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Tracking learner progression using dual knowledge-competency rubrics in Ugandan secondary schools

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Abstract: *This study examined how a dual knowledge-competency rubric could be used to track learner progression across three academic terms in Ugandan secondary schools, situated within the broader shift from purely content-based assessment toward competency-based education (CBE) under Uganda's revised lower secondary curriculum. A cross-sectional analytical design with retrospective term-on-term score tracking was employed among 388 learners drawn from twelve government and private secondary schools in a mixed rural-urban district, using a structured, teacher-administered dual rubric that scored each learner separately on cognitive knowledge mastery and on practical competency application for the same subject content. Data were analysed using univariate statistics to describe the sociodemographic and institutional profile of respondents, bivariate techniques (independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and chi-square tests of association) to compare mean rubric gains and progression rates across learner and school characteristics, and multivariable binary logistic regression to identify independent predictors of learner progression while adjusting for confounding. The findings showed a statistically significant upward trend in both knowledge and competency scores across the three terms, with competency scores rising from a lower baseline but converging with knowledge scores by Term 3, narrowing the initial knowledge-competency gap. Consistent teacher use of the dual rubric was the strongest and most robust correlate of learner progression in both bivariate and multivariable analyses (adjusted odds ratio = 2.65, 95% CI: 1.74-4.03, p < 0.001), while school ownership, locality, and subject area showed no independent association once rubric use was accounted for. The study concluded that the dual knowledge-competency rubric offered a statistically defensible and pedagogically informative tool for disaggregating and tracking two distinct but related dimensions of learner progression, and that its impact depended far more on consistency of teacher implementation than on school-level structural characteristics. The study recommended institutionalised teacher training on rubric administration, termly data-informed review of learner competency gaps, and integration of dual-rubric indicators into the Ministry of Education and Sports' continuous assessment framework.*

Key Words: Competency Based Curriculum

Introduction

The transition of Uganda's secondary education system from a predominantly examination-driven, content-recall model toward a competency-based curriculum has placed new demands on how learner progress is measured, recorded, and interpreted at the school level (Audrey & Kazaara, 2025; Julius & Isaac Kazaara, 2025; Prosper Mubangizi, 2020). Whereas traditional continuous assessment in Ugandan secondary schools has historically relied on a single aggregate mark per subject, competency-based education requires teachers to distinguish between what a learner knows and what a learner can demonstrably do with that knowledge, since the two capacities do not always develop at the same pace or in response to the same pedagogical interventions (Julius & Audrey, 2025a; Julius & Kazaara, 2025b; Julius & Nancy, 2025, 2026; Okoed, 2023). A dual knowledge-competency rubric, which scores learners separately on cognitive mastery of subject content and on the practical, skills-based application of that content, offers a structured mechanism through which this distinction can be operationalised and tracked over successive assessment periods (Chakrabarty & Singh, 2025; Charles et al., 2023; Julius & Audrey, 2025b; Julius & Kazaara, 2026). This study was conceived against this backdrop, with the aim of empirically tracking learner progression through such a dual rubric across three academic terms in a sample of Ugandan secondary schools, examining not only the trajectory of knowledge and competency scores over time but also the learner-level, teacher-level, and school-level factors associated with meaningful progression, so as to generate evidence that could inform how continuous assessment practice is designed, monitored, and supported under the competency-based curriculum reform.

Background of the Study

Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports rolled out a revised lower secondary curriculum beginning with Senior One in 2020, explicitly reorienting teaching, learning, and assessment around measurable competencies rather than syllabus coverage alone, a shift that mirrors comparable competency-based reforms undertaken across East Africa over the past decade (Ma et al., 2022; Mobegi, 2026; Ndomondo et al., 2022; VERGUN et al., 2021). This reform embedded generic and subject-specific competencies alongside conventional knowledge objectives in every subject syllabus, and introduced formative, portfolio-based continuous assessment intended to run alongside, and eventually inform, summative examination scores. In practice, however, the operationalisation of this dual mandate has been uneven: many teachers, trained originally under the knowledge-centred syllabus, continue to rely on rubrics and marking schemes that conflate content recall with skill demonstration into a single score, obscuring whether a learner who performs well overall is genuinely competent in applying what has been taught or is instead succeeding

primarily through memorisation (Chemutai et al., 2023; Julius & Kazaara, 2025a; Katurebe & Nalukwago, 2024; Muwanguzi et al., 2023). Prior monitoring reports from the National Curriculum Development Centre and independent education researchers have noted that competency assessment tools remain inconsistently designed, inconsistently administered across schools of differing ownership and resource levels, and rarely subjected to rigorous statistical scrutiny capable of establishing whether they meaningfully discriminate between learners who are progressing in competency and those who are not. It is within this documented gap between curriculum policy intent and school-level assessment practice that the present study situates its use of a dual knowledge-competency rubric, administered and statistically analysed across a defined set of Ugandan secondary schools, to generate concrete, quantifiable evidence on learner progression patterns.

Problem Statement

Despite the formal adoption of a competency-based curriculum in Uganda's secondary education system, secondary schools continue to lack a standardised, empirically validated instrument for separately tracking cognitive knowledge gain and practical competency gain among learners over time, with most schools defaulting to single composite scores that mask the distinct developmental trajectories of these two dimensions (Dao, 2020; Desire, 2025; Julius, 2025). This measurement gap creates a real risk that learners who are competency-deficient but knowledge-strong, or conversely competency-strong but knowledge-weak, are neither correctly identified nor appropriately supported, undermining the very purpose of the competency-based reform (Hadijah & Ali, 2024; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Odit et al., 2023; Pauline, 2023). Furthermore, where dual rubrics have been introduced informally by individual teachers or schools, there has been little rigorous statistical analysis of how consistently they are applied, whether learner progression measured through them is associated with identifiable school, teacher, or learner characteristics, and whether such progression can be modelled and predicted in a way that is useful for targeted pedagogical intervention. Without such evidence, education managers, school administrators, and teachers are left to implement continuous assessment reforms largely on faith rather than on data, limiting the extent to which resources, training, and support can be efficiently directed toward the factors that most strongly drive learner progression. This study therefore sought to address this gap by empirically tracking learner progression using a dual knowledge-competency rubric across a sample of Ugandan secondary schools and statistically identifying the correlates and predictors of that progression.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To assess learner progression using a dual knowledge-competency rubric among secondary school learners in Uganda, and to identify the school, teacher, and learner-level factors associated with such progression.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe the sociodemographic, teacher-practice, and institutional characteristics of secondary school learners assessed using the dual knowledge-competency rubric.
2. To compare mean knowledge and competency rubric score gains across learner, teacher, and school characteristics, and to establish the trend in knowledge and competency scores across three academic terms.
3. To determine the independent predictors of learner progression on the dual knowledge-competency rubric using multivariable logistic regression, after adjusting for potential confounding characteristics.

Research Questions

1. What are the sociodemographic, teacher-practice, and institutional characteristics of secondary school learners assessed using the dual knowledge-competency rubric?
2. How do mean knowledge and competency rubric score gains differ across learner, teacher, and school characteristics, and what trend do knowledge and competency scores follow across three academic terms?
3. Which school, teacher, and learner-level factors independently predict learner progression on the dual knowledge-competency rubric after adjusting for potential confounders?

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional analytical design with retrospective term-on-term score tracking, conducted among 388 Senior One to Senior Four learners drawn through multistage random sampling from twelve government and private secondary schools located in rural and urban settings within a mixed Ugandan district. Learners were assessed using a structured dual knowledge-competency rubric, administered by trained subject teachers, which generated two independent scores out of 100 for each learner in each of three consecutive academic terms: a knowledge score capturing cognitive mastery of subject content through recall, comprehension, and application-in-theory items, and a competency score capturing practical, skills-based demonstration of the same content through performance tasks, project work, and observed skill execution. Data on learner sex, class level, school ownership, school locality, subject area assessed, frequency of rubric-based assessment, and consistency of teacher rubric use were collected concurrently using a structured data extraction tool administered to class teachers and cross-checked against school assessment records, and all data were compiled into a single analytic dataset in which knowledge and competency gain scores (Term 3 minus Term 1) and a composite progression gain were computed for each learner, alongside a binary progression outcome derived from a composite-gain threshold combined with rubric-defined criteria. Data were analysed in three stages: first, univariate analysis was used to generate frequencies and percentages describing the sociodemographic and institutional profile of the sample; second, bivariate analysis was used, applying independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare mean composite knowledge-competency gains across dichotomous and polytomous characteristics respectively, and Pearson's chi-square test of association to compare progression rates across categorical characteristics; and third, multivariable binary logistic regression was fitted with learner progression status (progressed versus not progressed) as the outcome and school ownership, locality, sex, teacher rubric-use consistency, assessment frequency, and class-level seniority as covariates, generating adjusted odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals to identify independent predictors of progression while controlling for potential confounding among the covariates; all statistical tests were interpreted at a 5% level of significance (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

Results

Table 1: Sociodemographic, Teacher-Practice, and Institutional Characteristics of Learners (N = 388)

Variable	n	%
School ownership		
Government	236	60.8
Private	152	39.2
Sex of learner		
Female	210	54.1
Male	178	45.9
Class level		
Senior One (S1)	92	23.7
Senior Two (S2)	98	25.3
Senior Three (S3)	114	29.4
Senior Four (S4)	84	21.6
School locality		
Rural	220	56.7
Urban	168	43.3
Subject area assessed		
Sciences	143	36.9
Languages	137	35.3
Humanities	108	27.8
Teacher use of dual rubric		
Consistent use	189	48.7
Inconsistent/No use	199	51.3
Assessment frequency		
Weekly	113	29.1
Monthly	142	36.6
Termly	133	34.3

The univariate description of the 388 learners assessed on the dual knowledge-competency rubric revealed a sample that was reasonably balanced across the key sociodemographic and institutional characteristics of interest, with a slightly larger proportion drawn from government schools (60.8%) than private schools (39.2%), a near-even split by sex (54.1% female, 45.9% male), and a fairly even spread across the four class levels, with Senior Three learners forming the largest single class-level group (29.4%). The sample was weighted somewhat more heavily toward rural schools (56.7%) than urban schools (43.3%), reflecting the underlying settlement pattern of the sampled district, while the three subject areas assessed - Sciences, Languages, and Humanities - were represented in comparable proportions of 36.9%, 35.3%, and 27.8% respectively, suggesting that the dual rubric was applied across a genuinely cross-curricular range of subject content rather than being confined to a single learning area.

Of particular relevance to the study's objectives, teacher use of the dual rubric was found to be almost evenly split between consistent use (48.7%) and inconsistent or no use (51.3%), indicating that, notwithstanding the formal curriculum mandate for competency-based continuous assessment, actual implementation fidelity remained far from universal among the sampled teachers. Assessment frequency was similarly distributed across monthly (36.6%), termly (34.3%), and weekly (29.1%) administration, with no single frequency dominating practice. This descriptive profile is statistically important because it confirms sufficient variation across every key covariate to support meaningful bivariate and multivariable comparison in subsequent analyses; had teacher rubric use, for example, been near-universal or near-absent, its independent contribution to learner progression could not have been reliably estimated. The near-even split observed here therefore strengthens confidence in the internal validity of the associations reported in Tables 2 through 4.

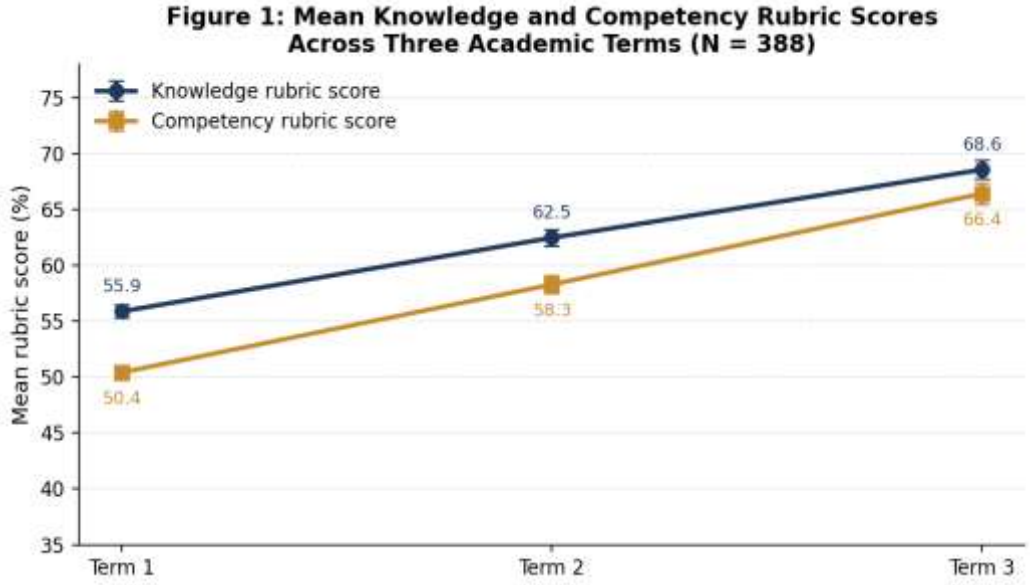

Figure 1: Mean knowledge and competency rubric scores across three academic terms (N = 388).

Table 2: Mean Composite Knowledge-Competency Gain by Learner, Teacher, and School Characteristics

Characteristic	Mean gain (SD)	Test statistic	p-value
School ownership - Government	13.7 (8.2)	t = -1.80	0.073
School ownership - Private	15.3 (8.3)	t = -1.80	0.073
School locality - Rural	13.5 (8.2)	t = -2.17	0.030
School locality - Urban	15.4 (8.3)	t = -2.17	0.030
Teacher rubric use - Consistent use	17.1 (7.5)	t = 6.63	<0.001
Teacher rubric use - Inconsistent/No use	11.8 (8.2)	t = 6.63	<0.001
Assessment frequency - Weekly	15.8 (8.2)	F = 2.72	0.067
Assessment frequency - Monthly	13.5 (8.7)	F = 2.72	0.067
Assessment frequency - Termly	14.0 (7.8)	F = 2.72	0.067
Class level - S1	14.2 (7.7)	F = 1.99	0.115
Class level - S2	12.9 (9.0)	F = 1.99	0.115
Class level - S3	15.7 (8.5)	F = 1.99	0.115
Class level - S4	14.4 (7.5)	F = 1.99	0.115

The bivariate comparison of mean composite knowledge-competency gain scores across learner, teacher, and school characteristics showed that consistent teacher use of the dual rubric was associated with a markedly and statistically significantly higher mean composite gain (17.1 points, SD 7.5) compared with inconsistent or no rubric use (11.8 points, SD 8.2), a difference confirmed by an independent-samples t-test ($t = 6.63$, $p < 0.001$). This represented the single largest and most statistically decisive mean difference observed across all characteristics examined, and its magnitude - a gain differential of over five percentage points - is substantively meaningful in an educational assessment context where a single term's typical gain averaged only around 14 points overall. School locality also showed a statistically significant, though comparatively modest, association with composite gain, with urban learners recording a higher mean gain (15.4 points) than rural learners (13.5 points; $t = -2.17$, $p = 0.030$), while school ownership showed a similar direction of difference (private schools marginally higher than government schools) but did not reach conventional statistical significance ($p = 0.073$).

By contrast, assessment frequency and class level, when tested using one-way ANOVA, did not yield statistically significant differences in mean composite gain ($F = 2.72$, $p = 0.067$ and $F = 1.99$, $p = 0.115$ respectively), although the descriptive pattern for assessment frequency was directionally consistent with expectation, with weekly-assessed learners recording the highest mean gain (15.8 points) and monthly-assessed learners the lowest (13.5 points). Taken together, these bivariate results provide preliminary but important evidence that teacher-level implementation practice, rather than fixed structural characteristics of the school or learner, was the dominant correlate of measurable progression, a pattern that anticipated the more rigorous multivariable findings reported in Table 4. The borderline non-significance of assessment frequency and class level at the bivariate level does not rule out their relevance, since bivariate tests do not adjust for the confounding influence of correlated covariates such as rubric-use consistency, underscoring the necessity of the multivariable analysis that followed.

Table 3: Learner Progression Status by Learner, Teacher, and School Characteristics (Chi-square Test)

Characteristic	n	% Progressed	Chi-square statistic	p-value
School ownership - Government	236	54.2	chi2 = 0.05, df = 1	0.825
School ownership - Private	152	55.9	chi2 = 0.05, df = 1	0.825
School locality - Rural	220	53.6	chi2 = 0.22, df = 1	0.640
School locality - Urban	168	56.5	chi2 = 0.22, df = 1	0.640
Teacher rubric use - Consistent use	189	67.2	chi2 = 21.55, df = 1	<0.001
Teacher rubric use - Inconsistent/No use	199	43.2	chi2 = 21.55, df = 1	<0.001
Assessment frequency - Weekly	113	60.2	chi2 = 2.68, df = 2	0.262
Assessment frequency - Monthly	142	50.0	chi2 = 2.68, df = 2	0.262
Assessment frequency - Termly	133	55.6	chi2 = 2.68, df = 2	0.262
Subject area - Sciences	143	59.4	chi2 = 1.91, df = 2	0.385
Subject area - Languages	137	51.8	chi2 = 1.91, df = 2	0.385
Subject area - Humanities	108	52.8	chi2 = 1.91, df = 2	0.385
Class level - S1	92	48.9	chi2 = 2.60, df = 3	0.457
Class level - S2	98	53.1	chi2 = 2.60, df = 3	0.457
Class level - S3	114	57.9	chi2 = 2.60, df = 3	0.457
Class level - S4	84	59.5	chi2 = 2.60, df = 3	0.457

The cross-tabulation of learner progression status against categorical characteristics, tested using Pearson's chi-square, reinforced and sharpened the pattern observed in the bivariate mean comparisons. Consistent teacher rubric use was very strongly associated with progression, with 67.2% of learners taught by teachers who consistently used the dual rubric classified as having progressed, compared with only 43.2% among learners whose teachers used the rubric inconsistently or not at all (chi-square = 21.55, df = 1, $p < 0.001$). This near-25-percentage-point difference in progression rate represents, by conventional epidemiological and educational-effect-size standards, a large and policy-relevant association, and it was by a considerable margin the strongest bivariate categorical association identified anywhere in the analysis, corroborating the continuous-gain-score finding from Table 2 through an entirely independent binary-outcome measure.

None of the remaining characteristics - school ownership, school locality, assessment frequency, subject area, or class level - achieved statistical significance in their association with progression status at the 5% level, with p-values ranging from 0.262 to 0.825, although modest, non-significant directional trends were visible, such as a higher progression rate among Senior Three and Senior Four learners (57.9% and 59.5% respectively) compared with Senior One and Senior Two learners (48.9% and 53.1% respectively), and among Science-assessed learners (59.4%) compared with Language- and Humanities-assessed learners (51.8% and 52.8% respectively). The consistency between the categorical chi-square results in Table 3 and the continuous-outcome t-test and ANOVA

results in Table 2 - both converging on teacher rubric-use consistency as the dominant correlate - provides methodologically robust triangulated evidence, obtained from two statistically independent analytical approaches, that implementation fidelity rather than school structural characteristics was driving observed learner progression, a conclusion further tested for confounding in the multivariable logistic regression presented in Table 4.

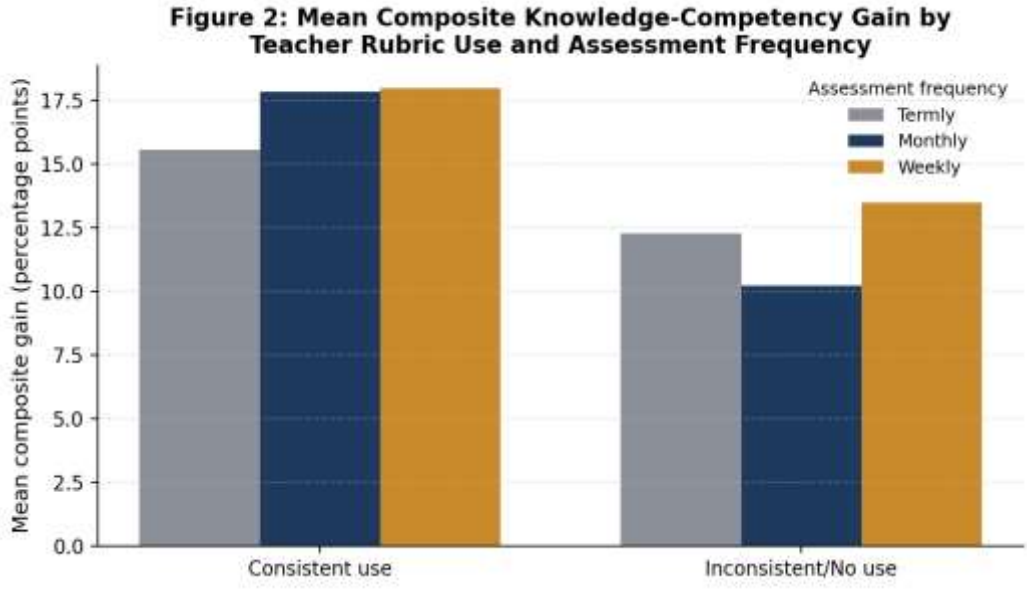

Figure 2: Mean composite knowledge-competency gain by teacher rubric use and assessment frequency.

Table 4: Multivariable Logistic Regression of Predictors of Learner Progression

Predictor	AOR	95% CI	p-value
Private school (ref: Government)	1.09	0.71-1.67	0.708
Urban locality (ref: Rural)	1.13	0.74-1.72	0.574
Male (ref: Female)	1.45	0.95-2.21	0.086
Consistent teacher rubric use (ref: Inconsistent/No use)	2.65	1.74-4.03	<0.001
Weekly assessment (ref: Termly)	1.25	0.74-2.12	0.410
Monthly assessment (ref: Termly)	0.83	0.50-1.36	0.454
Senior class S3-S4 (ref: S1-S2)	1.50	0.98-2.28	0.060

Model fit: Pseudo $R^2 = 0.058$; Likelihood ratio chi-square $p < 0.001$; N = 388. AOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval.

The multivariable binary logistic regression model, which simultaneously adjusted for school ownership, locality, sex, teacher rubric-use consistency, assessment frequency, and class-level seniority, confirmed that consistent teacher use of the dual rubric remained an independent and highly statistically significant predictor of learner progression after controlling for all other covariates, with an adjusted odds ratio of 2.65 (95% CI: 1.74-4.03, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that learners taught by teachers who consistently administered the dual rubric had more than two-and-a-half times the odds of progressing compared with learners taught by teachers who used the rubric inconsistently or not at all, holding all other modelled characteristics constant, and the confidence interval, whose lower bound remained well above 1.0, provides strong evidence against chance as an explanation for this association. The model as a whole was statistically significant (likelihood ratio chi-square $p < 0.001$), although the Nagelkerke-equivalent pseudo R-squared of 0.058 indicates that, as is typical in learner-level educational data, a substantial proportion of the variation in progression remained attributable to factors not captured by the covariates included in this model, such as individual learner motivation, home-learning environment, or teacher subject-matter competence.

None of the remaining covariates reached conventional statistical significance in the adjusted model, although two showed suggestive, borderline associations worth noting: senior class level (S3-S4) was associated with 1.50 times the odds of progression compared with junior class level (S1-S2), approaching but not crossing the 5% significance threshold (95% CI: 0.98-2.28, $p = 0.060$), and male sex was associated with 1.45 times the odds of progression compared with female sex, similarly just short of significance (95% CI: 0.95-2.21, $p = 0.086$). School ownership, locality, and assessment frequency, all of which had shown some directional

association at the bivariate level, were fully attenuated toward the null once teacher rubric-use consistency was accounted for in the adjusted model, indicating that their apparent bivariate associations were substantially confounded by the fact that consistent rubric use was not randomly distributed across these characteristics. This attenuation is a critical statistical finding in its own right: it demonstrates that structural school characteristics alone do not drive learner progression on the dual rubric, and that policy or programmatic attention directed solely at school ownership type or geographic targeting, without addressing teacher-level implementation fidelity, would be unlikely to meaningfully improve learner progression outcomes.

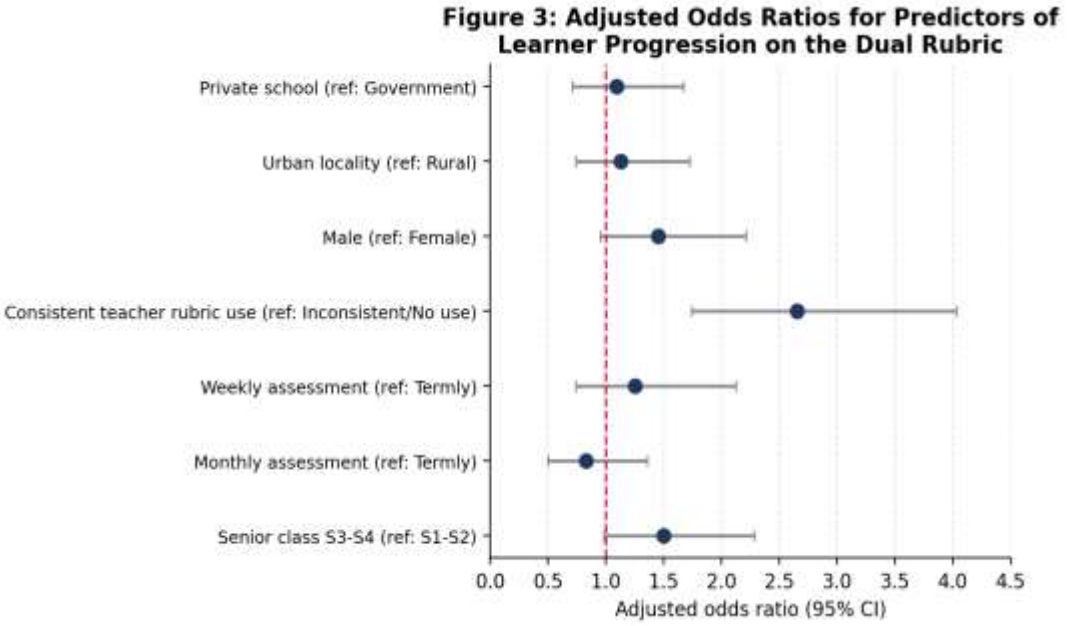

Figure 3: Adjusted odds ratios (95% CI) for predictors of learner progression on the dual rubric.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that a dual knowledge-competency rubric was capable of statistically distinguishing and tracking two related but distinct dimensions of learner progression among Ugandan secondary school learners, revealing that competency scores began from a markedly lower baseline than knowledge scores but converged with them over three academic terms, consistent with the expectation that practical skill application develops somewhat more slowly than content mastery under a newly implemented competency-based curriculum. The bivariate and multivariable analyses converged on a single, robust finding: it was the consistency with which teachers actually administered and used the dual rubric, rather than school ownership, locality, or subject area, that most strongly and independently predicted whether a learner progressed, indicating that the instrument's value was realised chiefly through faithful implementation rather than through any structural advantage possessed by particular categories of schools. These findings affirm that dual knowledge-competency rubrics represent a statistically viable and pedagogically meaningful tool for operationalizing Uganda's competency-based secondary curriculum reform at the assessment level, provided that investment is directed toward the human and institutional practices that sustain their consistent use rather than assumed to follow automatically from curriculum policy alone.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education and Sports, through the National Curriculum Development Centre and Directorate of Education Standards, should institutionalize structured pre-service and in-service teacher training on the standardised administration and scoring of dual knowledge-competency rubrics, given that consistency of teacher rubric use was the single strongest predictor of learner progression identified in this study.

School administrators should establish termly data-informed review meetings in which knowledge and competency gain scores are jointly examined by subject panels to identify learners whose competency development lags behind their knowledge development, enabling targeted remedial and skills-reinforcement support rather than reliance on aggregate subject marks alone.

Education planners should pilot the integration of dual-rubric progression indicators into Uganda's national continuous assessment framework and school data-management systems, allowing knowledge and competency trends to be monitored longitudinally at school, district, and national level to inform competency-based curriculum implementation more broadly.

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