The Competency-Based Curriculum in Africa: Decolonizing Education or a Neocolonial Project? A Critical Analysis

Dr. Arinaitwe Julius[1], Musiimenta Nancy[2]

1,2 Metropolitan International University

Abstract: This mixed-methods study critically analyzed competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms in five African countries—Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Africa, and Nigeria—to determine whether these reforms constituted genuine educational decolonization or represented neocolonial projects perpetuating external influence and Western epistemological dominance. Grounded in postcolonial and decolonial theoretical frameworks, the research employed a concurrent design integrating critical discourse analysis, comparative case studies, and quantitative survey research. Data were collected between March 2023 and October 2024 from 1,847 respondents including teachers, curriculum developers, educational administrators, and policy makers, with sample sizes calculated to achieve 80% statistical power for detecting medium effect sizes. Quantitative analyses included one-way ANOVA, chi-square tests, multiple linear regression, and structural equation modeling, while qualitative components involved critical discourse analysis of 342 policy documents and 89 semi-structured interviews with key informants. Results revealed systematic patterns of external domination in CBC design and adoption, with teachers reporting high levels of donor influence (M=4.23, SD=0.78) and international consultant dominance (M=4.11, SD=0.83), while local participation remained minimal (M=2.34, SD=0.89) and community voices were largely excluded (M=1.98, SD=0.82), with statistically significant differences across stakeholder groups (F=98.76-156.23, p<0.001, η²=0.139-0.203). Large majorities across all countries (61.4%-85.7%) agreed that Western epistemologies dominated CBC content and that frameworks mirrored international templates (68.2%-85.7%), while only minorities reported meaningful indigenous knowledge integration (12.8%-42.1%) or use of African languages (28.9%-56.3%), with significant between-country variations (χ²=59.87-102.45, p<0.001, Cramér's V=0.180-0.235). The study concluded that CBC reforms served external agendas of workforce standardization and global economic integration rather than locally-defined development priorities rooted in African philosophical traditions and cultural values. Recommendations included establishing sovereign curriculum development mechanisms with protected financing, implementing comprehensive epistemological decolonization through mother-tongue instruction and indigenous knowledge integration, and restructuring development partnerships to center African agency while rejecting conditional financing that constrains educational sovereignty. The research contributes to critical scholarship on educational decolonization, neocolonialism in international development, and the politics of curriculum reform in postcolonial contexts, while providing empirical evidence for policy debates about educational autonomy, cultural preservation, and authentic African-led development.

Keywords: competency-based curriculum, educational decolonization, neocolonialism

Introduction

The adoption of competency-based curriculum (CBC) across African nations represents one of the most significant educational reforms on the continent in recent decades. From Rwanda's shift to CBC in 2015 to Kenya's rollout beginning in 2017, and similar movements in Tanzania, Uganda, and South Africa, African governments have embraced this pedagogical model with remarkable enthusiasm. Proponents argue that CBC represents a progressive departure from colonial-era education systems that emphasized rote memorization and theoretical knowledge disconnected from lived realities (Julius, 2023; I. Kazaara et al., 2023). By focusing on skills, attitudes, and practical competencies, CBC is presented as a pathway to producing graduates equipped for the 21st-century economy and capable of driving national development.

However, beneath this optimistic narrative lies a fundamental tension that warrants critical examination. While CBC is often framed as an indigenous response to Africa's educational challenges, its theoretical foundations, implementation frameworks, and assessment mechanisms bear striking resemblance to models developed and promoted by Western institutions such as the World Bank, UNESCO, and various bilateral donors (Isaac Kazaara & Gracious Kazaara, 2024a, 2024b). This raises profound questions about agency, autonomy, and the nature of educational transformation in postcolonial Africa. Is the CBC movement genuinely decolonizing African education by centering local needs, values, and epistemologies? Or does it represent a more sophisticated form of neocolonial influence, where global North agendas are repackaged as African solutions? (Gracious Kazaara & Kazaara, 2025b, 2025a). This study critically analyzes the CBC phenomenon in Africa through the dual lenses of decolonization theory and neocolonial critique. It examines the origins, implementation processes, and outcomes of CBC reforms to determine whether they constitute authentic educational sovereignty or represent external imposition disguised as reform (Ariyo et al., 2024). By interrogating the power dynamics, knowledge systems, and development paradigms embedded within CBC frameworks, this research contributes to broader conversations about educational justice, cultural autonomy, and sustainable development in African contexts.

Background of the Study

The discourse surrounding competency-based education emerged prominently in Western educational circles during the 1960s and 1970s, gaining renewed momentum in the 1990s and 2000s as globalization intensified demands for workforce readiness and standardized learning outcomes (Victoria et al., 2023). International organizations, particularly the World Bank and OECD,

championed CBC as a solution to perceived gaps between educational outputs and labor market needs, especially in developing nations (Ssentanda & Wenske, 2023; Vergel et al., 2018). The framework emphasizes observable, measurable competencies—combining knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values—that learners should demonstrate upon completion of their education (Jane & Isaac Kazaara, 2023; A. I. Kazaara, 2023).

In Africa, the push for CBC reforms must be understood within the broader context of structural adjustment programs, education sector support projects, and the global education agenda embodied in initiatives such as Education for All and the Sustainable Development Goals. Many African nations adopted CBC as part of comprehensive education reforms often linked to external funding and technical assistance from development partners. The reforms were justified by citing high youth unemployment rates, skills mismatches, and the need to foster innovation and entrepreneurship (Jacinta & Kazaara, 2023; Sarah & Gracious Kazaara, 2024). However, African education systems continue to grapple with the legacy of colonialism, which imposed European curricula, languages, and pedagogies that marginalized indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices. Post-independence efforts at educational decolonization have met with mixed success, as economic dependencies and global power asymmetries have constrained genuine curriculum sovereignty (A. I. Kazaara & Desire, 2025). The introduction of CBC into this complex landscape raises critical questions about whether these reforms address or perpetuate colonial patterns in education.

Decolonization theory emphasizes the reclamation of indigenous epistemologies, the centering of local contexts, and the dismantling of Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies. Conversely, neocolonial critique highlights how contemporary global governance mechanisms, conditionalities attached to aid, and the hegemony of Western development models constrain the autonomy of postcolonial states. Understanding CBC through these theoretical frameworks requires examining not only curriculum content but also the processes by which reforms are conceived, financed, designed, and implemented (Julius & Mategeko, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025).

Problem Statement

Despite widespread adoption of competency-based curriculum across Africa, there exists insufficient critical examination of whether these reforms genuinely serve decolonization objectives or inadvertently advance neocolonial agendas in education. African governments and international partners present CBC as learner-centered, contextually relevant, and aligned with national development visions. Yet several concerning patterns emerge: the heavy reliance on external consultants and foreign expertise in curriculum design; the adoption of competency frameworks that mirror those developed for Western contexts; the continued marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems and African languages in implementation; and the imposition of standardized assessment regimes that reflect global rather than local priorities.

Furthermore, the financial architecture supporting CBC reforms often involves conditionalities and policy prescriptions from external donors, raising questions about whose interests these curricula ultimately serve. Teachers report inadequate preparation for CBC implementation, communities express confusion about the new system's purpose and methods, and early outcomes suggest mixed results in terms of learning achievement and graduate employability. Meanwhile, the discourse surrounding CBC frequently employs the language of modernization and global competitiveness, echoing colonial-era justifications for educational intervention that positioned African systems as deficient and in need of external remediation (Julius & Geofrey, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025).

The central problem, therefore, is the ambiguity surrounding the true nature and impact of CBC in Africa. Without rigorous critical analysis of the power relations, epistemological assumptions, and structural dependencies embedded within these reforms, African nations risk investing substantial resources in educational changes that may reinforce rather than challenge neocolonial patterns (Pepin et al., 2017). This study addresses this gap by systematically interrogating the CBC phenomenon to determine whether it represents authentic educational decolonization or constitutes a contemporary manifestation of neocolonial influence in African education systems. (Cook, 2022; Geera & Onen, 2023)

Main Objective

To critically analyze the competency-based curriculum reforms in Africa to determine whether they constitute genuine decolonization of education or represent a neocolonial project that perpetuates external influence and Western epistemological dominance in African educational systems.

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the origins, development processes, and stakeholder power dynamics involved in the design and adoption of competency-based curriculum frameworks in selected African countries, with particular attention to the role of international organizations, donor agencies, and local actors.
2. To assess the extent to which competency-based curriculum reforms incorporate, validate, and center indigenous African knowledge systems, languages, cultural values, and epistemologies versus privileging Western-derived competency frameworks and knowledge hierarchies.
3. To evaluate the implementation outcomes and impacts of competency-based curriculum in African contexts, including effects on learning achievement, teacher capacity, educational equity, and alignment with locally-defined development priorities versus externally-imposed benchmarks.

Research Questions

1. What are the origins and power dynamics characterizing the design and adoption of competency-based curriculum reforms in Africa, and to what extent do international organizations, donor agencies, and external consultants influence these processes compared to local educational stakeholders and communities?
2. How do competency-based curriculum frameworks in African countries engage with indigenous knowledge systems, African languages, and local cultural values, and do these curricula challenge or reproduce Western epistemological dominance in education?
3. What are the implementation outcomes and impacts of competency-based curriculum reforms in African educational contexts, and do these outcomes reflect locally-defined priorities for learning, development, and educational justice or primarily serve externally-defined standards of workforce readiness and global competitiveness?

Methods
This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods research design that integrated critical discourse analysis, comparative case study methodology, and quantitative survey research to comprehensively examine the nature of competency-based curriculum reforms across five purposively selected African countries: Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Africa, and Nigeria. The research was grounded in postcolonial and decolonial theoretical frameworks, which provided the analytical lens for interpreting power relations and epistemological assumptions embedded within CBC reforms. Data collection occurred between March 2023 and October 2024 and involved multiple sources and methods to ensure triangulation and robust findings. For the quantitative component, the study surveyed 1,847 respondents including teachers (n=1,200), curriculum developers (n=247), educational administrators (n=200), and policy makers (n=200) across the five countries, with sample sizes determined using G*Power 3.1 software to achieve 80% statistical power at α=0.05 for detecting medium effect sizes (Cohen's d=0.5) in comparative analyses. Stratified random sampling was employed within each country to ensure proportional representation across urban/rural settings, educational levels, and socioeconomic contexts. The survey instrument, validated through expert review and pilot testing (Cronbach's α=0.87), assessed perceptions regarding curriculum ownership, incorporation of indigenous knowledge, stakeholder participation, implementation challenges, and alignment with local versus external priorities using 5-point Likert scales. For the qualitative component, critical discourse analysis was conducted on 342 policy documents, curriculum frameworks, donor agreements, technical assistance reports, and official communications from ministries of education and international organizations to identify patterns of power, agency, and epistemological positioning. Additionally, 89 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants including senior curriculum developers, ministry officials, donor representatives, teachers' union leaders, indigenous knowledge custodians, and education scholars to capture diverse perspectives on CBC origins, processes, and impacts. Three focus group discussions were held in each country (n=15 total, 8-12 participants each) with teachers and community members to explore grassroots experiences and interpretations of CBC implementation. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 28.0 and R version 4.3.1, employing descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies), chi-square tests for categorical associations, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA for comparing perceptions across stakeholder groups and countries, multiple linear regression to identify predictors of perceived curriculum ownership and decolonization outcomes, and structural equation modeling (SEM) using the lavaan package to test pathways between external influence, local participation, indigenous knowledge integration, and perceived legitimacy of CBC reforms. Effect sizes were reported using Cohen's d for t-tests, eta-squared (η^2) for ANOVA, and standardized coefficients for regression and SEM analyses to provide substantive interpretation beyond statistical significance (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through convergent analysis, where themes from qualitative data were used to interpret and contextualize statistical patterns, while quantitative results provided scope and generalizability to qualitative insights. Ethical approval was obtained from the respective institutional review boards in all five countries, and informed consent was secured from all participants with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, while power-sensitive research practices were employed throughout to avoid reproducing extractive research relationships and to center African voices and agency in knowledge production.

Results.
Table 1: Stakeholder Perceptions of External Influence and Local Ownership in CBC Design and Adoption

Variable	Teachers M(SD)	Curriculum Developers M(SD)	Administrators M(SD)	Policy Makers M(SD)	F	p	η^2
External donors heavily influenced CBC design	4.23(0.78)	3.87(0.92)	3.45(1.03)	2.98(1.12)	147.32	<0.001	0.193
International consultants dominated curriculum development	4.11(0.83)	3.72(0.95)	3.28(1.08)	2.76(1.15)	139.45	<0.001	0.185

Local educators participated meaningfully in CBC design	2.34(0.89)	2.67(0.96)	3.12(1.02)	3.45(1.09)	98.76	<0.001	0.139
Community voices were incorporated in reform process	1.98(0.82)	2.23(0.88)	2.78(0.99)	3.01(1.06)	112.54	<0.001	0.154
National ownership of CBC reforms is genuine	2.12(0.91)	2.56(1.01)	3.34(1.05)	3.89(0.98)	156.23	<0.001	0.203
Donor conditionalities shaped CBC adoption	4.07(0.86)	3.68(0.98)	3.21(1.11)	2.54(1.18)	133.67	<0.001	0.179

Note: Scale 1-5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree); n=1,847

The one-way ANOVA results revealed statistically significant differences across all stakeholder groups on perceptions of external influence and local ownership in CBC design and adoption, with all F-values exceeding critical thresholds at $p<0.001$. The effect sizes, measured by eta-squared (η^2), ranged from 0.139 to 0.203, indicating moderate to large practical significance according to Cohen's benchmarks. Teachers consistently reported the highest perception of external influence, with mean scores above 4.0 for items related to donor influence (M=4.23, SD=0.78) and international consultant dominance (M=4.11, SD=0.83), suggesting strong agreement that external actors shaped the curriculum reform process. A clear gradient emerged across stakeholder groups, with policy makers reporting significantly lower perceptions of external influence compared to teachers, curriculum developers, and administrators. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests (not shown in table) confirmed that all pairwise comparisons between stakeholder groups were statistically significant ($p<0.01$), with the largest mean differences observed between teachers and policy makers across all variables. Conversely, items measuring local ownership and participation showed inverse patterns, with teachers reporting the lowest agreement (M=2.34 for local educator participation; M=1.98 for community voice incorporation), while policy makers reported the highest agreement (M=3.45 and M=3.01 respectively). The substantial effect sizes ($\eta^2>0.13$ for all variables) indicated that stakeholder role accounted for 13.9% to 20.3% of variance in perceptions, representing meaningful differences that transcended mere statistical significance.

These findings illuminated a fundamental disconnect in how different actors within the educational system perceived the origins and ownership of CBC reforms, with implications for understanding power dynamics and agency in curriculum change. The systematic pattern whereby those closest to classroom implementation (teachers) perceived significantly greater external influence than those involved in policy formulation (policy makers) suggested either differential access to information about reform processes or divergent interpretations shaped by positional interests and experiences. Teachers' strong agreement that external donors and international consultants dominated curriculum development (means exceeding 4.0) aligned with critical observations from interviews and document analysis, which revealed that technical assistance contracts, policy dialogue frameworks, and curriculum design workshops were frequently led by expatriate consultants from Western institutions. The low mean scores for community voice incorporation (M=1.98 among teachers) were particularly troubling from a decolonization perspective, as authentic educational sovereignty would necessitate meaningful participation by local communities, indigenous knowledge holders, and grassroots educators in curriculum decision-making. The statistically significant differences between stakeholder groups raised questions about whether policy makers genuinely experienced greater local ownership or whether their responses reflected institutional loyalty, social desirability bias, or investment in legitimating reforms they had championed. The large effect sizes suggested these were not trivial perceptual differences but rather substantive divergences in understanding the nature of CBC reforms. From a neocolonial critique standpoint, these results supported the interpretation that CBC adoption in Africa involved significant external influence that may have constrained genuine national autonomy, while the hierarchical pattern of perceptions indicated that those with greater proximity to international development partnerships (policy makers and administrators) held more favorable views of reform legitimacy than frontline implementers who experienced the disconnect between external prescriptions and local realities.

Table 2: Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Epistemological Orientations in CBC Frameworks

Indicator	Kenya %	Rwanda %	Tanzania %	South Africa %	Nigeria %	χ^2	p	Cramér's V
CBC explicitly incorporates indigenous knowledge	23.4	18.7	31.2	42.1	27.8	87.32	<0.001	0.217
Local languages used as medium of instruction in CBC	34.2	28.9	29.7	56.3	41.2	102.45	<0.001	0.235
African cultural values central to competency definitions	19.8	16.2	26.4	38.7	24.3	79.56	<0.001	0.207

Western epistemologies dominate curriculum content	78.3	82.1	73.6	61.4	75.9	68.23	<0.001	0.192
Competency frameworks mirror international templates	81.2	85.7	79.4	68.2	77.6	59.87	<0.001	0.180
Assessment methods validate indigenous ways of knowing	15.3	12.8	21.7	33.9	19.4	91.67	<0.001	0.223

Note: Percentage of respondents agreeing with statement; n=1,847

Chi-square tests of independence revealed statistically significant associations between country context and all indicators of indigenous knowledge integration and epistemological orientation (all p<0.001). The effect sizes, measured by Cramér's V, ranged from 0.180 to 0.235, indicating small to medium associations according to established conventions, which suggested meaningful variation across the five African countries studied. The percentage of respondents agreeing that CBC explicitly incorporated indigenous knowledge varied considerably across countries, from a low of 18.7% in Rwanda to a high of 42.1% in South Africa, with the chi-square statistic (χ^2=87.32, p<0.001) confirming these differences were unlikely due to chance. South Africa consistently showed the highest percentages across indicators of indigenous knowledge integration, including use of local languages (56.3%), centrality of African cultural values (38.7%), and assessment methods validating indigenous ways of knowing (33.9%), though even these figures represented minority positions among respondents. The most striking pattern emerged in responses indicating Western epistemological dominance and the mirroring of international templates, where large majorities across all five countries agreed (ranging from 61.4% to 85.7% for Western epistemological dominance, and 68.2% to 85.7% for mirroring international templates). Rwanda showed the highest agreement that competency frameworks mirrored international templates (85.7%) and that Western epistemologies dominated curriculum content (82.1%), while South Africa showed the lowest percentages for these items (68.2% and 61.4% respectively), creating an inverse relationship between Western orientation and indigenous knowledge integration. The consistency of high percentages across countries for Western dominance indicators, despite statistically significant chi-square values, suggested that while some between-country variation existed, the overarching pattern of Western epistemological hegemony transcended national contexts.

These findings presented compelling evidence that CBC reforms across the five African countries failed to substantively decolonize curriculum content and epistemological foundations, instead reproducing Western knowledge hierarchies while offering limited space for indigenous African ways of knowing. The fact that fewer than one-third of respondents in most countries agreed that CBC explicitly incorporated indigenous knowledge, used local languages meaningfully, or validated indigenous ways of knowing through assessment represented a fundamental contradiction to decolonization objectives. If educational decolonization requires centering African epistemologies, languages, and cultural frameworks, then CBC reforms as implemented fell dramatically short of this goal. The inverse relationship between Western epistemological dominance (acknowledged by 61-85% of respondents) and indigenous knowledge integration (acknowledged by only 12-42% of respondents) revealed a zero-sum dynamic wherein the adoption of internationally-derived competency frameworks effectively crowded out space for African knowledge systems. South Africa's relatively stronger performance on indigenous knowledge indicators could be attributed to its explicit constitutional commitments to multilingualism and indigenous knowledge systems, its more developed higher education research capacity in African epistemologies, and its particular historical reckoning with colonialism and apartheid that created political space for decolonization discourse. Conversely, Rwanda's high scores for Western orientation and international template mirroring reflected its explicit national strategy of positioning itself as a modernizing, globally-integrated economy, often at the expense of indigenous cultural preservation.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Perceived Curriculum Ownership

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
(Constant)	0.87	0.23	-	3.78	<0.001	[0.42, 1.32]
Local stakeholder participation in design	0.42	0.04	0.38	10.50	<0.001	[0.34, 0.50]
Indigenous knowledge integration	0.31	0.05	0.24	6.20	<0.001	[0.21, 0.41]
Donor financial contribution (%)	-0.02	0.003	-0.29	-6.67	<0.001	[-0.03, -0.01]
International consultant involvement	-0.36	0.06	-0.27	-6.00	<0.001	[-0.48, -0.24]
Teacher training adequacy	0.18	0.04	0.16	4.50	<0.001	[0.10, 0.26]
Alignment with national development priorities	0.27	0.05	0.21	5.40	<0.001	[0.17, 0.37]

Note: R^2=0.524, Adjusted R^2=0.518, $F_{(6, 1840)}$=338.45, p<0.001; Dependent Variable: Perceived National Ownership of CBC (1-5 scale)

The multiple linear regression model demonstrated strong predictive validity for perceived national ownership of CBC reforms, with the full model explaining 52.4% of variance in the dependent variable (R^2=0.524, Adjusted R^2=0.518), which represented a large effect size according to Cohen's conventions. The overall model F-statistic ($F_{(6, 1840)}$=338.45, p<0.001) confirmed that the set of

predictors collectively provided significantly better prediction than would be expected by chance alone. All six predictor variables demonstrated statistically significant relationships with perceived curriculum ownership at p<0.001, indicating robust associations that were highly unlikely to result from sampling error. Local stakeholder participation in design emerged as the strongest positive predictor (β=0.38, t=10.50, p<0.001), suggesting that for each one-unit increase in participation scores, perceived ownership increased by 0.42 points on the 5-point scale, holding other variables constant. Indigenous knowledge integration also showed a substantial positive relationship (β=0.24, B=0.31, p<0.001), indicating that curriculum frameworks incorporating African epistemologies were associated with enhanced perceptions of national ownership. Conversely, both donor financial contribution percentage (β=-0.29, B=-0.02, p<0.001) and international consultant involvement (β=-0.27, B=-0.36, p<0.001) demonstrated significant negative relationships with perceived ownership, meaning that higher levels of external involvement were associated with diminished perceptions of genuine national control over reforms. The standardized beta coefficients allowed direct comparison of relative importance, revealing that local stakeholder participation had the largest magnitude effect, followed by donor financial contribution and international consultant involvement (both negative), indigenous knowledge integration, alignment with national priorities, and teacher training adequacy.

The regression results provided empirical substantiation for theoretical arguments linking participatory processes and epistemological decolonization to authentic curriculum ownership in postcolonial contexts. The finding that local stakeholder participation was the strongest predictor of perceived ownership (accounting for the largest standardized effect) underscored the fundamental importance of inclusive, democratic curriculum development processes for legitimacy and buy-in. This aligned with decolonization scholarship emphasizing that the process of knowledge production matters as much as the content produced, and that educational sovereignty requires African actors to be decision-makers rather than mere implementers of externally-designed reforms. The significant positive relationship between indigenous knowledge integration and perceived ownership suggested that epistemological decolonization—centering African ways of knowing—contributed meaningfully to stakeholders viewing CBC as genuinely their own rather than as an imposition. This finding challenged technocratic approaches to curriculum reform that treat knowledge as culturally neutral and suggested that epistemological choices carry political significance in terms of ownership and legitimacy.

Table 4: Structural Equation Model Results - Pathways to CBC Implementation Outcomes

Pathway	Standardized Coefficient (β)	SE	z	p	95% CI
Direct Effects					
External Influence → Indigenous Knowledge Integration	-0.47	0.04	-11.75	<0.001	[-0.55, -0.39]
External Influence → Local Participation	-0.52	0.04	-13.00	<0.001	[-0.60, -0.44]
Local Participation → Indigenous Knowledge Integration	0.41	0.04	10.25	<0.001	[0.33, 0.49]
Indigenous Knowledge Integration → Learning Outcomes	0.28	0.05	5.60	<0.001	[0.18, 0.38]
Local Participation → Implementation Quality	0.39	0.04	9.75	<0.001	[0.31, 0.47]
Implementation Quality → Learning Outcomes	0.35	0.05	7.00	<0.001	[0.25, 0.45]
External Influence → Alignment with Global Standards	0.63	0.03	21.00	<0.001	[0.57, 0.69]
Alignment with Global Standards → Learning Outcomes	0.11	0.05	2.20	0.028	[0.01, 0.21]
Indirect Effects					
External Influence → Learning Outcomes (via Local Participation & Implementation)	-0.07	0.02	-3.50	<0.001	[-0.11, -0.03]
External Influence → Learning Outcomes (via Indigenous Knowledge)	-0.13	0.03	-4.33	<0.001	[-0.19, -0.07]
Total Effects					
External Influence → Learning Outcomes	-0.13	0.04	-3.25	0.001	[-0.21, -0.05]

Note: Model Fit Indices - χ^2(124)=287.34, p<0.001; CFI=0.961; TLI=0.954; RMSEA=0.027 (90% CI: 0.023-0.031); SRMR=0.038

The structural equation model demonstrated excellent fit to the observed data according to multiple fit indices, with the Comparative Fit Index (CFI=0.961) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI=0.954) both exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.95 for good fit, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA=0.027) falling well below the 0.05 cutoff for close fit, and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR=0.038) indicating minimal discrepancy between observed and model-implied covariances. Although the chi-square statistic was statistically significant (χ^2(124)=287.34, p<0.001), this was expected given the large sample size (n=1,847) and the chi-square test's sensitivity to sample size, making the other fit indices more relevant for model evaluation. The path coefficients revealed several theoretically important relationships. External influence demonstrated strong negative direct effects on both local participation (β=-0.52, z=-13.00, p<0.001) and indigenous knowledge integration (β=-0.47, z=-11.75, p<0.001), indicating that higher levels of external donor and consultant involvement were associated with reduced local stakeholder participation and diminished incorporation of African epistemologies. Local participation showed significant positive relationships with both indigenous knowledge integration (β=0.41, z=10.25, p<0.001) and implementation quality (β=0.39, z=9.75, p<0.001), suggesting that inclusive curriculum development processes facilitated both epistemological decolonization and effective implementation. Both indigenous knowledge integration (β=0.28, z=5.60, p<0.001) and implementation quality (β=0.35, z=7.00, p<0.001) demonstrated significant positive effects on learning outcomes. External influence showed a strong positive relationship with alignment to global standards (β=0.63, z=21.00, p<0.001), though global standards alignment showed only a weak positive relationship with learning outcomes (β=0.11, z=2.20, p=0.028). The indirect effects analysis revealed that external influence negatively affected learning outcomes through two mediating pathways: via reduced local participation and implementation quality (β=-0.07, p<0.001) and via diminished indigenous knowledge integration (β=-0.13, p<0.001). The total effect of external influence on learning outcomes was negative (β=-0.13, z=-3.25, p=0.001), indicating that when all pathways were considered together, external involvement was associated with worse rather than better learning outcomes.

The structural equation modeling results provided sophisticated empirical evidence for the neocolonial interpretation of CBC reforms by revealing the complex mechanisms through which external influence undermined both decolonization objectives and educational effectiveness. The strong negative paths from external influence to local participation (β=-0.52) and indigenous knowledge integration (β=-0.47) demonstrated that external involvement in curriculum reform—whether through donor financing, international consultants, or technical assistance programs—systematically constrained African agency and epistemological sovereignty. These findings suggested that the very architecture of development-financed education reform created structural obstacles to genuine decolonization, as external actors' involvement came with implicit or explicit preferences for particular curriculum models, assessment frameworks, and pedagogical approaches that reflected Western educational paradigms. The positive relationship between local participation and indigenous knowledge integration (β=0.41) indicated that when African educators, communities, and knowledge holders were genuinely empowered in curriculum design, they tended to create more culturally-grounded frameworks— but external influence patterns prevented this empowerment from occurring. The fact that both indigenous knowledge integration and implementation quality positively predicted learning outcomes (β=0.28 and β=0.35 respectively) challenged deficit narratives suggesting African education needed Westernization to improve quality, instead supporting the proposition that culturally-relevant, well-implemented curricula produced better learning results.

Perhaps most damning for the instrumental case for external involvement was the finding that the total effect of external influence on learning outcomes was negative (β=-0.13), meaning that despite external actors' stated objectives of improving educational quality, their involvement was associated with worse learning outcomes when accounting for the mediating mechanisms through which influence operated. This negative total effect resulted from external influence simultaneously reducing local participation and indigenous knowledge integration (both of which positively affected outcomes) while increasing alignment with global standards that showed minimal impact on actual learning (β=0.11). The mediation analysis revealed that external influence harmed learning outcomes primarily through epistemological pathways (via reduced indigenous knowledge integration, β=-0.13) rather than through implementation pathways (β=-0.07), suggesting that the imposition of Western epistemological frameworks was particularly detrimental to educational effectiveness in African contexts. These findings aligned with culturally-responsive pedagogy research demonstrating that students learn more effectively when curriculum connects to their cultural backgrounds, languages, and lived experiences. The model's excellent fit indices and the consistency of findings across multiple pathways provided robust support for reconceptualizing CBC reforms not as neutral technical improvements but as politically-charged interventions embedded within neocolonial power relations. The results suggested that pursuing educational decolonization and improving learning outcomes were not competing objectives but rather complementary goals—that authentic African ownership, epistemological decolonization, and educational effectiveness were mutually reinforcing. From a policy perspective, these findings challenged the dominant development paradigm in African education and called for fundamentally reimagining reform processes to center African agency, validate indigenous knowledge systems, and resist externally-imposed curriculum models, even when this meant refusing donor funding that came with constraints on national sovereignty.

Conclusion

This study critically analyzed competency-based curriculum reforms across five African countries to determine whether they constituted genuine educational decolonization or represented neocolonial projects perpetuating external influence and Western epistemological dominance. The findings conclusively demonstrated that CBC reforms, despite rhetoric emphasizing local relevance

and contextualization, functioned primarily as vehicles for neocolonial influence rather than authentic decolonization. Regarding the first objective examining origins, development processes, and stakeholder power dynamics, the results revealed systematic patterns of external domination, with teachers and curriculum developers reporting high levels of donor influence (M=4.23 and M=3.87 respectively) and international consultant dominance (M=4.11 and M=3.72), while local stakeholder participation remained minimal (M=2.34 among teachers) and community voices were largely excluded (M=1.98). The statistically significant differences between stakeholder groups ($p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.139-0.203$) indicated that those closest to implementation experienced reforms as externally imposed, while policy makers who interfaced directly with international partners held more favorable views of reform legitimacy, suggesting either differential information access or positional interests shaped perceptions. Addressing the second objective on indigenous knowledge incorporation and epistemological orientation, the study found that large majorities across all five countries (61.4%-85.7%) agreed that Western epistemologies dominated CBC content and that competency frameworks mirrored international templates (68.2%-85.7%), while only minorities reported meaningful integration of indigenous knowledge (12.8%-42.1%), use of African languages (28.9%-56.3%), or validation of indigenous ways of knowing through assessment (12.8%-33.9%). These patterns persisted across national contexts despite statistically significant between-country variations ($p<0.001$, Cramér's V=0.180-0.235), indicating systematic epistemological imperialism transcending individual country circumstances. Concerning the third objective evaluating implementation outcomes and alignment with local versus external priorities, the regression analysis revealed that external involvement (donor financing and international consultants) significantly predicted diminished perceptions of national ownership ($\beta=-0.29$ and $\beta=-0.27$, $p<0.001$), while local participation and indigenous knowledge integration emerged as the strongest positive predictors of perceived ownership ($\beta=0.38$ and $\beta=0.24$, $p<0.001$). Most critically, the structural equation modeling demonstrated that external influence negatively affected learning outcomes through multiple pathways (total effect $\beta=-0.13$, $p=0.001$), primarily by constraining indigenous knowledge integration (indirect effect $\beta=-0.13$, $p<0.001$) and reducing local participation (indirect effect $\beta=-0.07$, $p<0.001$), while alignment with global standards showed minimal impact on actual learning ($\beta=0.11$, $p=0.028$). These convergent findings across multiple analytical approaches—ANOVA, chi-square tests, multiple regression, and structural equation modeling—provided robust empirical evidence that CBC reforms in Africa constituted neocolonial projects that reproduced Western epistemological hegemony, constrained African agency in curriculum decision-making, marginalized indigenous knowledge systems, and ultimately undermined rather than enhanced educational effectiveness. The reforms served external agendas of workforce standardization and global economic integration rather than locally-defined development priorities rooted in African philosophical traditions, cultural values, and visions of human flourishing, thereby perpetuating colonial patterns of educational domination under the guise of modernization and technical improvement.

Recommendations

Establish Sovereign Curriculum Development Mechanisms with Protected Financing: African governments should create nationally-funded curriculum development centers with constitutional or legislative protections ensuring that external donors cannot condition educational financing on adoption of specific curriculum models, frameworks, or assessment regimes. These centers should be mandated to ground all curriculum work in African philosophical traditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and locally-articulated development visions, with participation structures guaranteeing that teachers, community knowledge holders, and civil society organizations have decision-making authority rather than merely consultative roles.

Implement Comprehensive Epistemological Decolonization Through Mother-Tongue Instruction and Indigenous Knowledge Integration: Educational systems must move beyond tokenistic inclusion of cultural content to fundamentally restructure curricula around African languages and epistemologies, beginning with universal mother-tongue instruction through at least primary education and extending African language use into secondary and tertiary levels across all subject areas.

Restructure Development Partnerships to Center African Agency and Reject Conditional Financing: African governments should collectively establish principles for engaging with external education donors that explicitly prohibit conditionalities linking financing to adoption of specific curriculum models, assert the right to reject technical assistance that does not align with nationally-defined priorities, and require that all external consultants work under the supervision and intellectual leadership of African curriculum specialists rather than directing reform processes. This includes developing alternative financing mechanisms such as regional education development funds capitalized through African Union member contributions, taxation of extractive industries, and South-South cooperation arrangements that reduce dependence on Western donors whose assistance historically reinforces neocolonial relationships.

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