

The Readiness of Ugandan Universities to Train Kiswahili Teachers for the Competence-Based Curriculum in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT *The integration of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject in Uganda's primary school Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) since 2020 created an urgent need for adequately trained Kiswahili teachers. This study examined the readiness of Ugandan public universities to train such teachers by assessing their curricular alignment, staffing capacity, instructional resources, and institutional preparedness. A mixed-methods design was employed, drawing on document analysis, structured questionnaires, and key informant interviews with 142 participants drawn from six universities, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Findings revealed that the majority of Ugandan universities had not adequately aligned their Kiswahili teacher-training programmes with CBC requirements. Only two universities Makerere and Kyambogo offered formal Kiswahili education programmes, and even these exhibited critical gaps in qualified staffing, contemporary instructional materials, and competence-based pedagogy. The study concluded that systemic reforms were urgently required at policy, institutional, and resource levels to ensure that Ugandan universities could produce competent Kiswahili teachers capable of implementing the CBC effectively in primary schools.*

Keywords: Kiswahili teacher training, Competence-Based Curriculum, Uganda, university readiness, language education, primary education reform

Background of the study

Uganda's educational landscape underwent a transformative shift following the government's adoption of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) for primary schools, a policy framework that replaced the content-heavy thematic curriculum with one focused on learner-centred skills, values, and competences. A landmark feature of this curriculum was the introduction of Kiswahili as a compulsory language of instruction and subject of study from Primary One, reflecting Uganda's obligations as a member state of the East African Community (EAC), which adopted Kiswahili as its official language in 2004 (East African Community, 2022). The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2020) outlined this transition as central to achieving regional integration and linguistic cohesion across East Africa, positioning Kiswahili not merely as a foreign language but as a unifying educational medium.

However, the practical realization of this policy mandate has been fraught with structural and institutional challenges. Uganda has historically not prioritized Kiswahili in its formal education system to the same extent as Kenya or Tanzania, leaving its higher education institutions underprepared for the task of producing qualified Kiswahili teachers at scale (Ssekamwa & Lugumba, 2021). Research conducted across the East African region consistently demonstrated that teacher supply was a critical bottleneck in the successful implementation of CBCs, particularly in languages that had previously occupied a peripheral status in national curricula (Oduol, 2021; Mkumbo, 2022). The urgency of addressing university readiness to train Kiswahili teachers was therefore not merely academic but constituted a matter of national educational development, cross-border cooperation, and the realisation of Uganda's Vision 2040 goals.

Problem Statement

Despite the policy mandate requiring Kiswahili instruction in Ugandan primary schools under the CBC, a critical question remained largely unaddressed in both policy discourse and educational research: were Ugandan universities institutionally prepared to train the Kiswahili teachers that this curriculum demanded? Preliminary observations and reports from the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC, 2021) indicated that the majority of primary schools lacked qualified Kiswahili teachers, with some schools relying on instructors who had only rudimentary knowledge of the language. Teacher training institutions had not systematically revised their curricula or invested in resources aligned with CBC competences, creating a glaring mismatch between the curriculum's expectations and the supply of adequately prepared teachers (MoES, 2022). Moreover, research on teacher education in Uganda had largely ignored Kiswahili as a subject discipline, focusing instead on English, science, and mathematics (Tumuhairwe, 2021). This study, therefore, was motivated by the need to systematically document and analyse the state of Kiswahili teacher preparation across Ugandan universities, identifying specific gaps and proposing evidence-based recommendations for policy and institutional reform.

Literature Review

The relationship between curriculum reform and teacher readiness has been extensively explored in global and African contexts. Vavrus and Bartlett (2013) established that CBCs, while pedagogically sound, frequently fail in implementation due to inadequately prepared teachers who lacked the methodological competences the new curricula demanded. In the East African context, Kenya's earlier adoption of a CBC in 2017 provided instructive lessons: Waweru and Ngugi (2022) found that even though Kenya had a much stronger base of trained Kiswahili teachers, the transition to CBC still exposed critical gaps in assessment literacy, learner-centred pedagogy, and teaching material development among serving teachers.

In Uganda specifically, Nakabugo et al. (2020) documented that the shift towards competence-based learning required not only changes in pedagogy but also fundamental restructuring of teacher education programmes. They argued that universities must align their training programmes with the competences articulated in the national curriculum, a process that necessitated curriculum review, staff development, and infrastructural investment. Regarding Kiswahili specifically, Mwaka and Ndawula (2021) noted that Ugandan universities had historically marginalised the language, with few institutions offering it as a degree programme or a subject in teacher education, thereby creating a persistent deficit in trained Kiswahili educators. Furthermore, Rugemalira (2022) highlighted across the region that without targeted investment in Kiswahili teacher training infrastructure, curriculum policies mandating the language would remain aspirational rather than functional. Collectively, these studies underscored the necessity of investigating institutional readiness as a prerequisite for effective CBC implementation in Uganda.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of university readiness for Kiswahili teacher training. The design was considered appropriate because it allowed for triangulation of data collected through multiple instruments, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Study Population and Sampling

The target population comprised Kiswahili lecturers, heads of department, deans of education faculties, and key informants at the NCDC and MoES across six purposively selected public universities in Uganda, namely Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Gulu University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Busitema University, and Mountains of the Moon University. A total of 142 participants were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling techniques. This sample size was consistent with recommendations for mixed-methods studies in educational settings (Creswell, 2022).

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and document review schedules. The questionnaires captured quantitative data on staffing levels, curriculum alignment, resource availability, and student enrolment, while the interviews elicited qualitative insights into institutional policies, challenges, and proposed solutions. Document analysis involved reviewing university prospectuses, faculty handbooks, course outlines, and national policy documents including the CBC Framework (NCDC, 2020) and the Teacher Education Policy (MoES, 2020).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and means, computed using SPSS Version 26. Qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2021), with themes identified deductively from the research objectives and inductively from the data. Ethical approval was obtained from the Makerere University School of Education Research Ethics Committee (Reference: MUREC/2023/042), and all participants provided informed written consent prior to data collection.

Results

Institutional Readiness Profile

The analysis of institutional readiness across six Ugandan universities revealed a deeply uneven landscape, with only two institutions Makerere University and Kyambogo University demonstrating any meaningful structural capacity to offer Kiswahili teacher education, though even these institutions exhibited significant deficiencies relative to the demands of the CBC framework.

Specifically, Makerere University had six qualified Kiswahili lecturers and provided 58% of the instructional resources deemed necessary for effective teacher preparation, while Kyambogo University had four such lecturers and offered 52% of the required resources; in contrast, the remaining four universities either had no Kiswahili programme whatsoever or possessed at most one lecturer, with resource adequacy levels as low as 9% at Mountains of the Moon University, reflecting a systemic neglect of Kiswahili as a discipline in the majority of Uganda's public university system.

Table 1: Institutional Readiness Profile of Ugandan Universities for Kiswahili Teacher Training (n=6)

University	Kiswahili Programme	Qualified Staff (n)	CBC-Aligned Curriculum	Teaching Resources (%)
Makerere University	Yes	6	Partial	58
Kyambogo University	Yes	4	Partial	52
Gulu University	No	1	No	21
Mbarara University	No	1	No	18
Busitema University	No	0	No	10
Mountains of the Moon	No	0	No	9

Source: Primary data, 2026.

Challenges Facing Kiswahili Teacher Training

A ranked analysis of the challenges perceived by respondents to impede effective Kiswahili teacher preparation identified six major impediments, with the shortage of qualified Kiswahili lecturers rated as the most critical challenge, cited by 131 respondents (92.3%), followed closely by the absence of CBC-aligned syllabi, which was flagged by 128 respondents (90.1%); these two factors together indicated that the very foundations of effective teacher training competent trainers and relevant curricula were absent in most institutions studied. The inadequacy of instructional materials was identified by 119 respondents (83.8%), insufficient funding by 108 (76.1%), limited practicum opportunities by 97 (68.3%), and low student enrolment in Kiswahili education programmes by 84 respondents (59.2%), collectively painting a picture of an educational sub-sector starved of human, financial, and material resources.

Table 2: Ranking of Challenges in Kiswahili Teacher Training Across Ugandan Universities

Rank	Challenge	Frequency (n=142)	Percentage (%)	Severity Level
1	Shortage of qualified Kiswahili lecturers	131	92.3	Critical
2	Absence of CBC-aligned syllabi	128	90.1	Critical
3	Inadequate instructional materials	119	83.8	High
4	Limited funding for Kiswahili departments	108	76.1	High
5	Insufficient practicum placements	97	68.3	Moderate
6	Low student enrolment in Kiswahili education	84	59.2	Moderate

Source: Primary data, 2026.

Coverage of CBC Competence Domains in Existing Programmes

An evaluation of how existing Kiswahili teacher training programmes at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities addressed the five core competence domains stipulated in Uganda's CBC framework demonstrated that no institution covered any domain adequately, with the highest coverage being communicative competence at Makerere University (64%) and Kyambogo University (60%), while other institutions averaged only 18% on this domain; more alarmingly, cross-curricular competences, which are foundational to the holistic vision of the CBC, were addressed at a mean of only 21% across all institutions, and assessment for learning a cornerstone of competence-based pedagogy achieved a mean coverage of merely 31%, signaling that Kiswahili teacher graduates were likely to enter primary classrooms ill-equipped to implement key pillars of the new curriculum.

Table 3: Coverage of CBC Competence Domains in Kiswahili Teacher Training Programmes (%)

CBC Competence Domain	Makerere (%)	Kyambogo (%)	Other Institutions (%)	Mean (%)
Communicative Competence	64	60	18	47
Literacy & Numeracy Integration	55	50	12	39

Learner-Centred Pedagogy	48	45	10	34
Assessment for Learning	44	40	9	31
Cross-Curricular Competences	30	28	6	21

Source: Document analysis and key informant interviews, 2026.

Discussion of Results

The findings from this study confirmed and extended earlier scholarly warnings about the structural unpreparedness of Ugandan universities to deliver competent Kiswahili teachers under the CBC (Mwaka & Ndawula, 2021; Nakabugo et al., 2020). The dominance of Makerere and Kyambogo Universities as the only institutions with any meaningful Kiswahili education infrastructure mirrored a broader pattern of institutional centralisation in Uganda's higher education sector, whereby resources and expertise were concentrated in a few legacy institutions while regional universities remained chronically under-resourced (Sekamwa & Lugumba, 2021). The near-universal identification of lecturer shortages and syllabus misalignment as critical challenges resonated with Waweru and Ngugi's (2022) findings from Kenya's CBC transition, suggesting that these were pan-regional challenges rather than uniquely Ugandan ones. Most significantly, the low coverage of competence domains particularly assessment for learning and cross-curricular integration indicated that even the best-positioned universities were training Kiswahili teachers for a curriculum that no longer existed, reinforcing Rugemalira's (2022) argument that policy mandates without institutional investment were fundamentally self-defeating.

Conclusions

This study concluded that Ugandan universities were, as of 2024, insufficiently prepared to train Kiswahili teachers capable of implementing the Competence-Based Curriculum in primary schools. The evidence gathered from six public universities revealed that institutional readiness was critically hampered by lecturer shortages, outdated and misaligned curricula, inadequate instructional materials, and limited financial investment in Kiswahili as a discipline. Only Makerere and Kyambogo Universities offered any structured Kiswahili teacher education, and even these exhibited major competence domain gaps relative to CBC requirements. The scale of the challenge was such that incremental reforms would be insufficient; what was required were systemic, coordinated interventions spanning policy, institutional governance, curriculum development, and resource allocation in order to align Uganda's university teacher training ecosystem with the aspirations of its national primary education reform agenda.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education and Sports was urged to develop a dedicated Kiswahili Teacher Training Policy that mandated all public universities offering teacher education to establish or strengthen Kiswahili education programmes aligned with CBC competences.

The National Curriculum Development Centre was recommended to collaborate with universities in designing CBC-aligned Kiswahili syllabi and providing associated instructional materials. Third, universities were advised to recruit and develop Kiswahili specialists through targeted scholarship schemes, lecturer exchange programmes with Tanzania and Kenya, and in-service training.

The government and development partners were called upon to increase funding allocations to Kiswahili departments specifically, including investment in language laboratories and digital learning resources.

Practicum partnerships between universities and primary schools were recommended to ensure that Kiswahili teacher trainees received adequate supervised teaching experience in CBC environments.

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