The Theoretical-Practical Chasm: A Critical Assessment of the Pedagogical Readiness of Staff Development Fellows for Competence-Based Curriculum Implementation in Zambian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a critical, evidence-based investigation into a pivotal yet under-examined determinant of higher education reform in Zambia: the pedagogical readiness of Staff Development Fellows (SDFs) to catalyze the national transition to a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). It diagnoses a critical **"Theoretical-Practical Chasm,"** a systemic disjuncture between the formal pedagogical knowledge of SDFs and their applied, contextual capacity to broker authentic CBC implementation across diverse academic disciplines. Employing a transformative sequential mixed-methods design across five public universities, the study integrated a validated *Pedagogical Readiness Inventory* with in-depth phenomenological interviews and documentary analysis. Findings revealed a profound readiness deficit, marked by a focus on administrative mechanics over philosophical understanding, a legitimacy crisis in mentoring senior faculty, and training divorced from Zambia's specific infrastructural and epistemological realities. The study's original contribution lies in theorizing the SDF not as a mere trainer but as a **"Pedagogical Broker,"** a role requiring sophisticated translation across disciplinary, generational, and cultural boundaries. It concludes that the success of the CBC paradigm hinges on a systemic investment in building this brokerage capacity; without it, the reform risks degenerating into a superficial compliance exercise, perpetuating a cycle of ambitious policy and failed classroom practice.

Keywords: Staff Development Fellows (SDFs); Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC); Pedagogical Readiness; Theoretical-Practical Gap; Pedagogical Brokerage; Faculty Development; Change Agency; Higher Education Pedagogy; Zambian Universities; Transformative Learning.

INTRODUCTION: THE CRUCIBLE OF CHANGE, STAFF DEVELOPMENT FELLOWS AT THE FRONTIER OF PEDAGOGICAL TRANSFORMATION IN ZAMBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

1.1 The Global Imperative and the Zambian Mandate: A Curriculum at a Crossroads

Higher education systems worldwide stand at a pivotal epoch, compelled to reconcile their venerable traditions with the exigencies of a volatile, complex, and ambiguous 21st century. The dominant paradigm of knowledge transmission, anchored in the lecture hall and the summative examination, faces mounting critique for its perceived insufficiency in cultivating the agile, critical, and innovative minds required to navigate global challenges and drive sustainable development. In response, a profound pedagogical reorientation has gained global momentum: the shift towards Competence-Based Education (CBE). This paradigm moves the locus of education from *what students know* to *what they can do* with what they know, emphasizing applied skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptive learning within authentic contexts (Biesta, 2015; OECD, 2018).

For African nations, this transition carries a particular urgency and a distinctive character. It is framed not only as a matter of global competitiveness but as a cornerstone for achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025), which explicitly call for education systems that foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and citizenship. However, scholars like Amutabi (2021) compellingly argue that this cannot be a process of uncritical mimicry. The adoption of CBE in Africa necessitates a delicate, critical

negotiation, a process of *indigenization* whereby global models is interrogated, adapted, and fused with local epistemologies, values such as Ubuntu, and context-specific socio-economic realities. The goal is not merely to produce a "competent graduate" by a universal standard, but to cultivate a "communitarian competence" that serves and transforms local communities.

Zambia's journey along this path is clearly articulated in its policy architecture. The visionary 1996 policy document, *Educating Our Future*, laid the philosophical groundwork for learner-centered education. This was followed by more concrete, sector-specific action, most notably in the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) sector through the landmark TEVET Act of 2013, which established a rigorous National Qualifications Framework. Universities, as the apex of the education system and the primary producers of the nation's professional and intellectual cadre, are now the focal point of this reform. Mandated by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and driven by the imperative to enhance graduate employability and national development, Zambian universities are undertaking the complex task of transitioning to a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC).

Yet, herein lies a formidable paradox. The very institutions entrusted with leading this cognitive and pedagogical revolution are themselves steeped in the traditions the reform seeks to transcend. The colonial legacy of Zambian higher education, characterized by hierarchical knowledge transmission and a strong disciplinary silo mentality, has proven resilient. Thus, the Zambian university finds itself in a state of profound tension, a site where a future-oriented, transformative policy mandate collides with deeply ingrained institutional cultures and pedagogical habits.

1.2 The Linchpin of Implementation: From Policy Rhetoric to Classroom Reality

The history of educational reform globally is replete with grand designs that faltered at the classroom door. As the seminal work of Michael Fullan (2007) elucidates, educational change is intrinsically a problem of the *learning* of adults, the teachers. Policies, frameworks, and curriculum documents are inert without the agency, understanding, and skill of the academic staff who must enact them. In the context of CBC, this enactment is exceptionally demanding. It requires a lecturer to metamorphose from a "sage on the stage," a disseminator of disciplinary canon, into a "guide on the side," a designer of learning experiences, a facilitator of collaborative inquiry, and an assessor of complex, integrated competencies.

The barriers to this transformation are well-documented and acutely felt in the Zambian context. Faculty may perceive CBC as a devaluation of their deep content expertise, a burdensome administrative imposition that multiplies workload without commensurate reward, or a poorly contextualized import alien to local teaching realities (Gibbs, 2010; Trowler, 2008). Institutional reward systems, heavily skewed towards research publication, offer little incentive for the intensive labour of pedagogical redesign. Furthermore, the practical challenges of implementing student-centered, activity-based learning in conditions of massification overcrowded lecture halls, limited technological infrastructure, and scarce material resources, can appear insurmountable (Otienoh, 2015). This confluence of factors creates a potent recipe for resistance, superficial compliance, or quiet abandonment of reform goals, a phenomenon where the formal structure of the curriculum changes (new syllabi, new learning outcomes) while the core pedagogical practice remains stubbornly unchanged.

Recognizing this implementation cliff, Zambian universities, mirroring global trends, have established institutional mechanisms to support faculty: Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs), Academic Development Units, or similar structures. These units are tasked with building pedagogical capacity, fostering a culture of teaching excellence, and most critically orchestrating the shift to CBC. At the operational heart of these centres are the foot soldiers of pedagogical change: the Staff Development Fellows (SDFs).

1.3 The Staff Development Fellow: An Ambiguous Vanguard

The SDF is typically an early- to mid-career academic, often selected for demonstrated teaching interest or promise, and seconded or appointed to the CTL. In theory, they are the catalytic agents of transformation. Their mandate is monumental: to bridge the chasm between the abstract principles of CBC and the concrete, messy reality of teaching Engineering Mechanics, Clinical Medicine, Constitutional Law, or Bemba Literature. They are expected to be master teachers, instructional designers, faculty coaches, change managers, and institutional

diplomats, all while often navigating their own precarious career paths and developing their disciplinary research profiles.

This role places the SDF in a position of profound structural ambiguity and potential vulnerability. They operate in what is termed a "third space," a hybrid zone between traditional academic authority (rooted in discipline and seniority) and professional support staff (Barnett, 2022). They are asked to mentor and coach senior professors, individuals who may possess decades of experience and significant institutional stature, while they themselves may lack a PhD or a substantial publication record. This inversion of traditional academic hierarchy can trigger a **"legitimacy crisis,"** where the SDF's authority to advise on pedagogy is contested or dismissed. Their expertise, pedagogical knowledge, is often accorded lower status than disciplinary knowledge within the academy's prestige economy.

Moreover, the SDF's preparation for this immensely complex role is frequently haphazard and inadequate. They may be sent to a short generic workshop on "CBC Fundamentals" and then expected to design and deliver developmental programmes for their colleagues. This lack of systematic, rigorous preparation for the *meta-profession* of faculty development is a critical, yet almost universally overlooked, flaw in the reform ecosystem. We invest in the curriculum document but not in the developers of the curriculum's interpreters. It is this glaring omission that forms the core problematic of this research.

1.4 Articulating the Core Problem: The Theoretical-Practical Chasm

This study posits that at the core of the CBC implementation challenge in Zambian universities lies a specific, institutionalized disconnect termed the **"Theoretical-Practical Chasm."** This is not the generic theory-practice gap but a multi-layered fissure that runs through the very architecture of the reform effort:

i. **The Epistemological Chasm:** This is the gap between the constructivist, situated learning theories underpinning CBC (Vygotsky, 1978) and the positivist, knowledge-transmission models that implicitly govern much of university teaching. SDFs may be trained in the *language* of constructivism without a deep, philosophical understanding of its implications for power, knowledge, and authority in the classroom.

ii. **The Pedagogical Chasm:** This is the gap between *knowing-that* (theoretical knowledge of CBC principles like "authentic assessment" or "constructive alignment") and *knowing-how* (the pedagogical artistry to model a truly student-centered seminar, design a robust competency rubric, or facilitate a project-based learning module in a resource-constrained setting).

iii. **The Translational Chasm:** This is the gap between generic, decontextualized CBC training and the need for discipline-specific translation. A one-size-fits-all workshop fails to answer the fundamental question every faculty member asks: "What does this look like in *my* subject?" The SDF needs the ability to broker between generic pedagogy and disciplinary cultures, a form of *Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Faculty Development*.

iv. **The Systemic Chasm:** This is the gap between the policy rhetoric of transformation and the on-ground institutional realities, the workload models, promotion criteria, resource allocations, and space configurations that actively inhibit change. The SDF, operating at the micro-level, often lacks the strategic literacy and agency to navigate or advocate for changes to these macro-level constraints.

An under-prepared SDF, confronting this multi-dimensional chasm, will likely default to a safe, reductionist approach. They may focus on the **"procedural primacy"** of CBC: training faculty to correctly format learning outcomes, populate assessment matrices, and use new syllabus templates. This creates a facade of compliance, the "painting the old coach a new colour" syndrome, while leaving the underlying pedagogical philosophy and practice untouched. The chasm persists, and the reform is neutralized at the point of delivery.

1.5 Research Objectives and Significance

This research, therefore, seeks to shift the analytical lens from the consuming end of faculty development (the resistant lecturer) to the delivering end (the SDF). It proceeds from the conviction that the readiness of the change

agent is a prior and necessary condition for the readiness of the change target. The overarching aim is to conduct a critical assessment of the pedagogical readiness of SDFs for leading CBC implementation and to theorize a framework for enhancing their efficacy.

The specific objectives are:

i. To evaluate SDFs' self-perceived competence and self-efficacy across the core domains of CBC knowledge, modelling skills, and mentorship capabilities.

ii. To explore the lived experiences of SDFs and CTL directors in navigating the professional, interpersonal, and institutional challenges of facilitating pedagogical change.

iii. To analyze the alignment between the formal preparation and support provided to SDFs and the complex, brokering realities of their role.

iv. To synthesize a contextually relevant, theoretically grounded framework for a comprehensive SDF readiness and continuous professional development programme.

The significance of this study is fourfold:

i. **Theoretical:** It introduces and elaborates the concept of the "Theoretical-Practical Chasm" and the corresponding "Pedagogical Broker" model as critical lenses for analyzing curriculum reform, contributing to the fields of higher education studies, change management, and professional development.

ii. **Empirical:** It provides the first systematic, multi-institutional evidence base on the capacities and challenges of SDFs in Zambia, filling a major gap in the literature on African higher education reform.

iii. **Methodological:** It demonstrates the value of a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative readiness assessments with rich qualitative explorations of lived experience, offering a replicable model for similar studies.

iv. **Practical and Strategic:** Its findings and framework offer direct, actionable insights for university vice-chancellors, CTL directors, the Higher Education Authority, and national policymakers. It argues that investing in the strategic development of SDFs is not a peripheral concern but a central leverage point for determining the success or failure of the multi-million-dollar CBC transformation agenda.

1.6 Structure of the Study

Following this introduction, the manuscript delineates the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that scaffold the inquiry, drawing on transformative learning, pedagogical content knowledge, and change agency theory. A comprehensive literature review situates the study within global and African discourses. The methodology chapter details the transformative sequential mixed-methods design. The results are presented thematically, integrating quantitative and qualitative data. The discussion chapter interprets these findings through the theoretical lens, culminating in the proposed "Readiness for Brokerage" framework. The conclusion summarizes the argument and presents targeted, actionable recommendations for institutional and national stakeholders. Ultimately, this research contends that the journey towards a competence-based future for Zambian higher education must begin with a rigorous, empathetic, and strategic assessment of those entrusted to build the bridge.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To critically assess SDF readiness, one must draw from an interdisciplinary theoretical base that illuminates the multifaceted nature of their task. This framework synthesizes theories of **adult learning and transformative change**, **pedagogical content knowledge**, and **institutional change agency** to construct a holistic lens for analysis.

2.1 Transformative Learning Theory and the Adult Learner (Faculty)

Jack Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is central to understanding the challenge SDFs face. TLT posits that deep, meaningful learning in adults requires a **disorienting dilemma** – an experience that disrupts existing frames of reference (habits of mind, meaning perspectives). For many seasoned academics, their own identity as discipline experts and their ingrained, often successful, teaching habits form a robust frame of reference. The mandate to adopt CBC can present such a dilemma, threatening their professional identity and sense of efficacy.

The SDF's role, therefore, is not to "train" but to **facilitate transformative learning** among colleagues. This requires creating a safe, reflective container where faculty can critically examine their assumptions about teaching and knowledge, experiment with new practices, and integrate new perspectives. This demands of the SDF a high degree of emotional intelligence, facilitation skill, and an understanding of adult development psychology, competencies rarely addressed in standard academic preparation. Failure to engage at this transformative level results in superficial compliance, where faculty "add" an outcome to a syllabus without changing their teaching philosophy, a phenomenon known as "painting the old coach a new colour."

2.2 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and its Brokered Form

Lee Shulman's (1986) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), the unique blend of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge that makes for effective teaching, is crucial. A chemistry professor possesses deep content knowledge (CK) and, over time, may develop PCK for teaching chemistry. However, the SDF's role requires a meta-level competency: **Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Faculty Development (PCK-FD)**. This is the specialized knowledge of how to help a chemistry professor (or historian, or lawyer) *develop their own PCK within a CBC framework*.

This PCK-FD involves:

i. **Translating Generic Pedagogy:** Converting principles like "authentic assessment" into discipline-specific examples (e.g., designing a mock public health consultancy report for a Ministry instead of a final exam).

ii. **Navigating Disciplinary Epistemologies:** Understanding how knowledge is constructed and validated in different fields to guide appropriate CBC strategies. A CBC approach in a clinical discipline (with its competency logbooks) will look different from one in philosophy (focused on dialogic reasoning).

iii. **Mentoring for Integration:** Coaching faculty to weave CBC methods seamlessly into their disciplinary narrative, avoiding the perception that pedagogy is an "add-on" to their real work.

The "chasm" often exists because SDFs possess generic pedagogical knowledge but lack the deep mentorship skills and disciplinary sensitivity to broker the development of discipline-specific PCK.

2.3 Change Agency and Diffusion of Innovations in Complex Systems

The work of SDFs is fundamentally about change management within the complex, loosely-coupled systems of universities. Everett Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations theory helps analyze their strategic positioning. SDFs are, by design, intended to be **"change agents," individuals** who influence clients' innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable. Their success depends on their credibility, their communication skills, and their ability to work through **"opinion leaders"** within academic departments.

Furthermore, institutional theory reminds us that universities are characterized by **institutional isomorphism**, a pressure to conform to external norms (like adopting CBC), but also by **decoupling**, where formal structures (a new CBC policy) may be adopted symbolically while core activities (classroom teaching) remain unchanged. The SDF operates precisely in this zone of potential decoupling. Their effectiveness hinges on their ability to connect policy to practice, to reduce decoupling by providing the practical support that makes genuine

implementation possible. This requires political savvy, an understanding of institutional power dynamics, and the ability to build coalitions, skills far beyond conventional teaching expertise.

2.4 Conceptual Synthesis: The Pedagogical Broker

Pulling these strands together, this study conceptualizes the effective SDF as a **"Pedagogical Broker."** A broker operates at the interface of different worlds, facilitating exchange and translation. The SDF must broker between:

i. **Theory and Practice:** Translating educational theory into actionable classroom strategies.

ii. **Policy and Discipline:** Interpreting national and institutional CBC mandates for specific departments.

iii. **CTL and Faculty:** Serving as a trusted liaison between the support unit and the academic heartland.

iv. **Generations:** Mediating between younger academics' digital fluency and senior academics' deep disciplinary mastery.

Brokerage readiness, therefore, is the core construct this research investigates. It encompasses three pillars:

i. **Pedagogical Mastery:** (deep, philosophical understanding and modelling ability of CBC);

ii. **Relational & Mentorship Expertise:** (skills in facilitating adult learning, coaching, and navigating power dynamics); and

iii. **Strategic Institutional Literacy:** (understanding of university governance, change processes, and resource mobilization). The assessment of SDF readiness is an assessment of their brokerage capacity across these three pillars.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The successful implementation of a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in any higher education system is a complex, multi-layered endeavor, contingent upon the alignment of policy, institutional will, resource allocation, and, most critically, human capacity. This review synthesizes global and African scholarship across four interconnected domains to establish the scholarly terrain and identify the critical gap this study addresses: (i) the philosophical and policy evolution of CBC; (ii) the well-documented challenges of faculty as the primary implementers; (iii) the established models and critiques of faculty development; and (iv) the conspicuous absence of scholarship on the developers themselves, the Staff Development Fellows (SDFs).

3.1 The Philosophical Imperative and Policy Diffusion of Competence-Based Education

The global shift towards Competence-Based Education (CBE) is linked to the late-20th century rise of neoliberalism, reframing education as economic investment and graduates as human capital (Biesta, 2015). Proponents argue that CBC enhances transparency, accountability, and relevance by focusing on demonstrable outcomes, what graduates can *do*, rather than on inputs or time served. In the African context, adoption is framed within a dual imperative: addressing persistent skills mismatches and decolonizing educational content and pedagogy. Continental frameworks like CESA 2016-2025 explicitly advocate for curricula that foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking. However, Amutabi (2021) cautions against uncritical importation, arguing for a concept of **"communitarian competence"** that integrates Ubuntu philosophy, indigenous knowledge systems, and locally-defined needs. Within Zambia, the policy trajectory is clear: from *Educating Our Future* (1996) to the TEVET Act (2013). But as Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) note, policy rollout often outpaces the development of pedagogical culture and support infrastructure.

3.2 The Faculty Crucible: Resistance, Capacity, and the Culture of Teaching

Extensive international literature identifies faculty as the ultimate gatekeepers of curricular reform (Fullan, 2007). Barriers to faculty adoption of CBC include: epistemological disconnect (positivist vs. constructivist views of knowledge), perceived administrative burden (Gibbs, 2010), misaligned reward structures (Trowler,

2008), and lack of discipline-specific support (Ashwin, 2020). Studies in East Africa (Otienoh, 2015; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009) confirm these barriers, adding challenges of large classes, limited technology, and inadequate funding for teaching materials. This literature diagnoses "symptoms" at the faculty level but typically prescribes a standard remedy: enhanced faculty development. The agent of this development, however, remains a shadowy figure.

3.3 Faculty Development Models: From "Training" to "Transformative Learning"

Effective faculty development is sustained, collaborative, and practice-based, situated within departments, leveraging communities of practice, engaging faculty as adult learners in transformative reflection (Mezirow, 1991), and encouraging the scholarship of teaching and learning (Steinert et al., 2016). In the African context, scholars like Chikoko and Moyo (2020) argue for a decolonial approach, integrating indigenous pedagogical practices and challenging Western educational hegemony. However, the literature on faculty development, while rich in describing *program design*, remains remarkably silent on the specific preparation of the *facilitators* of these programs. As McDonald and Stockley (2008) note, educational developers occupy a complex "third space" requiring unique skills rarely cultivated in traditional academic pathways, a gap even more pronounced in Africa.

3.4 The Critical Lacuna: The Under-Theorized and Under-Studied Change Agent

A systematic review reveals a stunning absence of empirical research on the **readiness, identity, and agency of Staff Development Fellows (or educational developers) themselves**, particularly in the Global South. The few related studies hint at legitimacy struggles in South Africa (Bosch & Laubscher, 2021; Mphahlele & Msimango, 2021) and under-resourced staff developers in East Africa (Nsereko & Mwanza, 2022). No dedicated, empirical study focuses on the Zambian SDF. This lacuna assumes that a good teacher can naturally become an effective faculty developer, a fallacy. The SDF role demands meta-pedagogical expertise: PCK-FD, adult learning facilitation, change management, and contextual brokerage capacity. Without a deliberate focus on building this capacity, faculty development programs risk perpetuating the very gaps they are meant to bridge.

3.5 Synthesis: Positioning This Study

The literature reveals a chain of potential failure points: robust global policy push for CBC, met by significant faculty-level barriers. The prescribed remedy is sophisticated faculty development, but the agents (SDFs) charged with delivering this development are themselves under-prepared, under-studied, and under-supported. This study, therefore, asks not about faculty readiness for CBC, but about **SDF readiness for enabling faculty readiness**, addressing a fundamental strategic blind spot in Zambian higher education reform.

METHODOLOGY

4.1 A Transformative Sequential Mixed-Methods Design (QUAN → QUAL)

This study employed a **transformative sequential mixed-methods design** (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), framed within a pragmatic and critical paradigm. The design proceeded in two sequential, interconnected phases: a quantitative census survey followed by an in-depth qualitative exploration.

4.2 Phase 1: Quantitative Strand - The Pedagogical Readiness Inventory (PRI)

4.2.1 Population, Sample, and Sampling Strategy

The target population comprised all identified SDFs across the five largest public universities in Zambia, selected purposively for their established Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) and active CBC implementation mandates. A **census approach** was employed. Based on institutional records, the exact population size was **80 SDFs**. A census was achieved with **68 respondents**, yielding a response rate of **85%**.

4.2.2 Instrument: Development and Validation of the Pedagogical Readiness Inventory (PRI)

The core instrument was a newly developed, validated *Pedagogical Readiness Inventory* (PRI). Its development followed a rigorous multi-stage process:

i. **Item Generation:** Items were derived deductively from the theoretical framework's three pillars of brokerage readiness (Pedagogical Mastery, Relational & Mentorship Expertise, Strategic Institutional Literacy). A pool of 45 Likert-scale items (5-point scale) and 10 scenario-based self-efficacy items (0–100 scale) was created.

ii. **Content Validation:** The initial item pool was reviewed by a panel of six experts. Using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR), items with a CVR < 0.78 were revised or discarded.

iii. **Pilot Testing:** The refined PRI was administered to a pilot group of 15 SDFs from one university not included in the main study. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three subscales were 0.84 (Pedagogical Mastery), 0.81 (Relational Expertise), and 0.79 (Institutional Literacy).

iv. **Final Instrument:** The final PRI comprised 35 core items across the three validated subscales, plus demographic and professional background questions.

4.2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection **was conducted** online via a secure, GDPR-compliant platform (Qualtrics), with follow-up reminders to maximise response rate. Quantitative analysis **was performed** using SPSS v.28. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) **were used** to profile overall readiness levels. Inferential statistics, including independent samples t-tests and ANOVA, **were used** to examine readiness differences based on variables such as years of experience, disciplinary background, and prior training in CBC. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) **was conducted** to further validate the factor structure of the PRI.

4.3 Phase 2: Qualitative Strand - Phenomenological Exploration and Documentary Analysis

4.3.1 Qualitative Sampling Strategy

Following analysis of the PRI data, a **purposive criterion sampling** strategy was used to select participants for the qualitative phase. Approximately 20-25 SDFs were selected to represent maximum variation based on their PRI scores (high, medium, low), institutional affiliation, discipline, and gender. All CTL Directors (n=5) from the participating universities were invited to provide managerial and systemic perspectives.

4.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection Methods

a. **In-Depth Phenomenological Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews, lasting 60–90 minutes, **were conducted** with selected SDFs and CTL Directors. The interview protocol explored: (i) lived experiences of brokering CBC, (ii) perceptions of challenges and enablers, (iii) critical incidents of success/failure, and (iv) views on preparation and support needs. Interviews **were** audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

b. **Documentary Analysis:** A systematic analysis of key documents **was conducted** to triangulate interview data, including SDF induction manuals, CBC workshop materials, CTL strategic plans, promotion circulars, and HEA guidelines on CBC implementation.

4.3.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

A hybrid approach to thematic analysis, combining inductive and deductive strategies, **was employed** (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Using NVivo 12, the process involved familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, and triangulation.

4.4 Ethical Considerations, Trustworthiness, and Validity

4.4.1 Ethical Protocols

The study **received** full ethical approval from the Mulungushi University Institutional Review Board (MUIREC Ref: [Approval Number]). Informed consent **was obtained** from all participants. Data **were stored** on

password-protected servers, with identifiers removed.

4.4.2 Ensuring Rigour

a. **Quantitative Validity/Reliability:** Established through PRI validation and the census.
b. **Qualitative Trustworthiness:** Ensured via Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility (prolonged engagement, member checking, triangulation), transferability (thick description), dependability (audit trail), confirmability (reflexivity journals).
c. **Integration Validity:** The sequential design **allowed** the qualitative phase to explore quantitative findings. A joint display table **was used** to map results onto themes.

4.5 Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the sample size (n=68), while representing 85% of the target population, is modest and drawn exclusively from five Zambian public universities; findings may not generalise to private universities or other national contexts. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from the PRI and interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Third, the cross-sectional design captures readiness at a single point in time. Fourth, the research did not include direct observation of SDF practice, a critical direction for future research. Finally, the single-country focus limits comparative insights within the Southern African region. These limitations notwithstanding, the study provides a foundational diagnostic of an under-researched cohort.

RESULTS: MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF THE THEORETICAL-PRACTICAL CHASM

The findings of this transformative sequential mixed-methods study present a coherent, yet stark, picture of the pedagogical readiness of Staff Development Fellows (SDFs) across the five Zambian public universities. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data reveals a landscape marked by significant, multi-layered gaps between the theoretical mandate of CBC and the practical capacity of those tasked with enabling it.

5.1 Quantitative Profile of SDF Readiness (RQ1)

Analysis of the *Pedagogical Readiness Inventory* (PRI) (n=68, response rate 85%) revealed a patterned readiness deficit.

Table 1: Demographic and Professional Characteristics of SDF Respondents (n=68)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	55.9
	Female	30	44.1
Years as SDF	<2 years	29	42.6
	2–5 years	27	39.7
	>5 years	12	17.6
Highest Degree	Bachelor's	18	26.5
	Master's	44	64.7

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	PhD	6	8.8
Discipline	Humanities/Social Sciences	31	45.6
	STEM	25	36.8
	Health Sciences	8	11.8
	Other	4	5.9
Prior CBC training (workshop)	Yes	51	75.0
	No	17	25.0

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for PRI Subscales (5-point scale)

Subscale	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Pedagogical Mastery	3.4	0.8
Relational & Mentorship Expertise	2.7	0.9
Strategic Institutional Literacy	2.9	0.7

*Note: Highest item within Pedagogical Mastery: "formulating learning outcomes" (M=4.1). Lowest items: "coaching senior faculty resistant to CBC" (M=2.2) and "navigating promotion policies" (M=2.5). *

Table 3: ANOVA Comparing PRI Subscale Scores by Years of Experience as SDF

Subscale	<2 years (n=29) M (SD)	2–5 years (n=27) M (SD)	>5 years (n=12) M (SD)	F (2,65)	P	Significant Post-Hoc
Pedagogical Mastery	3.2 (0.9)	3.5 (0.7)	3.6 (0.6)	1.84	.167	none
Relational & Mentorship Expertise	2.3 (0.8)	2.8 (0.9)	3.1 (0.7)	4.52	.014	<2 vs >5*
Strategic Institutional Literacy	2.7 (0.6)	2.9 (0.7)	3.2 (0.5)	3.01	.056	None

Significant at $p < .05$ (Tukey HSD).

Table 4: Principal Component Analysis (PCA) Factor Loadings for PRI Items (Rotated Component Matrix)

Item (abbreviated)	Component 1 (Pedagogical Mastery)	Component 2 (Relational Expertise)	Component 3 (Strategic Literacy)
Formulate CBC learning outcomes	.82	.12	.09
Design authentic assessments	.78	.21	.14
Model student-centred teaching	.74	.25	.11
Coach resistant faculty	.18	.85	.22
Mentor across disciplines	.22	.81	.18
Mediate pedagogical conflicts	.15	.79	.31
Advocate for workload change	.11	.24	.84
Navigate promotion policies	.09	.19	.81
Leverage institutional resources	.14	.28	.78
Eigenvalue	4.12	3.05	2.11
% Of variance explained	28.3	22.7	18.9 (total 69.9%)

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Loadings >.70 are considered strong. The three-factor structure confirms the theoretical pillars.

5.2 The Lived Experience of the Chasm (RQ2 & RQ3)

Qualitative analysis of interviews (n=24 SDFs, 5 CTL Directors) and documents produced five emergent themes that give human texture to the quantitative deficit:

i. **The Legitimacy Bind:** SDFs consistently described a "crisis of authority." One SDF in Social Sciences stated: *"How do I, a lecturer with five years, tell a professor of 30 years to change how he teaches? He sees pedagogy as my hobby, not real academic work."* This was compounded by the absence of formal authority or seniority within their hybrid "third space" role.

ii. **The Workshop Treadmill & Procedural Primacy:** SDFs reported their own preparation was a cycle of generic, decontextualized workshops. Consequently, their support to faculty defaulted to "procedural primacy" – focusing on syllabus template compliance. A CTL Director confirmed: *"We measure success by the number of syllabi converted to CBC format, not by observing changed classroom practice."*

iii. **Disciplinary Translation Barriers:** SDFs expressed profound difficulty brokering generic CBC principles into disciplines like Law, Medicine, or Engineering. An SDF in Engineering noted: *"The workshop said 'use project-based learning.' But with 400 students, no lab budget, and a rigid exam schedule? I had no strategies to offer my colleagues."* This highlights the critical lack of PCK-FD.

iv. **The Resource Chasm:** Interviews universally highlighted the glaring disconnect between CBC ideals and institutional realities: overcrowded lectures, lacking technology, and no funding for authentic assessment materials. This systemic chasm rendered many pedagogical models discussed in training theoretically inapplicable.

v. **Institutional Ambivalence:** Documentary analysis of promotion policies and strategic plans revealed a near-total absence of incentives for engaging in deep pedagogical change. This institutional misalignment implicitly legitimized faculty resistance and marginalized the SDFs' change efforts.

5.3 Analysis of SDF Preparation (RQ4)

Documentary analysis of SDF training materials showed a predominant focus on the "what" of CBC (definitions, outcome writing) with less than 15% of content dedicated to the "how" of facilitation, coaching, or change management. This aligns perfectly with the quantitative finding of high procedural knowledge but low relational and strategic efficacy, confirming that the preparation system itself is engineered to produce a technical, rather than a transformative, broker.

DISCUSSION: THEORIZING THE BROKERAGE DEFICIT AND ITS SYSTEMIC CONSEQUENCES

The integrated results present a compelling and multi-layered diagnosis: the SDF's role as a Pedagogical Broker is fundamentally under-institutionalized, leading to a systemic brokerage deficit that directly sustains the Theoretical-Practical Chasm. This discussion interprets these findings through the study's conceptual framework, moving beyond descriptive diagnosis to a critical analysis of causality and implication.

The quantitative and qualitative data converge to reveal that SDF readiness is skewed towards **procedural primacy**, a focus on the administrative mechanics of CBC, while critically lacking in the relational and strategic capacities required for genuine brokerage. This is not a personal failing but a **structural outcome**. The documented "Workshop Treadmill" of generic training, combined with the absence of a formal career path and institutional legitimacy, actively produces a cohort of change agents equipped to manage the *symbolic* compliance of reform (new syllabi, formatted outcomes) but not its *substantive* enactment (transformed classroom practice). The high self-efficacy in writing learning outcomes alongside the profound "Legitimacy Bind" and "Mentorship Paralysis" illustrates this perfectly: SDFs can repackage the curriculum document but cannot broker the pedagogical transformation of the senior professor who delivers it.

This brokerage deficit must be understood as a critical point of **systemic decoupling**. Institutional theory posits that organizations often decouple formal policies from core activities to manage conflicting pressures. Here, the university formally adopts the CBC mandate to satisfy external authorities like the HEA. However, by investing in a development model that produces only procedurally competent SDFs rather than transformative brokers and by maintaining promotion systems that ignore teaching innovation, the institution creates a perfect buffer. The SDF becomes the manager of the decoupling ritual, ensuring the paperwork of reform is complete while the core activity of teaching remains largely undisturbed. This explains the "painting the old coach a new colour" syndrome not as implementation failure, but as a perverse success of a system designed for symbolic compliance.

Furthermore, the documented decontextualized training represents a subtle form of **pedagogical neo-colonialism**. By uncritically importing and delivering generic, workshop-based CBC models divorced from Zambia's infrastructural realities, disciplinary epistemologies, and the Ubuntu-informed notion of "communitarian competence," the preparation system inadvertently widens the chasm it is meant to bridge. It positions global theory as the ideal and local constraints as mere obstacles, rather than as the essential context for indigenized innovation. This disempowers the SDF, rendering them disseminators of foreign scripts rather than facilitators of contextual translation.

Therefore, the core argument crystallizes: the **Theoretical-Practical Chasm is not an accidental gap but a manufactured one, sustained by a deliberately under-developed brokerage system.** The SDF's readiness deficit is a direct reflection of the system's unconscious investment in managing the *appearance* of change rather

than its *substance*. Closing the chasm requires a radical re-conceptualization of the SDF not as a junior trainer, but as a **Strategic Pedagogical Broker**, whose development in relational artistry, disciplinary translation, and institutional political literacy is the central investment upon which the entire ROI of the CBC reform depends.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM DIAGNOSIS TO STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

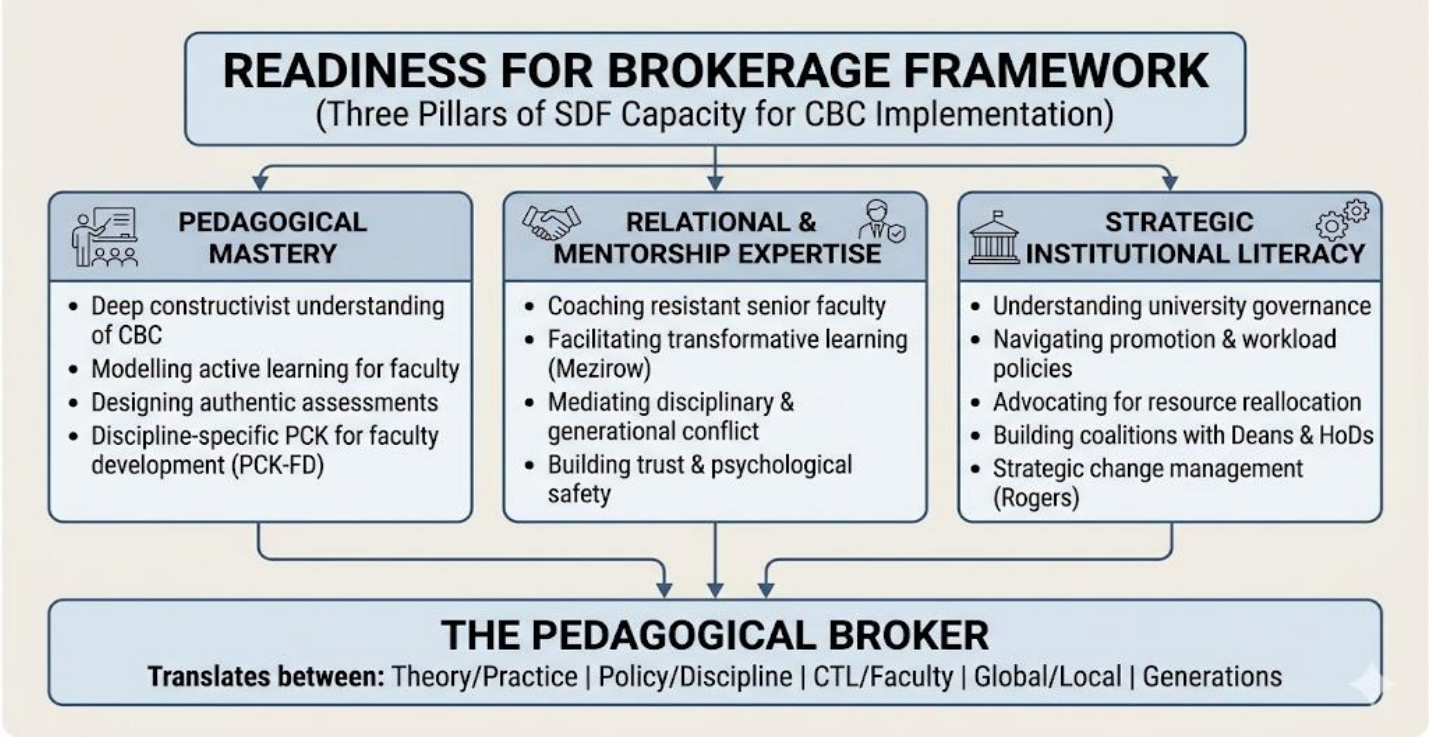
7.1 Conclusion: The Broker as the Keystone

This study has established that the successful implementation of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Zambian universities is imperiled not primarily by faculty resistance, but by a prior and more profound failure: the systemic under-preparation and under-institutionalization of the Staff Development Fellows (SDFs) tasked with brokering the change. The identified **"Theoretical-Practical Chasm"** is not a passive void but an active, institutionally sustained disconnect, reproduced through a cycle of decontextualized training, a legitimacy crisis for brokers, and institutional reward structures that privilege symbolic compliance over substantive pedagogical transformation. The SDF, conceptualized as the essential **"Pedagogical Broker,"** is currently positioned as a manager of this decoupling, rather than as its dismantler. **This study represents an initial diagnostic step; longitudinal research is now urgently needed to track how SDFs' brokerage capacities evolve over their careers and to assess the impact of proposed interventions on actual classroom practice and student learning outcomes.**

The findings present an unambiguous strategic imperative: the multi-million-kwacha, nationally mandated transition to CBC will succeed or fail at the point of brokerage. Investing in curriculum documents, policy frameworks, and generic faculty workshops, while neglecting the specialized, high-level capacity of those who must translate these elements into discipline-specific, context-sensitive practice, is an exercise in futility. Therefore, the journey towards a competence-based future must begin with a radical re-investment in the human infrastructure of change, the SDF. The following recommendations offer a concrete roadmap for this essential strategic pivot.

7.2 Recommendations: A Framework for Building Brokerage Capacity

Figure 1: The Readiness for Brokerage Framework for Staff Development Fellows



A. For University Leadership (Vice-Chancellors, Senates, Councils):

i. **Formalize the SDF Career Pathway:** Establish a recognized, promoted career track for "Pedagogical Broker" or "Senior Academic Developer" within the academic structure, with promotion criteria that equally value excellence in faculty development, pedagogical scholarship, and change leadership alongside traditional research.

ii. **Grant Strategic Mandate and Authority:** Integrate SDFs (or CTL Directors) as voting members on key committees overseeing curriculum, promotion, and resource allocation. This grants them the **strategic institutional literacy** and agency to align systems with pedagogical goals.

iii. **Resource the Reality:** Allocate dedicated, ring-fenced budgets for SDFs to support faculty innovation, including micro-grants for discipline-specific CBC teaching projects, resource development for large-class pedagogy, and technology for authentic assessment.

B. For CTLs and National Bodies (HEA, Ministry of Education):

i. **Establish a Zambian Consortium for Pedagogical Brokerage (ZCPB):** A national consortium, jointly governed by universities and the HEA, should be mandated to design and deliver a standardized, yet flexible, professional qualification for SDFs. This moves beyond ad-hoc workshops to a credentialed profession.

ii. **Implement a "Readiness for Brokerage" Curriculum:** The ZCPB curriculum should be a **practice-based micro-credential programme** structured around the three pillars:

a. **Module 1: Advanced Pedagogical Facilitation**, deep training in adult learning (Mezirow), coaching methodologies, and designing transformative learning experiences for faculty.

b. **Module 2: Disciplinary Translation & PCK-FD**, immersive practicums where SDFs work alongside faculty in specific disciplines to co-design CBC assessments and activities.

c. **Module 3: Institutional Change Agency & Leadership**, training in organizational theory, navigating academic politics, data-driven advocacy, and resource mobilization.

iii. **Create a Community of Practice & Mentorship:** Facilitate a national peer-network of SDFs for ongoing support, moderated by international experts and senior Zambian academics respected for teaching excellence.

C. For SDFs and CTL Directors:

i. **Embrace the Scholar-Practitioner Model:** SDFs should be supported to conduct and publish **Action Research** within their own institutions, studying the CBC transition in their specific contexts. This builds evidence-based practice, enhances legitimacy, and contributes to the global scholarship of educational development.

ii. **Cultivate Strategic Partnerships:** Proactively build alliances with influential "opinion leader" faculty in each department and with mid-level administrators (Deans, HoDs) who control workloads and resources, moving beyond a service-model to a strategic partnership model.

D. For Future Research:

i. Initiate **longitudinal studies** tracking the impact of a "brokerage-capacity" intervention on actual classroom practice and student learning outcomes over a 5-year period.

ii. Conduct comparative studies across SADC nations to develop a regional understanding of effective pedagogical brokerage in resource-constrained, post-colonial university contexts.

In conclusion, this study argues that the CBC is not merely a new curriculum to be implemented, but a new pedagogical culture to be built. Culture is built through relationships, translation, and strategically aligned systems – the precise domain of the broker. By recognizing and resourcing the SDF as the keystone of this architectural shift, Zambian universities can transition from a cycle of reform and disappointment to a sustainable future of authentic, contextually powerful, competence-based education. The choice is not whether to invest in brokers, but whether to invest in the success of the reform itself.

Appendix A: Pedagogical Readiness Inventory (PRI), Sample Items and Scoring Guidelines

A.1 Sample Items (5-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

Pedagogical Mastery Subscale (12 items - sample)

i. I can clearly explain the philosophical differences between a knowledge-based and a competence-based curriculum.

ii. I am confident in modelling a student-centred, active learning session for faculty from any discipline.

iii. I can design authentic assessment tasks (e.g., projects, portfolios, simulations) aligned with CBC outcomes.

iv. I can critique a syllabus to identify where pedagogical practice still reflects transmission models.

Relational & Mentorship Expertise Subscale (12 items - sample)

v. I feel equipped to coach a senior, resistant faculty member through a one-on-one consultation.

vi. I know how to facilitate a reflective dialogue with faculty who are sceptical of CBC.

vii. I can mediate a conflict between two colleagues from different disciplines about what "competence “means.

viii. I am comfortable giving constructive feedback to a professor who has more experience than I do.

Strategic Institutional Literacy Subscale (11 items – sample)

ix. I understand how my university's promotion criteria influence faculty motivation to engage in teaching innovation.

x. I know the key decision-makers and committees that control teaching resources and workload policies.

xi. I can develop a persuasive case (using data) to advocate for reduced class sizes to enable CBC.

xii. I am familiar with the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) quality assurance standards for CBC.

Self-Efficacy Scenario Items (0–100 scale - sample)

xiii. Rate your confidence (0–100) in facilitating a 3-hour workshop for Engineering faculty on how to redesign a traditional final exam into a competency-based project.

A.2 Scoring Guidelines

a. **Subscale scores:** Sum responses for items in each subscale, then divide by number of items to obtain mean subscale score (range 1–5). Higher scores indicate higher self-reported readiness.

b. Interpretation bands (adopted for this study):

i. 1.0–2.4: Low readiness (critical capacity gap)

ii. 2.5–3.4: Moderate readiness (competent in procedural tasks; weak in relational/strategic)

iii. 3.5–5.0: High readiness (brokerage capacity present)

c. Self-efficacy scenarios: Mean score (0–100) reported separately; scores below 50 indicate low confidence in application.

The full instrument (35 core Likert items + 10 scenario items + demographics) is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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