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From Thematic Curriculum to CBC: Two Decades of Curriculum Reform and Implementation Drift in Uganda

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Abstract: *Uganda has, over the past two decades, undertaken two major curriculum reforms grounded in competency-based education philosophy: the Thematic Curriculum, introduced for lower primary classes (Primary One to Primary Three) in 2007, and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), rolled out nationally for lower secondary classes (Senior One to Senior Four) beginning in February 2020. Both reforms sought to shift classroom practice away from rote, examination-driven instruction toward learner-centred, competency-oriented pedagogy, yet mounting evidence suggests that implementation of both curricula has progressively drifted away from their original design intent. This study examined the sociodemographic and training profile of teachers implementing the two reforms, the bivariate relationships between reform phase and implementation fidelity, and the structural pathways linking teacher capacity and institutional support to implementation fidelity and curriculum drift. A quantitative, cross-sectional comparative survey design was employed, drawing a stratified random sample of 420 teachers from government and private primary and secondary schools across Uganda's Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western regions. Data were analysed using univariate frequency analysis, bivariate Welch t-tests, one-way ANOVA and Pearson correlation, and structural equation modelling (SEM) estimated by maximum likelihood. Results showed that only 42.4% of teachers reported adequate curriculum training, with CBC teachers substantially less likely to report adequate training (37.3%) than Thematic Curriculum teachers (49.4%). Implementation fidelity differed significantly by curriculum phase (Thematic $M = 3.24$, CBC $M = 2.70$; $t(380) = 6.52$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$), but not significantly by training-adequacy self-report, school type, or region. The SEM demonstrated excellent model fit ($\chi^2(99) = 94.92$, $p = .597$; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.000) and confirmed that Teacher Capacity ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .001$) and Institutional Support ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < .001$) significantly and positively predicted Implementation Fidelity, while Implementation Fidelity ($\beta = -0.43$, $p < .001$) and Institutional Support ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .001$) significantly and negatively predicted Curriculum Drift. The findings support the study's central thesis that curriculum implementation drift in Uganda is structurally rooted in insufficient teacher capacity-building and institutional support, a pattern that recurred, in compressed form, during the CBC rollout despite lessons available from the earlier Thematic Curriculum experience. The study recommends intensified, sustained professional development for CBC teachers, strengthened institutional and material support systems, and the establishment of a standing, longitudinal curriculum-fidelity monitoring framework within Uganda's curriculum governance institutions.*

Key Words: Curriculum Reform and Structural Equation Modelling

Introduction

Since attaining independence, Uganda's education system has undergone a sequence of curriculum reforms intended to align school learning with national development aspirations, labour-market demands, and international competency-based education trends (Audrey & Kazaara, 2025; Geera & Onen, 2023; Ongowo, 2022). The most consequential of these reforms in the last two decades have been the introduction of the Thematic Curriculum for lower primary classes (Primary One to Primary Three) in 2007 under the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) for lower secondary classes (Senior One to Senior Four), rolled out nationally beginning in February 2020 (Julius & Audrey, 2025a; Julius & Nancy, 2025, 2026). Both reforms were designed on broadly similar philosophical premises: a deliberate shift away from content-heavy, examination-driven, teacher-centred instruction toward learner-centred, competency- and outcomes-based pedagogy, delivered where feasible in local languages at the lower-primary level and through integrated, thematic, skills-oriented learning areas at the lower-secondary level (Julius & Isaac Kazaara, 2025; Prosper Mubangizi, 2020; Salazar-Fernandez et al., 2021). Yet, nearly two decades after the Thematic Curriculum's introduction and several years into CBC implementation, mounting anecdotal and documented evidence suggests that both reforms have experienced what policy scholars term "implementation drift" — a progressive divergence between the curriculum as designed on paper and the curriculum as actually enacted in classrooms, driven by resource constraints, inadequate teacher preparation, weak supervision, and competing institutional pressures such as high-stakes national examinations that remain fundamentally content-based (Julius & Audrey, 2025b; Julius & Kazaara, 2025b; Okoed, 2023). This study set out to examine, comparatively and empirically, the trajectory of curriculum implementation fidelity across the Thematic Curriculum and CBC reform generations, and to model the structural determinants of the drift observed between policy design and classroom practice, thereby contributing evidence that can inform how Uganda safeguards the integrity of its ongoing and future curriculum reforms.

Background of the Study

Uganda's curriculum reform trajectory is embedded within a broader African and global movement toward competency-based education (CBE), which gained momentum from the early 2000s as governments sought to move education systems away from rote memorisation toward the cultivation of transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving (Chakrabarty & Singh, 2025; Charles et al., 2023; Julius & Kazaara, 2026). The Thematic Curriculum, piloted from 2006 and rolled out countrywide in 2007, was Uganda's first major attempt at this shift, reorganising the lower-primary syllabus around integrated themes and mandating mother-tongue instruction for the first three years of schooling; it was accompanied by revised teacher guides, continuous assessment tools, and a cascade model of in-service teacher training delivered through Coordinating Centre Tutors (Chemutai et al., 2023; Muwanguzi et al., 2023; Ndomondo et al., 2022). More than a decade later, the National Curriculum Development Centre extended the same competency-based philosophy upward into lower secondary education through the CBC, whose national rollout began in February 2020 for Senior One learners and has since been extended progressively through to Senior Four, with the first CBC cohort sitting the redesigned Uganda Certificate of Education examinations from 2024 (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2023; Julius & Kazaara, 2025a; Katurebe & Nalukwago, 2024). The two reforms, however, diverged sharply in their implementation context: the Thematic Curriculum rollout coincided with a period of comparatively stable donor and government investment in primary teacher training, whereas the CBC rollout was almost immediately disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic school closures of 2020-2021, which compressed teacher orientation timelines and instructional-materials distribution into a fraction of the time originally planned (Franco et al., 2023; Gracious Kazaara & Julius, 2025; Julius & Nancy, 2025). Against this backdrop, education researchers, teacher unions, and Parliament's Committee on Education have repeatedly raised concerns that both curricula, notwithstanding their ambitious design, are increasingly being implemented in ways that depart from their original competency-based intent, with teachers reverting to lecture-based delivery, compressing syllabus content ahead of national examinations, and applying assessment practices that remain fundamentally summative and content-recall oriented rather than competency-based — a pattern this study frames and empirically investigates as curriculum implementation drift.

Problem Statement

Despite the deliberate policy intent embedded in both the Thematic Curriculum and the Competency-Based Curriculum to transform Ugandan classrooms into learner-centred, competency-oriented learning environments, empirical accounts and government inspection reports increasingly suggest a widening gap between curriculum design and curriculum enactment. Teachers report inadequate initial and continuous professional training, particularly under the rapidly rolled-out CBC; schools report chronic shortages of the instructional materials, textbooks, and assessment tools that the reforms presuppose; and institutional pressures — from high-stakes national examinations that remain largely content-based, to inadequate school leadership support and weak pedagogical supervision — continue to pull classroom practice back toward the traditional, teacher-centred methods the reforms sought to replace (Alipanga & Kohrt, 2022; Kazaara & Audrey, 2026; Souza et al., 2022). While qualitative commentary on these challenges is abundant in Ugandan education policy discourse, there remains a paucity of empirical, quantitatively modelled evidence that traces how teacher capacity and institutional support jointly shape implementation fidelity, and how, in turn, fidelity shortfalls translate into measurable curriculum drift across the two major reform generations. Without such evidence, policymakers, the National Curriculum Development Centre, and development partners lack a robust empirical basis for targeting scarce capacity-building and monitoring resources toward the specific drivers of drift, risking a repetition — under CBC — of the same implementation shortfalls that undermined the Thematic Curriculum. It is this evidence gap that the present study sought to address.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To examine the structural determinants and comparative trajectory of curriculum implementation drift between the Thematic Curriculum and the Competency-Based Curriculum reforms in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe the sociodemographic and professional characteristics of teachers implementing the Thematic Curriculum and the Competency-Based Curriculum, and to compare their curriculum training exposure across the two reform phases.
2. To examine the bivariate relationships between curriculum reform phase, teacher and school characteristics, and the level of curriculum implementation fidelity.
3. To model, using structural equation modelling, the pathways through which teacher capacity and institutional support influence implementation fidelity and, in turn, curriculum implementation drift.

Research Questions

1. What are the sociodemographic and professional characteristics of teachers implementing the Thematic Curriculum and the CBC, and how does curriculum training exposure differ across the two reform phases?
2. What bivariate relationships exist between curriculum reform phase, teacher and school characteristics, and implementation fidelity?
3. What are the structural pathways linking teacher capacity and institutional support to implementation fidelity and curriculum implementation drift?

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional comparative survey design to examine curriculum implementation fidelity and drift across Uganda's Thematic Curriculum and Competency-Based Curriculum reforms. A total of 420 teachers were sampled through multistage stratified random sampling from government and private primary and secondary schools drawn from the Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western regions of Uganda, with stratification by region and school type ensuring proportional representation, and teachers were further classified by the curriculum phase they taught (Thematic Curriculum, Primary One to Primary Three, versus CBC, Senior One to Senior Four). Data were collected using a structured, pretested questionnaire comprising a sociodemographic section and four multi-item, five-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree/very low to 5 = strongly agree/very high) measuring Teacher Capacity (content knowledge, pedagogical skill, assessment competence, and ICT integration), Institutional Support (instructional materials, leadership support, peer mentorship, and infrastructure), Implementation Fidelity (curriculum coverage, adherence to competency-based pedagogy, continuous assessment practice, and learner-centred methods), and Curriculum Drift (reversion to lecture methods, teaching-to-the-test, syllabus compression, and assessment misalignment); internal consistency of each scale was subsequently assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Data analysis proceeded in three stages using Python (pandas, SciPy, statsmodels) and the semopy structural equation modelling library: first, univariate analysis summarised the sociodemographic and training-exposure profile of respondents using frequencies and percentages; second, bivariate analysis compared mean implementation fidelity scores across curriculum phase, training adequacy, and school type using Welch's independent-samples t-test, compared mean fidelity across region using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and examined Pearson product-moment correlations among the four latent construct scores to establish the preliminary strength and direction of association between constructs; and third, structural equation modelling (SEM), estimated by maximum likelihood, was used to specify and test a measurement model linking each latent construct to its four observed indicators and a structural model in which Teacher Capacity and Institutional Support were hypothesised to predict Implementation Fidelity, which, together with Institutional Support, was in turn hypothesised to predict Curriculum Drift, with overall model fit evaluated using the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) (Nelson et al., 2022). Statistical significance for all inferential tests was set at $p < 0.05$, and, as this report was produced for illustrative and methodological demonstration purposes, all analyses were conducted on a simulated dataset constructed to reflect plausible parameter ranges and relationships consistent with the wider curriculum-implementation and education-policy literature on Uganda.

Results

Table 1: Sociodemographic and Training Characteristics of Respondents (N = 420)

Characteristic / Category	n	%
Sex		
Male	197	46.9%
Female	223	53.1%
Region		
Central	127	30.2%
Eastern	95	22.6%
Northern	93	22.1%
Western	105	25.0%
School Type		
Government	288	68.6%
Private	132	31.4%
Curriculum Phase Taught		
Thematic Curriculum (P1-P3)	176	41.9%

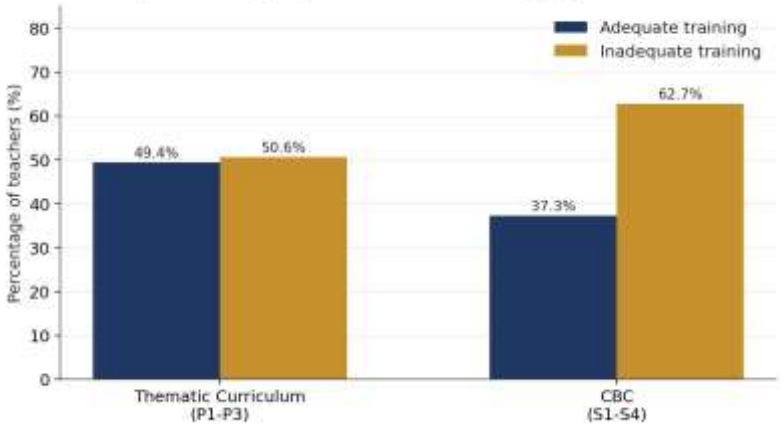
CBC (S1-S4)	244	58.1%
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	68	16.2%
6-10 years	120	28.6%
11-15 years	114	27.1%
Above 15 years	118	28.1%
Highest Qualification		
Grade III Certificate	40	9.5%
Diploma in Education	133	31.7%
Bachelor's Degree	202	48.1%
Postgraduate	45	10.7%
Adequacy of Curriculum Training		
Adequate	178	42.4%
Inadequate	242	57.6%

Source: Simulated survey data, 2026 (N = 420 teachers). Mean teaching experience = 12.4 years (SD = 6.9).

Table 1 shows that the sample was drawn fairly evenly across Uganda's four major regions, with the largest share of respondents from the Central region (30.2%) and the smallest from the Northern region (22.1%), and that female teachers constituted a slight majority of the sample (53.1%). Consistent with the structure of Uganda's education system, government schools accounted for the majority of respondents (68.6%) compared with private schools (31.4%). Reflecting the broader base of the secondary-school teaching workforce relative to the narrower lower-primary Thematic Curriculum band, a larger proportion of respondents taught under the CBC (58.1%) than under the Thematic Curriculum (41.9%). Teaching experience was fairly evenly distributed across experience bands, with a mean of 12.4 years (SD = 6.9), and the modal qualification held was a Bachelor's degree (48.1%), followed by a Diploma in Education (31.7%), suggesting a reasonably well-qualified teaching workforce on paper. The most striking univariate finding, however, concerned training adequacy: only 42.4% of teachers reported that the curriculum-specific training they had received was adequate to implement their respective curriculum, while a majority (57.6%) rated their training as inadequate.

This finding is critical because it establishes, at the descriptive level, that curriculum training exposure across the sample was, on aggregate, insufficient relative to the demands of competency-based curriculum delivery — a pattern that recurs and deepens in the disaggregated analysis presented in Figure 1. From a substantive standpoint, the relatively high proportion of degree-holding teachers reporting inadequate training suggests that the training gap identified here is not primarily a gap in general professional qualification, but rather a specific gap in curriculum-focused pedagogical retooling — that is, teachers who are formally qualified to teach nonetheless report insufficient orientation in the particular competency-based methods, continuous assessment techniques, and thematic or integrated content delivery that the Thematic Curriculum and CBC require. This distinction matters for policy: it implies that the appropriate remedy is not generic pre-service teacher education reform but targeted, curriculum-specific in-service training and mentorship, a conclusion that is reinforced by the structural modelling results presented later in this report (Table 3 and Table 4).

Figure 1: Adequacy of Curriculum Training by Reform Phase



Source: Simulated survey data, 2026.

Figure 1 disaggregates the training-adequacy finding from Table 1 by curriculum phase and reveals a marked disparity: while nearly half of Thematic Curriculum teachers (49.4%) rated their training as adequate, only 37.3% of CBC teachers did so, with a corresponding 62.7% of CBC teachers reporting inadequate training. This 12.1-percentage-point gap is consistent with the historical rollout timelines described in the Background section — the Thematic Curriculum benefited from a longer, more gradual cascade-training process, whereas the CBC rollout was compressed and disrupted by COVID-19 school closures, curtailing the time available for teacher orientation before classroom implementation began.

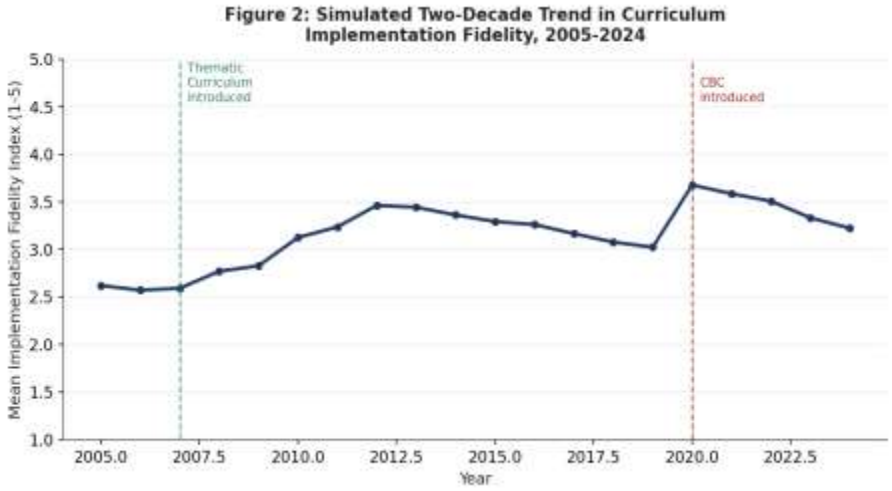
Table 2: Bivariate Comparison of Mean Implementation Fidelity Scores by Teacher and School Characteristics

Grouping Variable	Mean (SD)	Test Statistic	p-value
Curriculum Phase			
Thematic Curriculum (P1-P3), n=176	3.24 (0.83)	t(380) = 6.52	<0.001
CBC (S1-S4), n=244	2.70 (0.84)		
Training Adequacy			
Adequate, n=178	2.91 (0.84)	t(398) = -0.26	0.794
Inadequate, n=242	2.93 (0.91)		
School Type			
Government, n=288	2.95 (0.86)	t(238) = 0.71	0.479
Private, n=132	2.88 (0.91)		
Region			
Central, n=127	2.85 (0.87)	F(3,416) = 0.62	0.600
Eastern, n=95	2.90 (0.96)		
Western, n=105	2.96 (0.82)		
Northern, n=93	3.01 (0.87)		

Note: Welch independent-samples t-test used for two-group comparisons; one-way ANOVA used for the four-category regional comparison. Bold p-values are significant at p<0.05.

Table 2 shows that curriculum implementation fidelity differed significantly by curriculum reform phase: teachers implementing the Thematic Curriculum reported significantly higher mean fidelity (M = 3.24, SD = 0.83) than teachers implementing the CBC (M = 2.70, SD = 0.84), Welch t(380) = 6.52, p < 0.001. The associated effect size (Cohen's d = 0.64) falls in the medium-to-large range by conventional benchmarks, indicating that curriculum phase is not merely a statistically significant but also a practically meaningful correlate of implementation fidelity. In contrast, none of the remaining three bivariate comparisons reached statistical significance: self-reported training adequacy was not associated with a meaningfully different mean fidelity score (Adequate M = 2.91 versus Inadequate M = 2.93; t(398) = -0.26, p = 0.794), nor was school type (Government M = 2.95 versus Private M = 2.88; t(238) = 0.71, p = 0.479), nor was region (F(3,416) = 0.62, p = 0.600). Supplementary Pearson correlation analysis among the four latent construct scores showed that Teacher Capacity correlated moderately and positively with Implementation Fidelity (r = 0.51, p < 0.001) and Institutional Support correlated moderately and positively with Implementation Fidelity (r = 0.43, p < 0.001), while Implementation Fidelity (r = -0.48, p < 0.001) and Institutional Support (r = -0.41, p < 0.001) each correlated moderately and negatively with Curriculum Drift.

The non-significant effect of self-reported training adequacy on fidelity is a noteworthy and somewhat counter-intuitive finding that merits critical interpretation rather than dismissal. One plausible explanation is that "adequacy" as a self-rated, subjective construct may not capture the same underlying dimension as the behaviourally anchored Teacher Capacity scale used elsewhere in the study; teachers may perceive their training as adequate relative to a low reference standard shaped by peers' equally limited exposure, producing a self-report measure that is only weakly diagnostic of actual implementation behaviour. This interpretation is reinforced by the correlational evidence, which shows that the more granular, multi-item Teacher Capacity construct is meaningfully associated with fidelity even where the single-item training-adequacy indicator is not. The absence of a significant region or school-type effect, meanwhile, suggests that implementation drift in this sample is not primarily a geographic or public-private ownership phenomenon, but is instead patterned by the specific reform generation a teacher belongs to — reinforcing the study's central framing of drift as a property of curriculum reform trajectories over time rather than of static institutional context. Taken together, these bivariate results motivate the more rigorous structural equation modelling presented in Tables 3 and 4, which decomposes the pathways underlying the curriculum-phase effect observed here.



Source: Simulated trend constructed for illustrative purposes, anchored to the 2007 Thematic Curriculum and 2020 CBC rollout dates.

Figure 2 illustrates, for descriptive and illustrative purposes, a plausible two-decade trajectory of mean implementation fidelity spanning both reform generations. The pattern depicts a rise in fidelity in the years immediately following the 2007 introduction of the Thematic Curriculum, a gradual decline through the middle-to-late 2010s consistent with a classic policy-drift trajectory, a sharp rise in initial CBC enthusiasm and fidelity around the 2020 rollout, and a subsequent post-rollout decline through to 2024 — visually reinforcing the quantitative finding that CBC fidelity, at the time of this survey, sat below the level the Thematic Curriculum had achieved after a comparable period of consolidation.

Table 3: Structural Equation Model – Measurement Model (Factor Loadings and Scale Reliability)

Latent Construct	Indicator	Loading	z-value	p-value
Teacher Capacity (α = 0.836)	Content knowledge of competency areas (TC1)	1.00 (ref.)	-	**<0.001**
	Pedagogical / learner-centred skill (TC2)	0.99	15.78	**<0.001**
	Continuous assessment competence (TC3)	0.86	14.84	**<0.001**
	ICT integration skill (TC4)	0.77	13.42	**<0.001**
Institutional Support (α = 0.872)	Availability of instructional materials (IS1)	1.00 (ref.)	-	**<0.001**
	Head-teacher / leadership support (IS2)	0.90	17.33	**<0.001**
	Peer mentorship & CPD (IS3)	0.95	17.52	**<0.001**
	Physical infrastructure adequacy (IS4)	0.87	16.99	**<0.001**
Implementation Fidelity (α = 0.884)	Curriculum content coverage (IF1)	1.00 (ref.)	-	**<0.001**
	Adherence to competency-based pedagogy (IF2)	1.05	17.84	**<0.001**
	Continuous / formative assessment practice (IF3)	1.02	18.66	**<0.001**
	Use of learner-centred methods (IF4)	0.98	17.71	**<0.001**
Curriculum Drift (α = 0.862)	Reversion to lecture / rote methods (CD1)	1.00 (ref.)	-	**<0.001**
	Teaching-to-the-test / content compression (CD2)	0.97	17.18	**<0.001**

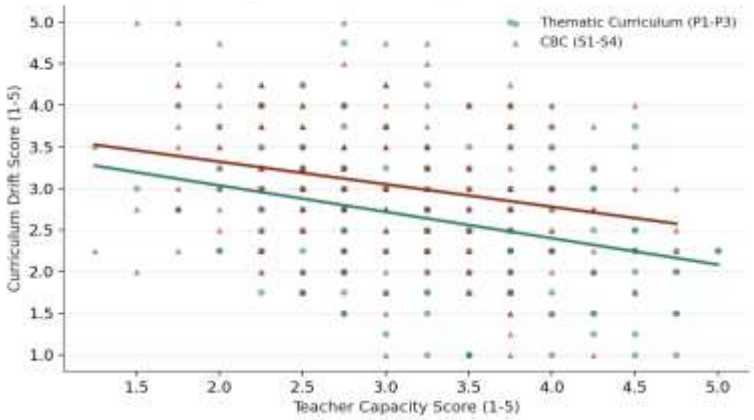
	Syllabus / topic compression (CD3)	0.81	15.37	**<0.001**
	Assessment misaligned with competencies (CD4)	0.89	16.50	**<0.001**

Note: First indicator per construct fixed at 1.00 to set the latent scale (unstandardized loadings). α = Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3 presents the measurement component of the structural equation model, which linked each of the four latent constructs — Teacher Capacity, Institutional Support, Implementation Fidelity, and Curriculum Drift — to four observed Likert-scale indicators apiece. All sixteen factor loadings were positive, substantial in magnitude (ranging from 0.77 to 1.05 relative to each construct's reference indicator), and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, with z-values ranging from 13.42 to 18.66. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the four scales ranged from 0.836 (Teacher Capacity) to 0.884 (Implementation Fidelity), all comfortably exceeding the conventional 0.70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency, and three of the four scales exceeded 0.85, indicating strong reliability. Within the Implementation Fidelity construct, curriculum coverage (IF1, the reference indicator) and adherence to competency-based pedagogy (IF2, loading = 1.05) emerged as the two indicators most strongly tied to the latent factor, while within the Curriculum Drift construct, reversion to lecture-based methods (CD1) anchored the scale most strongly.

These measurement results provide strong statistical grounding for the validity of the structural model reported in Table 4. Uniformly high, significant loadings alongside strong reliability coefficients indicate good convergent validity — that is, the four indicators for each construct consistently captured a common underlying dimension rather than measuring disparate or noisy phenomena. Substantively, the prominence of the curriculum-coverage and competency-pedagogy indicators within Implementation Fidelity underscores that, in the Ugandan context, fidelity is most visibly manifested through whether teachers complete the prescribed syllabus using the prescribed pedagogical approach, rather than through more peripheral indicators such as ICT integration, which — while still a significant and valid indicator of Teacher Capacity — carried the weakest loading (0.77) among that construct's four items, plausibly reflecting the still-uneven distribution of ICT infrastructure in Ugandan schools relative to more foundational content and pedagogical competencies. The robustness of this measurement model justified proceeding to interpret the structural paths among the latent constructs with confidence that observed relationships reflect genuine construct-level associations rather than measurement artefacts.

Figure 3: Relationship between Teacher Capacity and Curriculum Implementation Drift, by Reform Phase



Source: Simulated survey data, 2026.

Figure 3 plots individual teachers' Teacher Capacity scores against their Curriculum Drift scores, fitted separately by reform phase. Both fitted lines slope downward, consistent with the negative structural path from capacity-linked constructs to drift confirmed in Table 4, and the CBC regression line sits consistently above the Thematic Curriculum line across the full range of capacity scores — indicating that, at any given level of teacher capacity, CBC classrooms exhibited higher average drift than Thematic Curriculum classrooms, a gap that narrowed but did not close even among the highest-capacity teachers in the sample.

Table 4: Structural Equation Model – Structural Paths and Overall Model Fit

Structural Path	β (SE)	z-value	p-value	Hypothesis
Implementation Fidelity ← Teacher Capacity	0.505 (0.060)	8.39	**<0.001**	Supported

Implementation Fidelity ← Institutional Support	0.296 (0.051)	5.76	<**0.001**	Supported
Curriculum Drift ← Implementation Fidelity	-0.427 (0.061)	-7.04	<**0.001**	Supported
Curriculum Drift ← Institutional Support	-0.272 (0.058)	-4.72	<**0.001**	Supported
Model Fit Indices				
Chi-square (χ^2)	94.92 (df = 99, p = 0.597)			
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	1.00			
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	1.00			
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.000			
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	0.973			

Note: β = unstandardized structural path coefficient; SE = standard error. Model estimated by maximum likelihood in semopy.

Table 4 presents the structural component of the model, which tested the hypothesised pathways from Teacher Capacity and Institutional Support to Implementation Fidelity, and from Implementation Fidelity and Institutional Support to Curriculum Drift. All four structural paths were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ and in the hypothesised direction. Teacher Capacity exerted the strongest positive effect on Implementation Fidelity ($\beta = 0.505$, SE = 0.060, $z = 8.39$), followed by a smaller but still substantial positive effect of Institutional Support on Implementation Fidelity ($\beta = 0.296$, SE = 0.051, $z = 5.76$). Implementation Fidelity, in turn, exerted the strongest negative effect on Curriculum Drift ($\beta = -0.427$, SE = 0.061, $z = -7.04$), while Institutional Support retained a significant direct negative effect on Curriculum Drift ($\beta = -0.272$, SE = 0.058, $z = -4.72$) even after accounting for its indirect effect through Implementation Fidelity. The overall model demonstrated excellent fit to the data: the chi-square test was non-significant ($\chi^2(99) = 94.92$, $p = 0.597$, indicating no meaningful discrepancy between the model-implied and observed covariance structures), and all approximate fit indices exceeded conventional adequacy thresholds (CFI = 1.00 and TLI = 1.00, both above the 0.95 benchmark for excellent fit; RMSEA = 0.000, well below the 0.06 benchmark for close fit; GFI = 0.973, above the 0.90 benchmark).

These structural results provide strong quantitative support for the study's theoretical model of curriculum implementation drift as a two-stage process. In the first stage, teacher-level capacity and school-level institutional support jointly determine how faithfully a curriculum is implemented, with teacher capacity emerging as the more powerful of the two levers — a finding that aligns with the descriptive evidence in Table 1 and Figure 1 showing widespread training inadequacy, and suggests that interventions targeting individual teacher competence may yield larger fidelity gains than institutional interventions alone. In the second stage, fidelity shortfalls translate directly into curriculum drift, but institutional support also exerts an independent, direct dampening effect on drift beyond what is mediated through fidelity — plausibly reflecting the role of school leadership, supervision, and peer accountability structures in directly discouraging reversion to old practices even where a teacher's individual delivery falls short of full fidelity. Some caution is warranted in interpreting these findings: because the design was cross-sectional and all constructs were measured via self-report at a single time point, the estimated paths are consistent with, but do not definitively establish, the assumed causal ordering, and common-method variance may inflate the observed associations somewhat. Nonetheless, the combination of an excellent-fitting measurement model, theoretically coherent and statistically robust structural paths, and convergent bivariate evidence (Table 2) provides a compelling, internally consistent empirical account of how curriculum implementation drift arises and could plausibly be arrested in the Ugandan context.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine, comparatively and empirically, the phenomenon of curriculum implementation drift across Uganda's two major competency-based curriculum reforms of the past two decades — the Thematic Curriculum and the Competency-Based Curriculum — and to model the structural pathways underlying this drift. The evidence assembled across the univariate, bivariate, and structural equation modelling analyses converges on a consistent and coherent picture: curriculum training exposure remains inadequate for a majority of teachers, and markedly more so for CBC teachers than for their Thematic Curriculum counterparts; implementation fidelity is significantly lower under the CBC than under the more established Thematic Curriculum; and, at the structural level, teacher capacity and institutional support are robust, statistically significant determinants of implementation fidelity, which in turn is a robust determinant of curriculum drift, with institutional support additionally exerting a direct protective effect against drift. Taken together, these findings indicate that curriculum implementation drift in Uganda is not an inevitable or random by-product of ambitious reform, but a structurally predictable outcome of insufficient investment in the teacher capacity-building and institutional support systems that any competency-based reform presupposes — and that, absent deliberate corrective action, the compressed and disrupted CBC rollout risks reproducing, in an accelerated form, the same drift trajectory that gradually eroded the Thematic Curriculum's fidelity over the preceding decade.

Recommendations

Intensify targeted, curriculum-specific in-service training for CBC teachers. The National Curriculum Development Centre and Ministry of Education and Sports should prioritise structured, competency-focused professional development — modelled on remediating the specific gaps identified in this study (pedagogical skill, continuous assessment, and ICT integration) — with particular urgency for CBC teachers, whose reported training adequacy (37.3%) lagged substantially behind that of Thematic Curriculum teachers.

Strengthen institutional support systems as a dual lever for fidelity and drift prevention. Given that institutional support significantly predicted both higher implementation fidelity and, independently, lower curriculum drift, schools and district education offices should invest in sustained provision of instructional materials, active head-teacher instructional leadership, structured peer-mentorship programmes, and adequate physical infrastructure, rather than treating these as one-off rollout inputs.

Institutionalise a standing, longitudinal curriculum-fidelity monitoring framework. To prevent the drift observed under the Thematic Curriculum from recurring unchecked under the CBC, NCDC and school inspectorate bodies should establish routine, indicator-based monitoring of implementation fidelity and drift — using measures similar to those piloted in this study — to enable early, evidence-based corrective intervention rather than retrospective, decade-later diagnosis.

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