evident that most of the schools in Uganda that the researcher visited were overcrowded. In Mbale, the Director of Studies (DoS) acknowledged the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), but emphasised that it could not be effectively implemented due to the large number of students in the school as a result of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in the system. He mentioned that classes for senior one and two, where the CBC was introduced, had 200 students in each stream (DoS Mbale, personal interview, August 2022). Furthermore, the numbers were deemed too high to properly implement the CBC in comparison to the Ministry of Education and Sports' policy of a 1:40 teacher-student ratio (*The Independent*, 2023). Concerns about large class sizes have also been raised by columnists in newspapers and other scholars (Editor, 2022; Mwesigye, 2015; *The Monitor*, 2021). However, the CBC, being a learner-centred curriculum, is more effective with smaller class sizes and well-trained facilitators who can help students explore their interests and abilities. During an interview, a National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) official suggested that teachers address the issue of overcrowded

classes by creating scenarios (NCDC official, personal interview, June 24, 2022). Consequently, many schools have chosen to continue with the old curriculum because it is easier to understand than the CBC (Masaba, 2022; *NTV Uganda*, 2023). These challenges hinder students from reaching their full potential and becoming successful.

### Pre-testing Stage

A pilot study was conducted in Stage 5. A few selected schools within the country were chosen to verify whether the reviewed curriculum meets the set objectives of the review (Dyjur et al., 2019; Sedere, 2011). The significance of this stage is to assess the feasibility of the new changes within the curriculum, consider the context, and evaluate the practicality within the educational landscape to minimise technical and ethical errors. At this stage, a small number of schools are selected, and the pilot study is conducted over four years, focusing on lower secondary education. This was illustrated by the double-shift system<sup>4</sup> in the Universal Secondary Education (USE) pilot study. When ethical issues were identified, the system was discontinued and replaced with streaming, resulting in schools abandoning the double-shift system of education (New Vision, 2020, December 3). However, this stage also had its issues, as important elements such as the timetable in the

<sup>4</sup> Learners were expected to learn in shifts where the 1st batch would start in the morning session and another one in the afternoon session.

new curriculum were not adjusted to accommodate the integration of activities for the learners. Instead, the timetable remained unchanged, as noted by a teacher in Bushenyi during an interview: “The CBC is fine, but the current structure does not align with the 30-40 minute lesson timetables in schools. It is unrealistic to expect students to participate in various activities with large class sizes in Ugandan classrooms” (personal interview, July 5, 2022). Additionally, the school closing time under the CBC was modified to 2:30 PM. However, a typical school day extends beyond 4:00 PM, including weekends, which deprives learners of time for personal growth, as they creatively and innovatively solve challenges and fully realise their potential.

Instead of conducting a pilot study, the CBC was implemented and gaps were discovered during the implementational stage. For instance, lack of examination for the course that had been under the CBC for three years, as reported in the article “Government halts the O-level vocational exams” in the *Monitor* (Mukhaye & Sabano, 2023) was unavoidable. It was found out that the requirements for CBC had not been properly checked, leading to insufficient resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of re-tooled teachers. This resulted in glitches and roadblocks to the implementation of CBC which finally limit a learner from realising their full potential.

## Evaluation Stage

The purpose of evaluation at this stage is revision and adoption (Dyjur et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004; Sedere, 2011). It is necessary to determine the reasons for the review and visualise the entire review process (Dyjur et al., 2019; Sedere, 2011). At this stage, an evaluation is conducted to determine whether the reviewed curriculum is effective (UNESCO, 2015, 2017). Once the reviewers are satisfied with the fieldwork reports from the pilot study (also refer to stage 5), they implement the reviewed curriculum in all schools. However, as noted earlier, this stage was skipped.

## Implementation Stage

At this stage, everything is completed in the CRP, and the curriculum is ready for implementation. This is the final stage, with the report guiding curriculum users on what to do (Dyjur et al., 2019; Sedere, 2011). However, the NCDC official claimed that the implementation of CBC faced challenges as listed below: “... Resistance from Ugandans including some parliamentarians, Makerere University lecturers, lack enough funds...” (NCDC official, personal interview, June 24, 2022). The unpreparedness of the CRP resulted in implementation challenges that made the State Minister in charge of Primary Education inform the Parliament of Uganda on the progress of reviewing the curriculum at the Advanced Level (AL) in the system. He noted, “The current S.4 learners will not transition

to the CBC when they get to upper secondary next year, as it will not be ready by then. This implies that they will continue their studies under the existing A' level curriculum" (URN, 2024). The same concern is also highlighted by Altinyelken (2010) also highlighted this concern, noting that the implementation of the thematic curriculum was rushed, leading to various challenges in implementation, including inadequate training, materials, and overall ethical management issues. Similar challenges were faced by CBC (Kembabazi, 2023; Kidega & Khaing, 2023; Muwanguzi et al., 2023). The Minister's response to the CBC's continuity and transition from Senior Four to Senior Five raises questions about its future. It depicts curriculum rejections, non-ownership, inadequate training tools, and assessments that point to disjointed processes. This creates uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety among parents, and mostly learners, preventing them from realising their dreams. As a result, many learners are not benefiting from the changes in the curriculum and consistently fail to be fruitful, hence failing to realise their potential while in school, leading them to remain subdued and unable to fulfil their dreams.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The CRP did not follow the basic principles stated in the CRP. It was merely a directive from the MoES. The resultant (new) curriculum, CBC, may not be adequately

integrated into the larger Ugandan formal education system, especially in rural areas. It was hastily implemented, similar to the thematic curriculum. The CRP excluded many stakeholders, and technical steps were not followed. The concept of ownership was disregarded, leading to the perception that it is distant from stakeholders. Indeed, some stakeholders labelled it as a "copy and paste" approach due to the CRP challenges.

The curriculum in Uganda appears to be more of a political tool than a social service change soliciting for social duty; it is prescribed and not descriptive. The curriculum review intended to achieve holistic education followed a frail process. While it initially raised hopes for change, it contains numerous loopholes that hinder its successful implementation, hence limiting learners from realising their full potential.

An ethical recommendation is that before any curriculum review, the necessary technical steps should be followed, namely needs assessment, preparation, development of tools and materials, infrastructure preparation and development, pre-testing, evaluation, and implementation. This process should begin with the recognition of all stakeholders, as Kant advises in the *Ethics of Duty*. Parents are encouraged to interest themselves in the educational matters of their children, teachers, and learners participating in the review, while the MoES and NCDC take responsibility

for prior preparations by availing enough resources to make CRP work for proper implementation. When this is done, learners realise their God-given gifts, abilities, and talents, and are modelled by retooled teachers who facilitate them in the learning process. Learners become fruitful, creatively

innovative, become original creators rather than mere consumers, and fill and subdue the earth, thus fulfilling their DM. Therefore, the importance of considering the ethical outcomes of these changes on learners and the entire education system should be emphasised.

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