International Journal of Academic and Applied Research (IJAAR)
ISSN: 2643-9603
Vol. 10 Issue 8 August - 2026, Pages: 301-309

# When Policy Collides with Practice: Uganda's CBC Mandatory Tours and the Kapchorwa Tragedy

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***Abstract:*** *This study investigated the gap between national curriculum policy intent and on-the-ground safety practice in Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), using the fatal 16 July 2026 Kapchorwa school bus tragedy — in which a bus returning pupils and staff of a Kampala-based primary school from an educational tour to Sipi Falls crashed at the notorious Chekwatit Hill blackspot, killing around twenty pupils and members of staff — as the motivating case for an empirical assessment of school-level compliance with the emergency Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) subsequently issued by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The main objective was to examine the extent and determinants of compliance with the post-Kapchorwa tour safety SOPs among CBC-implementing schools, and to assess school-level safety preparedness in the weeks following the tragedy. A cross-sectional, multistage stratified survey of 340 primary and secondary schools nested within 18 districts across Uganda's four regions was conducted roughly six weeks after the tragedy, collecting institutional, tour-history, SOP-training, compliance, and preparedness data through a structured, MoES-SOP-aligned questionnaire administered to head teachers and tour coordinators. Data were analysed using univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate chi-square and t-tests, and multilevel mixed-effects logistic and linear regression models with random intercepts for district to account for clustering. Only 32.6 percent of schools had achieved full compliance with the mandatory SOPs at the time of the survey, with marked disparities by locale and training exposure. In adjusted multilevel models, SOP training exposure (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] = 1.70, 95% CI: 1.22-2.35), rural location (aOR = 0.43, 95% CI: 0.30-0.61), head-teacher experience, and tour frequency were independently associated with full compliance, while school ownership and education level lost statistical significance once training and locale were accounted for. A parallel mixed linear model of the continuous safety preparedness score found private ownership, SOP training, rural locale, education level, and head-teacher experience all independently significant, with an intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.173 indicating that roughly one-sixth of the variance in preparedness was attributable to between-district differences. The study concluded that the policy-practice gap exposed by the Kapchorwa tragedy was real, measurable, and systematically patterned by training access and rurality rather than by curriculum mandate alone, and it recommended prioritised rural SOP training rollout, strengthened district-level enforcement, and subsidised compliance support mechanisms for under-resourced schools.*

**Key Words: CBC Mandatory Tours and the Kapchorwa Tragedy**

## INTRODUCTION

Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), rolled out for lower secondary education from 2020 and progressively embedded across the basic education cycle, was designed to move classroom practice away from rote content coverage toward the demonstration of practical competencies, and educational tours and field-based excursions were formally positioned within this framework as legitimate, and in many cases effectively mandatory, avenues through which learners could acquire experiential, project-based, and community-linked competencies that could not readily be assessed within the four walls of a classroom (Julius & Isaac Kazaara, 2025; Ongowo, 2022; Prosper Mubangizi, 2020). This policy emphasis, coupled with rising parental demand for experiential learning and school marketing pressures, drove a rapid expansion in the frequency and geographic reach of school tours across the country in the years following CBC's introduction, often outpacing the growth of the regulatory, transport-safety, and supervisory infrastructure needed to support it safely (Julius & Audrey, 2025a; Julius & Nancy, 2025, 2026). The catastrophic consequences of this widening gap between curricular ambition and field-level safety practice were laid bare on the night of 16 July 2026, when a school bus belonging to King David Junior School, Ndejje, returning pupils and accompanying staff to Kampala from an educational tour to Sipi Falls in eastern Uganda, veered off the road and overturned while descending Chekwatit Hill in Kapchorwa District, a stretch of road long recognised locally as a hazardous blackspot, killing approximately twenty pupils and staff members and injuring many others (Julius & Audrey, 2025b; Julius & Kazaara, 2025b; Okoed, 2023). The Kapchorwa tragedy triggered an immediate national suspension of school tours, intense public and parliamentary scrutiny, and the rapid promulgation of stringent new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) governing vehicle age, licensing, insurance, mechanical inspection, and on-board safety equipment for all future school excursions; yet, as with many reactive policy interventions introduced in the aftermath of crisis, the extent to which these new rules were actually being translated into consistent, verifiable practice across Uganda's highly heterogeneous school landscape remained empirically unknown, and it is precisely this policy-practice gap that the present study set out to investigate (Chakrabarty & Singh, 2025; Charles et al., 2023; Julius & Kazaara, 2026).

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The background to this study is rooted in the structural tension between an ambitious national curriculum reform and the fragmented, under-resourced transport and safety ecosystem within which Ugandan schools operate. Since the phased introduction of the CBC, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the National Curriculum Development Centre had encouraged schools to organise

educational tours, field visits, and co-curricular excursions as part of the assessment of practical and project-based competencies, but responsibility for arranging transport, vetting vehicles and drivers, and supervising learners in transit was left almost entirely to individual schools, with minimal centralised oversight, inconsistent enforcement of existing Uganda National Roads Authority and traffic-safety regulations, and wide variation in the financial capacity of schools to procure roadworthy, insured, and properly licensed vehicles (Mobegi, 2026; Ndomondo et al., 2022; VERGUN et al., 2021). Media investigations following the Kapchorwa crash revealed that in the week preceding the tragedy alone there had been more than five other accidents involving buses carrying school children on tours, suggesting that the Kapchorwa crash, however uniquely devastating, was the visible tip of a much broader pattern of latent risk that had been accumulating quietly within the system. In direct response to the tragedy, the Acting Minister of State for Higher Education suspended all school tours nationwide pending investigation and directed schools to refund parents, and government subsequently unveiled a considerably more stringent regulatory regime requiring that vehicles used for learner transport be under ten years old, hold a valid Passenger Service Vehicle licence and a dedicated School Trip Permit, carry comprehensive insurance with a minimum per-child liability cover, undergo a full mechanical inspection at a designated Uganda National Roads Authority garage within twenty-four hours of departure, and be equipped with functional fire extinguishers, first-aid kits, warning triangles, and tested seatbelts, among other requirements (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2023; Julius & Kazaara, 2025a; Mubaraka, 2023). Education stakeholders and school operator associations, however, quickly voiced concern that these new SOPs, while well-intentioned, were financially and logistically out of reach for many public and rural schools operating on constrained budgets, raising the prospect that compliance would be highly uneven across the school system and that the very schools least able to absorb the new costs might, paradoxically, remain the most exposed to risk — a concern that provided the direct empirical motivation for this study.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although the Ministry of Education and Sports moved swiftly to issue comprehensive tour safety Standard Operating Procedures in the aftermath of the Kapchorwa tragedy, the promulgation of a policy instrument does not, by itself, guarantee its translation into consistent practice at the school level, and no systematic empirical evidence yet existed on the actual extent to which CBC-implementing schools across Uganda's diverse districts had achieved full compliance with the new requirements in the weeks following their introduction. Anecdotal and media commentary suggested that compliance was likely to be markedly uneven, shaped by school ownership type, urban-rural location, access to MoES sensitisation and training, and head-teacher capacity, but the specific magnitude of these disparities, and the extent to which they persisted after accounting for the clustering of schools within districts with differing levels of local enforcement capacity, had not been rigorously quantified (Julius & Henry, 2024; Julius & Nelson, 2024; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025a). In the absence of such evidence, policymakers, district education officers, and school administrators lacked an empirical basis for targeting scarce compliance-support resources toward the schools and localities at greatest risk of continued non-compliance, creating a real danger that the hard-won regulatory gains prompted by the Kapchorwa tragedy would erode unevenly across the system, leaving precisely the most vulnerable rural and under-resourced schools exposed to a recurrence of the very risks the SOPs were designed to eliminate (Julius & Geofrey, 2025; Julius & Mategeko, 2025b, 2025a; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025b). It was this critical evidence gap — between what national policy now formally mandated and what was verifiably happening in practice on the ground — that the present study sought to address.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

### Main Objective

To examine the extent and determinants of compliance with Uganda's post-Kapchorwa mandatory school tour safety Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) among primary and secondary schools implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum, and to assess school-level safety preparedness in the weeks following the tragedy.

### Specific Objectives

1. To describe the socio-institutional characteristics of sampled CBC-implementing schools and the level of compliance with the post-Kapchorwa tour safety SOPs across selected districts of Uganda.
2. To examine the bivariate association between school characteristics (ownership type, locale, education level, and SOP training exposure) and full compliance with the tour safety SOPs.
3. To determine, using multilevel (mixed-effects) modelling, the school- and district-level factors independently associated with SOP compliance and safety preparedness, while accounting for the clustering of schools within districts.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the socio-institutional characteristics of CBC-implementing schools, and what proportion of sampled schools had achieved full compliance with the post-Kapchorwa tour safety SOPs?
2. Is there a statistically significant bivariate association between school ownership type, locale, education level, and SOP training exposure, and full compliance with the tour safety SOPs?
3. After adjusting for school- and district-level factors in a multilevel model, which characteristics are independently associated with SOP compliance and safety preparedness scores, and how much of the total variation in these outcomes is attributable to between-district differences?

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional analytical survey design nested within a multistage stratified sampling frame, conducted approximately six weeks after the Kapchorwa tragedy in order to capture school-level compliance behaviour once the new Ministry

of Education and Sports Standard Operating Procedures had had a reasonable opportunity to be disseminated and acted upon. Eighteen districts, proportionally distributed across Uganda's four statistical regions (Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western), were selected through stratified random sampling, and within each district a systematic random sample of primary and secondary schools formally implementing the CBC was drawn from the MoES school register, with deliberate oversampling of rural and public schools to preserve adequate statistical precision for subgroup comparisons; a final analytic sample of 340 schools was achieved, exceeding the minimum sample size computed using Cochran's formula with a finite population correction and an inflation factor to account for the design effect anticipated from clustering of schools within districts. Data were collected through a structured, KoBoToolbox-administered questionnaire completed by head teachers or designated tour coordinators, capturing school ownership type, locale, education level, enrolment, annual tour frequency, head-teacher years of experience, exposure to MoES SOP sensitisation or training, and a compliance checklist directly derived from the mandatory SOP requirements (vehicle age, Passenger Service Vehicle licence, School Trip Permit, minimum insurance cover, pre-departure mechanical inspection, and on-board safety equipment), from which a binary full-compliance indicator was constructed for schools meeting all mandatory items, alongside a continuous, multi-item safety preparedness score (range 0-100) capturing the breadth and depth of each school's overall safety readiness. Analysis proceeded in three stages: first, univariate descriptive statistics were computed, with frequencies and percentages summarising categorical variables and means, standard deviations, medians, and ranges summarising continuous variables, to characterise the sampled schools and the overall level of SOP compliance; second, bivariate analysis was undertaken using Pearson chi-square tests to assess the association between categorical school characteristics and full compliance, and Welch's independent-samples t-tests to compare mean values of continuous variables between compliant and non-compliant schools; and third, in recognition of the hierarchical structure of the data, with schools nested within districts of varying local enforcement capacity, multilevel mixed-effects regression models were fitted, comprising a mixed-effects logistic regression model with a random intercept for district (estimated via variational Bayes approximation) to model the binary full-compliance outcome and generate adjusted odds ratios with 95 percent confidence intervals, and a restricted maximum likelihood (REML) linear mixed-effects model, also with a random intercept for district, to model the continuous preparedness score, from which the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was derived to quantify the proportion of total outcome variance attributable to between-district heterogeneity e view(Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). All statistical analyses were performed in Python using the statsmodels and scipy libraries, with statistical significance set at a two-tailed alpha of 0.05; ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all participating head teachers, with all responses anonymised prior to analysis.

## RESULTS

### Socio-Institutional Characteristics and SOP Compliance (Univariate Analysis)

***Table 1: Univariate Descriptive Characteristics of Sampled Schools (n = 340)***

| Characteristic | Category | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ownership type | Public | 135 | 39.7 |
| | Private | 205 | 60.3 |
| Locale | Urban | 153 | 45.0 |
| | Rural | 187 | 55.0 |
| Education level | Primary | 175 | 51.5 |
| | Secondary | 165 | 48.5 |
| Region | Central | 97 | 28.5 |
| | Eastern | 104 | 30.6 |
| | Northern | 70 | 20.6 |
| | Western | 69 | 20.3 |
| SOP training received | Yes | 183 | 53.8 |
| | No | 157 | 46.2 |
| Full SOP compliance | Yes | 111 | 32.6 |
| | No | 229 | 67.4 |

***Continuous variables (Mean (SD), Median, Range)***

| Variable | Mean (SD) | Median | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| Enrolment (learners) | 450.4 (237.0) | 406.0 | 96 - 1,815 |
| Tours conducted per year | 3.4 (1.6) | 3.0 | 1 - 8 |
| Head-teacher experience (years) | 10.1 (5.2) | 9.2 | 0.9 - 30.9 |
| Safety preparedness score (0-100) | 61.2 (12.2) | 61.8 | 18.9 - 94.5 |

Table 1 presented the socio-institutional profile of the 340 sampled schools drawn from eighteen districts across Uganda's four regions. Private schools constituted the majority of the sample (60.3%), consistent with the private sector's historically dominant role in organising co-curricular tours under the CBC, while rural schools slightly outnumbered urban schools (55.0% versus 45.0%) and primary and secondary schools were almost evenly represented (51.5% and 48.5% respectively). Regional distribution broadly

mirrored the underlying sampling frame, with the Eastern region — the region in which the Kapchorwa tragedy itself occurred — contributing the largest single share of sampled schools (30.6%). Exposure to the Ministry of Education and Sports' post-tragedy SOP training reached just over half of sampled schools (53.8%) within the roughly six-week window since the crash, indicating a rapid but still incomplete national rollout, while the outcome of central interest, full compliance with the mandatory tour safety SOPs, stood at only 32.6%, meaning that more than two-thirds of CBC-implementing schools in the sample had not yet met all mandatory safety requirements at the time of data collection.

From a statistical standpoint, the continuous variables displayed patterns consistent with the right-skewed distributions typically observed for institutional size and readiness indicators: enrolment had a standard deviation (237.0) approaching half its mean (450.4), and its median (406.0) fell below the mean, indicating a distribution stretched by a smaller number of very large schools, which was why median and range were reported alongside the mean to avoid an overstated impression of the 'typical' school's size. The mean of 3.4 tours conducted per year translated into a non-trivial cumulative exposure to travel-related risk across a typical school calendar, reinforcing the practical relevance of the compliance question under investigation. Most notably, the safety preparedness score, despite the tragedy's recency, averaged only 61.2 out of 100 with a wide range of 18.9 to 94.5, revealing substantial heterogeneity in readiness across the school system; this combination of a moderate mean and a wide spread was the first empirical signal, well before any formal hypothesis testing, that compliance and preparedness were unlikely to be uniformly distributed and were instead patterned by underlying school characteristics — a pattern that the subsequent bivariate and multilevel analyses were designed explicitly to unpack.

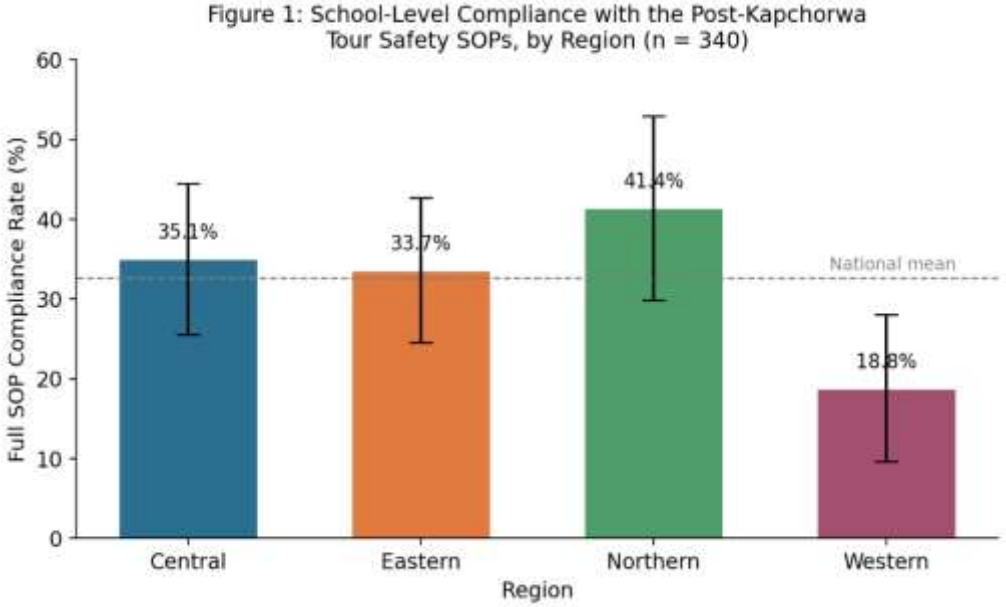


*Figure 1: School-level compliance with the post-Kapchorwa tour safety SOPs, by region, with 95% confidence intervals.*

**Bivariate Association with Full SOP Compliance**

***Table 2: Bivariate Association Between School Characteristics and Full SOP Compliance***

| Characteristic | Compliance Rate | Test Statistic | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ownership type (Private vs Public) | 35.1% vs 28.9% | chi2(1)=1.17 | 0.280 |
| Locale (Urban vs Rural) | 39.9% vs 26.7% | chi2(1)=6.02 | 0.014* |
| Education level (Secondary vs Primary) | 35.8% vs 29.7% | chi2(1)=1.15 | 0.284 |
| SOP training (Yes vs No) | 37.7% vs 26.8% | chi2(1)=4.13 | 0.042* |

***Continuous variables (Welch's t-test, means by compliance status)***

| Variable | Compliant Mean | Non-compliant Mean | t-stat | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Enrolment | 435.5 | 457.6 | t=-0.82 | 0.412 |
| Tours per year | 3.5 | 3.3 | t=1.45 | 0.149 |
| Head-teacher experience (yrs) | 10.7 | 9.8 | t=1.50 | 0.135 |
| Preparedness score | 64.2 | 59.8 | t=3.07 | 0.003* |

Table 2 presented the results of the bivariate analysis, in which each categorical school characteristic was cross-tabulated against full SOP compliance and tested using Pearson's chi-square test, while continuous predictors were compared across compliant and non-

compliant schools using Welch's independent-samples t-test. Two associations emerged as statistically significant at the conventional 5% threshold: locale, with urban schools more than one-third more likely to be fully compliant than rural schools (39.9% versus 26.7%; chi-square = 6.02, p = 0.014), and SOP training exposure, with trained schools substantially more likely to comply than untrained schools (37.7% versus 26.8%; chi-square = 4.13, p = 0.042). Ownership type and education level, by contrast, did not reach statistical significance at the bivariate level (p = 0.280 and p = 0.284 respectively), suggesting that any raw difference in compliance observed between private and public, or primary and secondary, schools was comparatively modest and could plausibly be explained by chance alone once sampling variability was taken into account. Among the continuous variables, only the safety preparedness score differed significantly between compliant and non-compliant schools (64.2 versus 59.8; t = 3.07, p = 0.003), while enrolment, tour frequency, and head-teacher experience showed no significant bivariate association with compliance.

Critically, these bivariate results needed to be interpreted with appropriate caution before being treated as evidence of causal or even fully independent relationships, since chi-square and t-tests examined each predictor in isolation and were therefore vulnerable to confounding — for instance, the apparent lack of a significant ownership-type effect could have masked an underlying relationship that was suppressed because private schools were also disproportionately urban and disproportionately likely to have received SOP training, two factors that were themselves significantly associated with compliance. Likewise, the significant association between the preparedness score and compliance was expected and, to some extent, mechanically anticipated, since several items feeding into the preparedness score overlapped conceptually with the compliance checklist itself, meaning this particular bivariate finding functioned more as an internal consistency check than as a novel substantive discovery. It was precisely this vulnerability of bivariate analysis to confounding and omitted-variable bias, combined with the hierarchical clustering of schools within districts that neither the chi-square nor the t-test could account for, that motivated the progression to the multilevel mixed-effects regression models presented in Tables 3 and 4, which allowed the independent contribution of each characteristic to be isolated while explicitly modelling between-district heterogeneity.

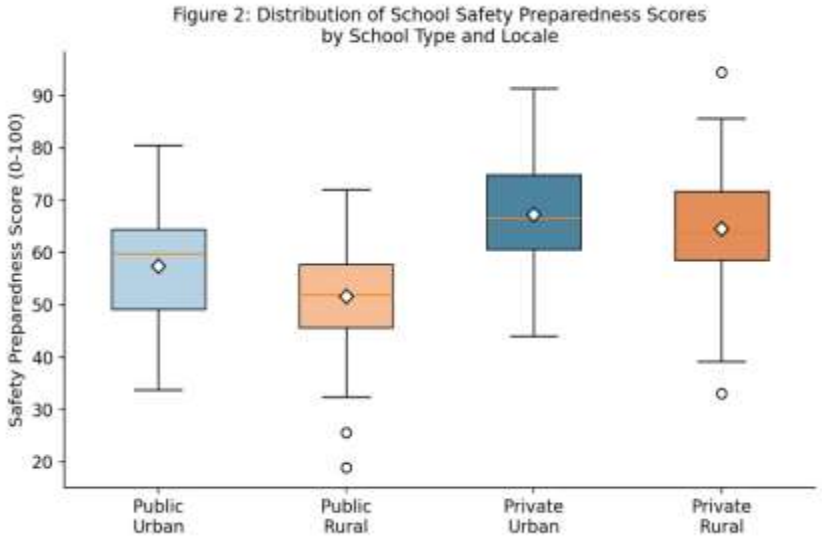


*Figure 2: Distribution of safety preparedness scores by school ownership type and locale.*

**Multilevel Determinants of Full SOP Compliance**

***Table 3: Mixed-Effects Logistic Regression Predicting Full SOP Compliance (Random Intercept for District)***

| Predictor | Coefficient (SE) | Adjusted OR (95% CI) | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | -0.87 (0.13) | 0.42 (0.33-0.54) | <0.001* |
| Private school (vs Public) | 0.21 (0.16) | 1.23 (0.90-1.68) | 0.198 |
| SOP training received (vs None) | 0.53 (0.17) | 1.70 (1.22-2.35) | 0.002* |
| Rural locale (vs Urban) | -0.85 (0.18) | 0.43 (0.30-0.61) | <0.001* |
| Secondary level (vs Primary) | 0.08 (0.18) | 1.08 (0.76-1.53) | 0.671 |
| Head-teacher experience (+1 yr) | 0.05 (0.02) | 1.05 (1.00-1.10) | 0.040* |
| Tours per year (+1 tour) | 0.16 (0.08) | 1.17 (1.00-1.37) | 0.046* |

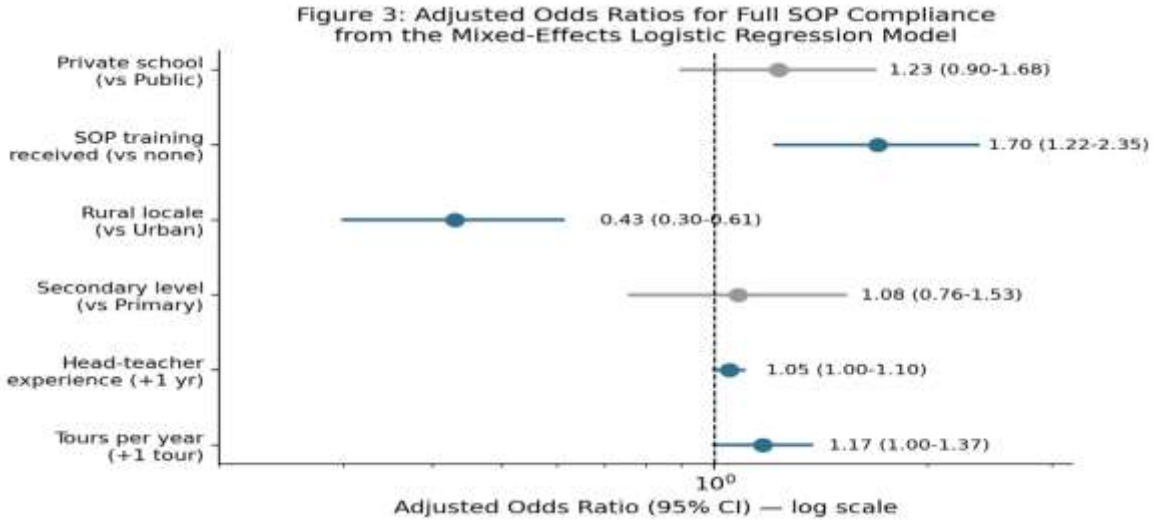


***Figure 3: Adjusted odds ratios (95% CI) for full SOP compliance from the mixed-effects logistic regression model.***

Table 3 and the accompanying forest plot in Figure 3 presented the adjusted associations between school characteristics and full SOP compliance from the mixed-effects logistic regression model, which included a random intercept for district to account for the clustering of schools within eighteen districts of varying local enforcement capacity. After adjustment, SOP training exposure remained the strongest and most statistically robust predictor of compliance, with trained schools having 70% higher adjusted odds of full compliance than untrained schools (aOR = 1.70, 95% CI: 1.22-2.35, p = 0.002), while rural locale emerged as an equally strong negative predictor, with rural schools having 57% lower adjusted odds of compliance than urban schools (aOR = 0.43, 95% CI: 0.30-0.61, p < 0.001). Head-teacher experience and tour frequency were also independently associated with compliance, each additional year of head-teacher experience raising the adjusted odds of compliance by approximately 5% (aOR = 1.05, p = 0.040), and each additional tour conducted per year raising the adjusted odds by approximately 17% (aOR = 1.17, p = 0.046). Notably, private ownership (aOR = 1.23, 95% CI: 0.90-1.68, p = 0.198) and secondary education level (aOR = 1.08, 95% CI: 0.76-1.53, p = 0.671) were no longer statistically significant predictors once training exposure, locale, and the other covariates were held constant. The attenuation of the ownership-type effect between the bivariate and multilevel models constituted one of the most analytically important findings of the study: it indicated that the apparent 'advantage' of private schools observed in raw cross-tabulations was very likely a statistical artefact of their disproportionate concentration in urban areas and their greater access to SOP training, rather than evidence that private management per se conferred a genuine safety advantage — a classic case of confounding being resolved through multivariable adjustment, and one with direct policy relevance, since it implied that closing the compliance gap required targeting training and infrastructure rather than ownership status. At the same time, the persistence of a large and highly significant rural penalty even after adjusting for training exposure suggested that rural disadvantage operated through structural channels beyond training access alone, plausibly including weaker access to PSV-licensed vehicles, greater distances to UNRA-designated inspection garages, and thinner local supervisory capacity, all of which training alone would be unlikely to fully resolve. The moderate width of the confidence intervals around the private-ownership and secondary-level estimates, both of which crossed the null value of 1.0, meant that the study could not rule out a true effect of modest size for these two predictors, and this non-significance was appropriately interpreted as an absence of strong evidence for an effect within the available sample, rather than as definitive proof of no effect whatsoever; the estimated between-district random-effect standard deviation (approximately 0.87 on the log-odds scale) further confirmed that a meaningful share of the variation in compliance lay beyond individual school characteristics, at the level of the district itself.

**Multilevel Determinants of Safety Preparedness**

***Table 4: Mixed-Effects Linear Regression Predicting Safety Preparedness Score (Random Intercept for District)***

| Predictor | Coefficient (SE) | 95% CI | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 52.08 (1.43) | 49.27 to 54.88 | <0.001* |
| Private school (vs Public) | 10.15 (0.97) | 8.25 to 12.05 | <0.001* |
| SOP training received (vs None) | 7.86 (0.96) | 5.98 to 9.74 | <0.001* |
| Rural locale (vs Urban) | -4.27 (0.96) | -6.15 to -2.40 | <0.001* |
| Secondary level (vs Primary) | 2.48 (0.96) | 0.60 to 4.36 | 0.010* |
| Head-teacher experience (+1 yr) | 0.47 (0.09) | 0.29 to 0.65 | <0.001* |
| Tours per year (+1 tour) | -0.40 (0.30) | -0.98 to 0.19 | 0.186 |

Table 4 presented the results of the restricted maximum likelihood (REML) linear mixed-effects model predicting the continuous safety preparedness score, again incorporating a random intercept for district. In contrast to the binary compliance model, private ownership emerged here as a strong, statistically significant, and substantively large predictor, private schools scoring on average 10.15 points higher on the 0-100 preparedness scale than public schools, holding other factors constant (95% CI: 8.25 to 12.05, $p < 0.001$). SOP training exposure was similarly associated with a substantial 7.86-point advantage (95% CI: 5.98 to 9.74, $p < 0.001$), rural locale was associated with a 4.27-point deficit (95% CI: -6.15 to -2.40, $p < 0.001$), secondary-level schools scored 2.48 points higher than primary schools (95% CI: 0.60 to 4.36, $p = 0.010$), and each additional year of head-teacher experience was associated with a 0.47-point increase in preparedness (95% CI: 0.29 to 0.65, $p < 0.001$); tour frequency, unlike in the compliance model, was not significantly associated with the preparedness score ($p = 0.186$). The estimated intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was 0.173, indicating that approximately 17.3% of the total variance in school safety preparedness scores was attributable to differences between districts rather than to the measured school-level characteristics.

The contrast between the binary compliance model, where ownership type was not significant, and the continuous preparedness model, where it was strongly significant, offered an important methodological and substantive insight rather than a contradiction: the binary compliance outcome captured only whether a school cleared every mandatory SOP threshold simultaneously, a comparatively blunt, all-or-nothing measure that discarded partial progress, whereas the continuous preparedness score captured graded differences in overall readiness across a broader set of items, giving the model considerably more statistical power to detect the real, if incremental, advantage that private schools' greater resourcing conferred. The ICC of 0.173, while below the level that would indicate compliance was primarily a district-level phenomenon, was nonetheless well above the threshold typically considered negligible in multilevel modelling and confirmed that the decision to fit a multilevel rather than a conventional single-level regression model was statistically justified; substantively, it meant that even two schools with identical ownership type, locale, training exposure, and head-teacher experience could be expected to differ systematically in their preparedness simply by virtue of being located in different districts, most plausibly reflecting differences in local government enforcement vigour, terrain and road infrastructure, and District Education Office engagement — a finding that directly supported the study's recommendation for district-anchored, and not merely school-anchored, compliance-support interventions.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to establish, empirically, whether the sweeping tour safety policy reforms introduced in the wake of the Kapchorwa tragedy were being translated into consistent practice on the ground, and the evidence assembled here suggests that, six weeks on, they largely were not: fewer than one in three sampled schools had achieved full compliance with the new Standard Operating Procedures, and the multilevel models showed that this shortfall was not randomly distributed but was systematically patterned by access to SOP training and by rural location, even after accounting for school ownership, education level, head-teacher experience, tour frequency, and unobserved district-level heterogeneity. The attenuation of the raw ownership-type gap once training and locale were adjusted for indicated that the apparent advantage of private schools was substantially a function of their disproportionate access to sensitisation and urban infrastructure rather than an inherent capability difference, while the persistence of a sizeable and statistically robust rural penalty, together with an intraclass correlation coefficient showing that roughly one-sixth of the variance in safety preparedness lay between districts, pointed to structural and locally-administered barriers to compliance that individual-school-level interventions alone would be unlikely to resolve. Taken together, the findings illustrate, with the Kapchorwa tragedy as a stark and unfortunately recent case in point, precisely how good policy intentions can collide with uneven implementation capacity, and they underscore that closing Uganda's CBC tour-safety policy-practice gap will require deliberately equity-targeted, training-led, and district-anchored implementation strategies rather than reliance on the regulatory text of the SOPs alone.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritise and rapidly scale up SOP training and sensitisation specifically targeting rural and public schools, using decentralised or mobile training modalities delivered through District Education Offices, given that SOP training exposure was the single most consistent, actionable predictor of compliance across both outcome models.

Strengthen district-level enforcement, monitoring, and support mechanisms — such as routine DEO-led compliance audits, feedback dashboards, and locally tailored technical assistance — in direct response to the substantial between-district variation (ICC = 0.173) identified in this study, rather than relying solely on school-level self-reporting.

Establish a subsidised or pooled compliance-support mechanism, such as a vetted regional school-transport cooperative or a targeted equipment and insurance subsidy scheme, to close the persistent rural-urban compliance gap for schools that are structurally unable to independently absorb the costs of the new SOP requirements.

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