Strategies by Higher Education Institutions to Prepare for Competency-Based Learning in the Context of Secondary Education Reforms

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ABSTRACT

The transition to competency-based learning (CBL) in secondary education has far-reaching implications for higher education institutions (HEIs), which must adapt their curricula, pedagogy, and assessment approaches to ensure continuity in learners' academic progression. While CBL promises to enhance graduates' skills and employability, many HEIs face uncertainties regarding effective strategies, including limited faculty preparedness, inadequate resources, and weak policy frameworks. Without deliberate institutional responses, the risk of misalignment between secondary and higher education could undermine the intended benefits of the reforms. Despite the growing discourse on CBL, limited research has examined how HEIs in Uganda are preparing to align with these changes. This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to explore strategies adopted by selected HEIs in Uganda. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with administrators, faculty, and policymakers, focus group discussions with academic staff, and document analysis of institutional and policy reports. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and generate insights. Findings revealed that HEIs are engaging in diverse strategies such as curriculum redesign, faculty capacity building, adoption of new assessment frameworks, investment in digital learning technologies, and strengthening collaborations with secondary schools and government agencies. However, these efforts are constrained by resource limitations, slow policy alignment, and varied institutional commitment. The study concludes that while HEIs are making progress in adapting to CBL reforms, their preparedness remains uneven and requires stronger policy support, systematic capacity building, and sustainable resourcing. It recommends closer collaboration between the Ministry of Education, HEIs, and secondary schools to foster alignment, as well as targeted investment in faculty training and infrastructure to fully realize the potential of competency-based reforms.

Keywords: Competency-Based Learning (CBL), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Secondary Education Reforms, Curriculum Alignment, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Education systems worldwide are undergoing significant reform, with an increasing shift from traditional knowledge-based approaches to competency-based learning (CBL). Competency-based learning emphasizes the acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that are directly applicable to real-life situations (Javed et al., 2026). Unlike traditional models that prioritize rote memorization and standardized testing, CBL is learner-centered, outcome-oriented, and flexible in pace and assessment methods. Its introduction in secondary schools, particularly within Uganda and other African countries, signals a critical transformation that requires alignment at higher levels of education (Mulumba, 2026; Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025). In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports introduced the new lower secondary curriculum in 2020 with the earlier report (MOES, 2019), which structured around competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, digital

literacy, and lifelong learning. This reform aims to produce graduates who are adaptable to a rapidly changing job market and capable of contributing to sustainable national development, better equipped for higher education, employment, and societal challenges (Atibuni et al., 2024; Kyasanku & Nakawuki, 2026; Mutebi et al., 2026). However, the full realization of these goals depends on whether higher education institutions (HEIs) are prepared to accommodate learners transitioning from a competency-based secondary school background to ensure continuity and coherence in learners' academic journeys. Traditionally, HEIs operate on rigid structures that emphasize credit hours, lecture-based instruction, and summative examinations (Julius & Nancy, 2026). Such approaches are often misaligned with the principles of competency-based learning, creating a potential disconnect between secondary and tertiary education. When universities and colleges do not adapt, learners trained under CBL in secondary schools may struggle with reintegration into traditional higher education settings, undermining the objectives of the reforms (Atibuni et al., 2024). Therefore, higher education must proactively prepare for this transition. The preparedness of HEIs can be assessed in terms of curriculum alignment, faculty training, assessment practices, technological adoption, partnerships with industry, and governance structures (Senior et al., 2025). Therefore, through implementing deliberate strategies, HEIs can ensure that the introduction of CBL at the secondary level creates a seamless educational continuum that supports learners' personal, academic, and professional growth.

Competency-based learning has been widely discussed in global educational literature as a model that aligns learning with 21st-century skills. In countries such as the United States, Finland, and Australia, competency-based models in higher education emphasize mastery of clearly defined outcomes rather than completion of credit hours (Pasi & Dhamak, 2026). Several universities have pioneered flexible CBL degree programs that allow learners to progress upon demonstrating mastery, thereby personalizing learning pathways. In the African context, the discourse on competency-based education (CBE) is gaining momentum. Kenya, for instance, (Peter Odhiambo, 2025), has implemented the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at primary and secondary levels, prompting universities to review their admissions and curriculum policies. Studies (Sifuna, 2020; UNESCO, 2021) show that the transition requires HEIs to align with the skill-based focus of secondary education in order to avoid mismatch between expectations of students and institutional offerings.

The objective of this paper is to examine the strategies being put in place by higher education institutions to be ready for competency-based learning. It also explores challenges and gaps in implementation, offering recommendations for policy makers, university leaders, and educators. By analyzing these dimensions, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on educational transformation, providing context-specific insights for developing countries and global perspectives on ensuring that higher education remains relevant in the era of competency-based education. This study therefore seeks to explore the strategies adopted by higher education institutions in Uganda to prepare for competency-based learning, aiming to provide insights that can strengthen alignment between secondary and tertiary education and enhance the effectiveness of national education reforms. In the Ugandan context, research on HEI preparedness for secondary-level CBL reforms is limited. Most studies focus on the implementation of CBL in secondary schools, with scant attention to how universities and colleges are adapting their curricula, faculty development, and assessment frameworks. This gap underscores the need for empirical studies that explore institutional strategies, challenges, and opportunities, providing insights that can guide policy formulation, institutional planning, and capacity-building initiatives in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competency-Based Learning (CBL) emphasizes the acquisition and demonstration of specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes, moving away from traditional time-based education models. Research indicates that CBL promotes student-centered learning, critical thinking, and practical application of knowledge, which are essential for preparing graduates for higher education and the workforce (McLaughlin et al., 2017). In secondary education, CBL reforms are designed to ensure that learners progress based on mastery rather than seat time, fostering deeper understanding and transferable skills. This paradigm shift has significant implications for higher education institutions (HEIs), which must adapt to the new competencies' students acquire at the secondary level. Several studies highlight the strategies HEIs employ to align with competency-based frameworks. Curriculum redesign is often the primary strategy, involving restructuring courses to emphasize skill mastery and integration across disciplines (Spady, 2015). Faculty capacity building is equally critical, as educators must be trained in innovative teaching methods, assessment practices, and learner-centered pedagogies that support CBL.

Assessment reform, including formative assessments and performance-based evaluations, ensures that students' competencies are accurately measured and reinforced throughout their learning journey (Harden, 2018). Technology adoption also plays a vital role, providing platforms for blended learning, simulations, and digital assessments that facilitate competency development. Partnerships between HEIs, secondary schools, and policymakers are increasingly recognized as essential for effective alignment. Collaborative initiatives enable smoother transitions, shared understanding of competencies, and coordinated support structures (Van der Vleuten et al., 2015). Despite these strategies, challenges remain. Studies report that HEIs often face resource limitations, inconsistent policy guidance, and variable faculty commitment, which hinder the full implementation of CBL-aligned programs (Harris & Smith, 2020). In Uganda, limited studies exist on higher education's preparedness for CBL. However, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has emphasized the need for curriculum reforms that align with the secondary CBL framework. Victoria University and other HEIs are exploring modularized curricula and practical assessments, but implementation remains slow. The literature indicates that while secondary-level CBL reforms are progressing, higher education often lags behind due to rigid structures, limited funding, and resistance to change. Bridging this gap is crucial to sustaining the educational reform trajectory.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivist Learning Theory

Theoretically, CBL is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active, learner-driven process where knowledge is constructed through experiences (Gannar & Kilani, 2025). Constructivism, advanced by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, posits that learning is an active, learner-driven process in which individuals construct knowledge through experiences, reflection, and interaction with their environment (Sarangi, 2026). Therefore, learners are encouraged to engage critically, solve problems, and apply their knowledge to real-life situations. This philosophy aligns closely with the principles of CBL, which emphasize mastery of competencies such as problem-solving, collaboration, digital literacy, and creativity (Thongkorn & Cojorn, 2025). In the context of higher education readiness for CBL, constructivism underscores the need for curriculum redesign to prioritize active learning and interdisciplinary approaches. It also justifies the importance of faculty development, as lecturers must shift from traditional roles as content deliverers to facilitators and mentors guiding students in constructing knowledge. According to (Datta et al., 2024), institutions must move beyond traditional credit-hour systems and adopt flexible frameworks for recognizing learning outcomes. Faculty development is critical, as instructors must be retrained to assess competencies through authentic methods such as portfolios, simulations, and project-based assessments rather than examinations alone. Similarly, assessment reforms rooted in constructivism encourage authentic tasks such as projects, portfolios, and simulations that reflect learners' ability to apply skills in real-world contexts rather than recalling memorized content (Muganga, 2015). Moreover, the theory highlights the role of collaborative learning, where peer-to-peer interaction and industry partnerships enrich the educational experience by situating learning in meaningful contexts (Weng et al., 2024). Framing CBL through the constructivist theory, higher education institutions are positioned to create student-centered, flexible, and competency-driven learning environments that mirror the reform already introduced in secondary schools. Thus, constructivism not only provides theoretical justification for the strategies discussed in this paper but also offers practical guidance for transforming higher education into a space where learners actively build competencies necessary for success in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore strategies employed by higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare for competency-based learning (CBL) in response to ongoing secondary education reforms. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of perceptions, practices, and experiences of stakeholders, rather than reducing them to numerical data (Allsop et al., 2022). This approach provided rich insights into how institutions are positioning themselves to align with new educational reforms. A multiple case study design was used to capture the diversity of strategies across different universities and colleges in Uganda. Case study design was appropriate because it allows for a holistic and contextualized understanding of institutional responses to CBL reforms (Ganesha & Aithal, 2022). The target population consisted of academic administrators, faculty members, and curriculum developers in selected HEIs, alongside policymakers from the Ministry of Education and Sports. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select participants who are directly involved in curriculum design, program coordination, or policy implementation related to CBL.

Approximately 22 participants were anticipated, ensuring representation from both public and private universities.

Data were collected through semi-structured Interviews whereby individual interviews were conducted with administrators, faculty, and policymakers to elicit their views on institutional preparedness, strategies, challenges, and opportunities associated with CBL (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This format provided for flexibility to probe for depth while maintaining consistency across interviews. Secondly, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with groups of faculty members to encourage discussion and uncover shared and divergent perspectives on strategies being implemented at the departmental level (McNaughton & Cowell, 2018). Finally, document Analysis for institutional strategic plans, curriculum frameworks, government circulars, and policy documents were reviewed to triangulate interview data and to understand how strategies are formally articulated. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis and FGDs were transcribed, coded systematically, and grouped into themes; curriculum redesign, faculty capacity building, assessment reform, technology integration, and partnership development. Document analysis provided complementary evidence and reinforced or challenged emerging themes. Reflexivity was maintained throughout to minimize researcher bias. Ethical clearance was sought from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect identities. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Results: Strategies by Higher Education Institutions

The study explored how higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uganda are preparing to align with the transition to competency-based learning (CBL) in secondary education. The findings revealed that HEIs are implementing a range of institutional, pedagogical, and policy-related strategies aimed at ensuring continuity between secondary and higher education systems. The results are presented according to the major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

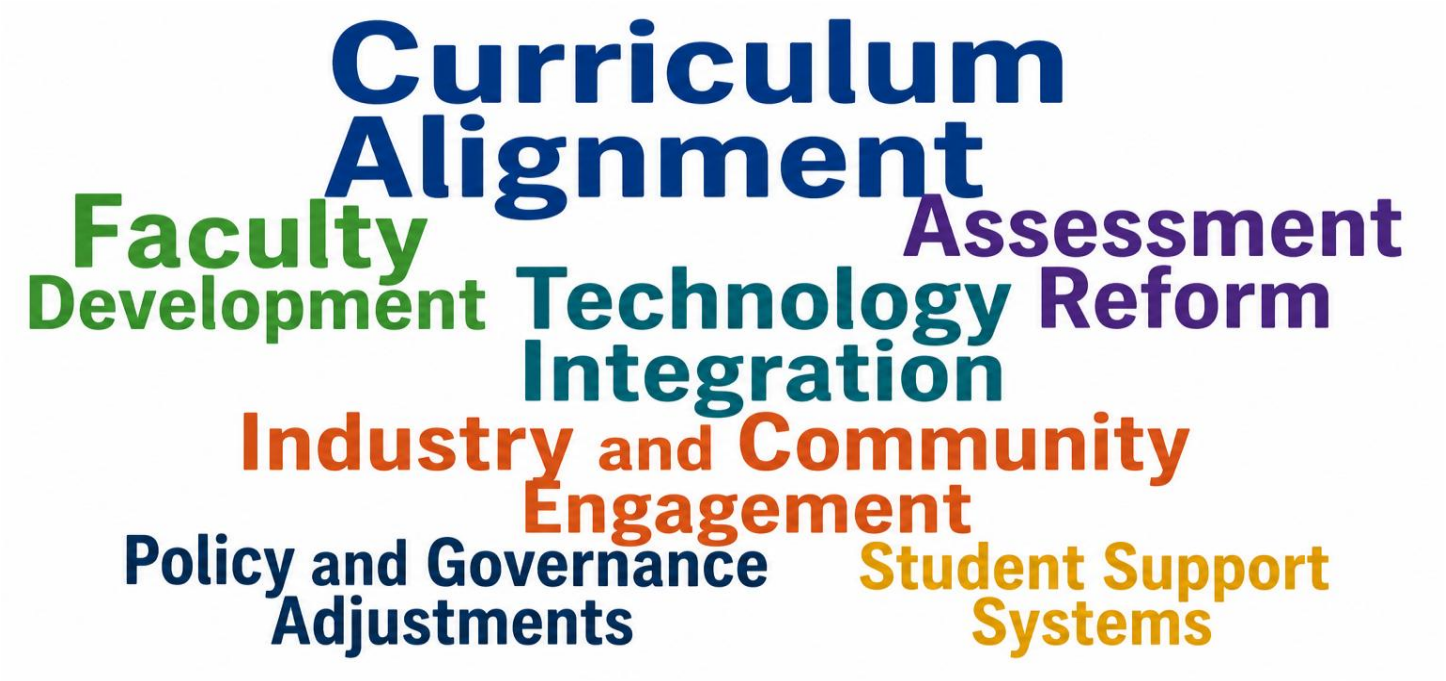

Figure 1: Strategies by higher education institutions

Curriculum alignment

One of the most critical strategies for preparing higher education institutions for competency-based learning is curriculum alignment. This involves redesigning university curricula to shift from content-heavy, exam-driven structures to competency-oriented frameworks that emphasize real-world skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial thinking. Traditional curricula in many universities tend to focus on theoretical knowledge, often detached from practical applications, thereby creating a mismatch between

graduates' skills and labor market demands. Competency-based curriculum reform addresses this gap by ensuring that every program outcome is mapped to specific, measurable competencies that students are expected to demonstrate by graduation as illustrated during an interview with one of the university policy implementers;

> *"…a key aspect of this reform is the modularization of programs, which allows greater flexibility in course delivery and assessment. Modularization enables students to progress at their own pace, accumulate credits, and receive recognition for prior learning including the informal or non-formal experiences, thereby widening access and inclusivity. Additionally, modular approaches allow curricula to be updated more easily in response to technological, social, and economic changes…"*

This demonstrates that by designing interdisciplinary courses, capstone projects, and problem-based learning modules, universities can nurture critical thinking, innovation, and adaptability among students. For instance, by addressing climate change as a learning project may involve contributions from environmental science, economics, political science, and engineering, thereby equipping students with holistic perspectives. Beyond modularization, embedding interdisciplinary approaches into the curriculum is vital. Real-world problems rarely fall within the boundaries of a single discipline; they require integrated knowledge and collaborative approaches. Curriculum alignment, therefore, ensures that higher education institutions are not only responsive to the competencies emphasized at the secondary school level but also capable of producing graduates who are creative, adaptable, and ready to thrive in dynamic work and life environments.

Faculty development

Faculty development is central to the successful implementation of competency-based learning (CBL) in higher education institutions. Lecturers and professors, traditionally trained and accustomed to content delivery and knowledge transmission, must now shift their roles to facilitators, mentors, and assessors of competencies. This requires comprehensive professional development programs that equip faculty with the skills to design competency-based curricula, implement learner-centered pedagogies, and adopt authentic assessment methods as explained during a focus group discussion with one of the university administrators, it was revealed that;

> *"…for instance, instead of relying on examinations that test rote memorization, faculties need to learn how to design performance-based tasks such as case studies, projects, and simulations that allow students to demonstrate mastery of competencies. Professional development initiatives particularly include workshops, short courses, peer mentoring, and collaborative learning communities where lecturers share experiences and best practices…"*

Universities should therefore encourage action research, enabling faculties to experiment with and reflect on new teaching strategies in their own classrooms. Additionally, faculty development must emphasize digital literacy, as technology plays a pivotal role in supporting flexible, individualized learning pathways. Beyond training, institutions must provide incentives and recognition to faculty who embrace competency-based approaches, such as promotions, awards, or research grants tied to teaching innovation. Building faculty capacity in this way ensures that lecturers are not passive recipients of reforms but active drivers of change who model the very competencies critical thinking, adaptability, and collaboration that they seek to instill in students. Without well-prepared faculty, efforts to align higher education with CBL risk being superficial, as curriculum and policy reforms cannot translate into meaningful student learning experiences. Therefore, sustained investment in faculty development is a non-negotiable prerequisite for embedding competency-based learning within higher education.

Assessment Reform

Assessment reform is another cornerstone of higher education's readiness for competency-based learning. Traditional assessment systems, which prioritize written examinations and standardized testing, are inadequate for measuring the breadth of skills and attitudes required in a competency-based framework. To truly capture learners' mastery, universities must transition to authentic, performance-based assessments that reflect real-world tasks and challenges. Such methods may include portfolios, capstone projects, oral presentations, simulations, and work-based assessments that allow students to demonstrate not only knowledge but also its application in practical contexts. Continuous formative assessment should also be emphasized, enabling learners to receive

timely feedback and improve over time rather than relying solely on high-stakes final exams. Technology can play a crucial role in this transformation by providing digital platforms for tracking competencies, issuing digital badges, and maintaining e-portfolios where students compile evidence of their learning and skills across different courses. Assessment reform also calls for the development of clear rubrics and competency frameworks to ensure transparency and fairness. Lecturers must be trained to apply these rubrics consistently and to provide constructive feedback that supports student growth. Furthermore, universities need to rethink grading systems, as traditional percentage scores may not adequately reflect competency attainment; mastery-based grading, for example, focuses on whether or not a student has demonstrated a specific skill rather than ranking them against peers. While challenges such as standardization, scalability, and quality assurance exist, assessment reform remains indispensable for preparing higher education institutions to welcome learners from CBL-oriented secondary schools. It ensures that the assessment process aligns with the ultimate goal of education: producing graduates who are competent, adaptable, and ready for complex societal and professional demands.

Technology Integration

The integration of technology is a vital strategy for embedding competency-based learning into higher education institutions. Digital tools not only enhance teaching and learning but also provide the infrastructure necessary to support personalized, flexible learning pathways. Learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle, Blackboard, or Canvas allow universities to track student progress on individual competencies, offer adaptive learning modules, and facilitate blended or fully online learning experiences. In addition, digital portfolios and e-badges enable students to showcase evidence of their competencies in real time, thereby increasing transparency and employability. Virtual simulations, gamification, and online collaborative tools also enrich the learning experience by immersing students in problem-based tasks that mirror real-world challenges. Technology is particularly critical in large classes, where traditional methods make it difficult to monitor individual student growth; analytics tools within LMS platforms can help lecturers identify struggling students early and provide targeted support. Furthermore, technology integration allows for flexible, self-paced learning, which is a hallmark of competency-based education. For example, students can revisit digital learning materials, retake quizzes, or resubmit assignments until they achieve mastery of a given competency. However, the successful integration of technology requires more than acquiring digital tools; institutions must invest in capacity building for faculty and students, reliable internet infrastructure, and effective policies governing online learning. Equity considerations must also be addressed to ensure that all students, regardless of background, can access and benefit from digital learning opportunities. Ultimately, technology serves as both a driver and enabler of competency-based learning, providing the means to transform assessment, instruction, and curriculum delivery in ways that align with the demands of 21st-century education.

Industry and Community Engagement

Competency-based learning emphasizes real-world relevance, making industry and community engagement an indispensable strategy for higher education institutions. Universities must collaborate with industries, employers, and local communities to co-design curricula that directly reflect workplace needs and societal challenges. Such partnerships ensure that the competencies taught in classrooms are not abstract but tied to actual skills required in employment and entrepreneurship. For example, industries can provide input on curriculum design, participate in guest lectures, and co-develop projects that mirror workplace scenarios. Beyond curriculum design, internships, apprenticeships, and service-learning opportunities allow students to apply their learning in authentic contexts, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. Community engagement also offers avenues for learners to develop competencies such as leadership, problem-solving, and cultural awareness while addressing local challenges in health, agriculture, education, or technology. Moreover, innovation hubs, business incubators, and research collaborations foster entrepreneurial mindsets among students, preparing them to become job creators rather than job seekers. Such collaborations not only benefit students but also enhance the reputation and relevance of higher education institutions in society, creating stronger trust between universities, industries, and communities. For CBL to succeed, feedback loops from employers and communities should be integrated into the evaluation of programs, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness. While challenges exist, such as aligning diverse stakeholder expectations and securing sustainable partnerships, industry and community engagement remain essential for grounding competency-based learning in practical, socially meaningful outcomes. By actively partnering with external stakeholders, universities can ensure that their graduates are competent, adaptable, and ready to thrive in diverse professional and community settings.

Policy and Governance Adjustments

For competency-based learning to be effectively embedded in higher education, supportive policies and governance structures are essential. Traditional university policies are often rigid, emphasizing fixed timelines, standardized credit-hour systems, and uniform progression requirements. These structures conflict with the flexibility and personalization inherent in CBL. Therefore, higher education institutions must develop policies that allow learners to progress at their own pace, accumulate competencies in modular formats, and transfer credits across institutions. National regulatory bodies, such as councils for higher education, also need to adapt their accreditation and quality assurance frameworks to accommodate competency-based models. For example, instead of evaluating programs based on contact hours, regulators should assess whether students demonstrate mastery of clearly defined competencies. Governance adjustments also include establishing institutional committees or taskforces dedicated to overseeing CBL reforms, monitoring implementation, and ensuring faculty and student support. Policies that recognize prior learning both formal and informal are critical to making education more inclusive and flexible. Furthermore, governance must address funding mechanisms, ensuring that resources are allocated to support faculty training, technological infrastructure, and curriculum reform. Universities must also embrace collaborative governance, engaging students, faculty, industry, and community stakeholders in decision-making processes around CBL implementation. Without enabling policies and governance frameworks, even the best-intentioned reforms risk stagnation at the level of theory. Therefore, policy and governance adjustments form the backbone of systemic readiness for CBL, ensuring sustainability, institutional coherence, and alignment with broader national education reforms.

Student Support Systems

Student support systems are a critical component in preparing higher education institutions for competency-based learning (CBL). Learners transitioning from secondary schools where CBL is already implemented may face challenges in adapting to higher education environments that still retain elements of traditional learning structures. To bridge this gap, universities must establish comprehensive support systems that guide students academically, socially, and psychologically. One essential element is the design of robust orientation programs tailored for first-year students entering from CBL backgrounds. Such programs should introduce learners to university expectations, competency frameworks, self-directed learning strategies, and the use of technology in academic work. Beyond orientation, academic advising plays a pivotal role in helping students navigate flexible curricula and modular learning pathways that characterize CBL. Advisors and mentors can provide individualized guidance, helping learners identify strengths, address weaknesses, and chart personalized learning and career trajectories.

Equally important is the provision of psychosocial support. As CBL emphasizes independent, self-paced learning, some students may experience stress, anxiety, or feelings of isolation. Counseling services, peer mentoring schemes, and wellness programs can provide the emotional scaffolding necessary for learners to thrive. Additionally, universities must invest in inclusive learning support for students with diverse needs, including those with disabilities or limited digital literacy, to ensure equitable access to CBL opportunities. Digital learning centers, tutoring programs, and peer-support networks can further enhance learners' engagement and mastery of competencies.

Student support systems also extend to career guidance and employability services. By connecting students with internships, industry mentors, and entrepreneurship opportunities, universities can help them see the practical relevance of their competencies. In this way, student support is not limited to academic success but also extends to personal development and workforce readiness. A well-structured support system therefore ensures that students do not merely survive the transition into higher education under CBL but excel as competent, confident, and adaptable graduates.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite the promising reforms and strategies aimed at preparing higher education institutions for competency-based learning (CBL), several challenges and gaps continue to hinder full readiness and implementation. A primary obstacle is resistance to change among lecturers, administrators, and institutional leaders who are

accustomed to traditional academic systems centered on lectures, rigid curricula, and examination-based assessments. Shifting to a learner-centered model that emphasizes skills, flexibility, and personalized learning often generates uncertainty and skepticism, particularly when change demands significant adjustments to teaching philosophies, workload distribution, and evaluation methods. This resistance is compounded by resource constraints, as many institutions in developing contexts, such as Uganda, struggle with inadequate funding, limited digital infrastructure, and insufficient access to modern teaching and learning technologies. Establishing laboratories, innovation hubs, or robust learning management systems requires substantial investment, which remains difficult to secure in resource-constrained settings.

In addition, policy lag poses a major barrier. While secondary-level reforms have embraced CBL, higher education policy frameworks often trail behind, leading to a misalignment between the competencies developed at lower levels and the expectations in universities. This gap creates confusion for both learners and institutions, as there is no coherent national framework to guide the smooth transition from secondary to tertiary education. Closely related is the issue of assessment standardization. CBL emphasizes mastery of skills, which may vary widely in demonstration across learners, making it difficult for universities to apply uniform grading systems. For instance, two students may demonstrate the same competency in different ways, but rigid assessment structures may fail to recognize such diversity, raising concerns about fairness, comparability, and quality assurance.

Finally, equity concerns remain critical. Competency-based learning heavily relies on access to digital resources, internet connectivity, and personalized support, which are not equally available to all learners. Students from rural areas, low-income backgrounds, or marginalized groups risk being left behind if institutions fail to address digital divides and social inequalities. Without deliberate interventions, CBL may inadvertently widen educational disparities rather than reduce them. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive, systemic reforms that go beyond isolated strategies. Resistance must be addressed through capacity building and change management; resource gaps require targeted investment and partnerships; policies need harmonization across education levels; assessment systems must balance flexibility with quality assurance; and equity considerations must remain at the forefront of reform efforts. Only by addressing these gaps can higher education institutions fully realize the promise of competency-based learning.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of competency-based learning (CBL) at the secondary school level presents both a significant opportunity and a complex challenge for higher education institutions. On one hand, it provides an opportunity to produce learners who are better prepared with practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and adaptability required in modern economies. On the other hand, it challenges universities and colleges to transform traditional structures that have long been centered on rigid curricula, lecture-based teaching, and summative examinations. To ensure a seamless educational continuum, higher education must embrace deliberate reforms that align with the philosophy and practice of CBL. Central to this process is curriculum alignment, which ensures that the competencies emphasized at secondary level are carried forward and further developed at tertiary level. Equally important is faculty development, as lecturers need to shift roles from content deliverers to facilitators of competency-based learning. In addition, assessment reform, technology adoption, industry and community partnerships, and governance reforms remain critical pillars for readiness. Together, these strategies provide higher education with the capacity to adapt, innovate, and remain relevant in an era of educational transformation.

RECOMMENDATION

To ensure the effective integration of competency-based learning (CBL) in higher education, a set of coordinated actions is essential. First, policy alignment is critical, as ministries of education and higher education councils must harmonize frameworks to create coherence between secondary and tertiary education, thereby ensuring that learners' progression is seamless. Equally important is capacity building, which calls for continuous training of faculty and administrators to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to implement CBL effectively. The success of these efforts, however, depends heavily on funding and infrastructure, making it imperative for governments and development partners to invest in digital technologies, modern learning spaces, and relevant educational resources. In addition, collaborative models are needed to foster partnerships among

secondary schools, higher education institutions, and industries, ensuring that curricula and learning experiences are relevant to real-world needs. Finally, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to track the impact of CBL strategies, identify gaps, and support evidence-based improvements. Together, these recommendations provide a roadmap for advancing CBL in higher education sustainably and effectively. Hence by adopting these measures, higher education institutions will not only be prepared for competency-based learning but will also position themselves as engines of innovation and drivers of national development.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adhered to recognized ethical standards for educational research. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review committee. Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, benefits, and potential risks of the study, and their voluntary participation was sought through informed consent.

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