



Original Article

## Pedagogical Experiences of Bishop Stuart University Students on School Practice about the New Lower Secondary School Curriculum in South Western Uganda

Dr. Irene Aheisibwe, PhD<sup>1\*</sup> & Dr. Enock Barigye, PhD<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Stuart University, P. O. Box 09 Mbarara, Uganda.

\* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5910-768>; Email: [iaheisibwe@feams.bsu.ac.ug](mailto:iaheisibwe@feams.bsu.ac.ug)

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The study aimed at documenting pedagogical experiences of Bishop Stuart University students on school practice about the new lower secondary school curriculum in southwestern Uganda. A descriptive research design was employed where 90 students pursuing different programmes in the Faculty of Education, Arts, and Media Studies in the academic year 2021-2022 were involved in the study. Probability sampling technique was used. Data was collected using focus group discussions, documentary analysis, and observation. The findings reveal effective integration of Information communication technology, addressing individuality among learners in activities of integration, lack of adequate instructional resources, need for constant monitoring of learners, lack of finances, poor attitude, and little training on assessment as major pedagogical challenges. It is concluded that this approach shall help in the attainment of Uganda's efforts to achieve Vision 2040, which is seeing Uganda become a middle-income country. The study recommends more training on effective integration of ICT, assessment, evaluation, teacher attitude change, provision of adequate instructional materials, financing, and constant monitoring. Proper planning for afternoon sessions so that students are not left redundant is also essential. It is imperative that teacher training institutions support systems for the proper adoption of the new curriculum. Individuality among learners in activities of integration should also be attended to.

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## INTRODUCTION

Uganda's education system has been criticised for a long time since its graduates' struggle with job-seeking. The lower secondary curriculum has been the same despite several new world needs. The old curriculum could not equip the learners with thorough skills and knowledge to become innovative in order to create jobs but rather teaches them more theoretical work than practical skills and that explains the high levels of unemployment in Uganda. To address these challenges, there was need for an overhaul of the lower secondary education. This was intended to fulfil Uganda's efforts to achieve Vision 2040 which is seeing Uganda become a middle-income country by 2040.

In Uganda, the idea of reviewing the Ordinary level as a foundational educational level has been long. Whereas the process of started in 2010, the actual implementations started in 2020.

The old curriculum emphasized simple recall of information where most learners simply accumulated a lot of information which they could not be put to use. This type of rote learning eventually led to an accumulation of graduates who had little knowledge on skills, values and attitude required in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This prompted the NCDC to overhaul the curriculum to focus on critical thinking, problem-solving, mathematical computation, ICT proficiency, and communication (Yasar & Aslan, 2021). In the new curriculum, content was condensed, new languages such as Chinese included while Physical Education and

Entrepreneurship Education were made compulsory for learners in Senior 1 and 2 (Daily Monitor, 2020). Projects were also integrated into learning so that each learner completes one in each subject. The project entails identifying a community problem and the available local resources and then designing a solution to that problem. Regarding methodology, the teacher is the facilitator of learning, while learners are entirely responsible for their learning. On duration, classroom teaching was reduced to 5 hours a day to allow learners to engage in research, project work, clubs, games, sports and have time for self-study/revision (Chemonges, 2020). Formative Assessment and evaluation which is school based is at 20% while 80% is summative. Learners shall also be subjected to the Directorate of Training Institutions (DIT) examinations like Nutrition and Food Technology, Entrepreneurship, Agriculture, ICT, Technical and Design, and Physical Education to allow them to acquire a competency certification of level 1 on the Uganda Vocational Qualification Framework (UVQF) for the world of work (<https://www.ncdc.go.ug/>).

Conceptually, pedagogical experiences refer to activities that students are involved in the educational process. School practice on the other hand is a practicum where all students intending to be teachers participate in to get acquainted with the roles and obligations of a professional teacher. Theoretically, the study was anchored on the constructivist theory of learning by Jean Piaget which promotes continuous individual learning (Kanno, 2018).

## Statement of the Problem

Education in Uganda aims at providing learners with the knowledge and skills for self-employment. Unfortunately, unemployment rate in Uganda keeps increasing. Currently, the unemployment rate is amounted to 2.94 percent in 2021 (Aaron O'Neill, Jan 30, 2023) which is very alarming.

To address this, the government of Uganda, reviewed the ordinary level curriculum. However, little is known about the pedagogy in this curriculum. As a teacher training institution, Bishop Stuart University was interested in documenting pedagogical experiences of students on school practice about this new curriculum.

## General Purpose

To document pedagogical experiences of Bishop Stuart University Students on school practice about the new lower secondary school curriculum in southwestern Uganda.

## Research Question

What are the pedagogical experiences of Bishop Stuart University Students on school practice about the new lower secondary school curriculum in southwestern Uganda.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted in this study, Kumar (2011). The participants were stratified into zones, then, simple random sampling was used where participants were assigned numbers from 1 to 10, and a random number generator was used to select a total of 90. The study was done among students of Bishop Stuart University doing school practice in the academic year 2021-2022. Bishop Stuart University is a chartered private and not-for-profit University. It was founded by the Ankole Diocese of the Province of the Anglican Church of Uganda in 2002 and was chartered by the government of Uganda in 2014. The University has its campus at Kakoba, Mbarara Municipality, and

Mbarara District in Uganda. Data was collected using focus group discussions, documentary analysis and observation.

## FINDINGS

Findings indicate the new ordinary level curriculum is quite demanding and time consuming. It requires continuous monitoring of learners, recording daily activities and establishing peer teams. Identifying activities of integration and determining participation levels of every learner is quite tedious especially in schools with big numbers of students.

The results indicate that there were methodological challenges especially with the integration of ICT in learning. Most schools have insufficient numbers of functional computers, limited or no internet and most students lack knowledge on how to use ICT in the teaching – process. Besides, the study established that learners are using the opportunity of exposure to the internet to engage in unproductive activities like pornography.

A shortage of instructional resources was also mentioned as a major challenge. The study found that new curriculum textbooks had different information compared to the expected outcomes of the curriculum. This could have been due to giving the contracts for printing textbooks to different publishers. Worse still, some classes and subjects did not have any textbooks for guidance. One student teacher exhibited a message from administrators thus;

*“Following the seminar held at Nabbingo in December 2022, new curriculum books for S.3 will delay coming out following the mistakes made in previous publishers of S.2 and S.1. Therefore, as a teacher, you are supposed to sit down, look at the syllabus and competences in that scheme and conduct a lesson since its learner based. Relax, the books will come late”.*

Student teachers had anticipation of acquiring further knowledge on the implementation of the

new curriculum from senior teachers, which turned out to be the reverse. Some senior teachers were rather influencing the student teachers on school practice to use the old curriculum system.

Student teachers also argued that the new curriculum requires hands-on experience for learners. This has led to financial implications for school management. This was challenging, especially when school management was not providing the required resources for classroom activities. One respondent had this to say,

*“I teach Biology, I need several things to establish a garden for mushrooms to be able to demonstrate what I am teaching, but the school has not provided resources”.*

On assessment and evaluation, the study established that most student teachers were not quite sure how to grade learners using the proposed ranking system. Whereas the continuous assessment using activities of integration was proposed, student teachers were not quite sure about how this would contribute to summative evaluation at the end of the course. This has left us in confusion going back to the old format of assessment, especially at the end of the term. One respondent had this to say,

*“From my observation of different schools, every school has a different assessment report for its learners”.*

The students are also taking the new curriculum for granted since termly reports are no longer there. Learning also stops at 2:00 pm so students are practically redundant for the entire afternoon session. This has led to indiscipline and control issues since these students are adolescents.

In attending to individuality among learners, the study revealed the student had limited knowledge of how to engage all learners especially in activities of integration. Learners who are not naturally assertive were also left unattended.

## DISCUSSION

The findings on the new curriculum being quite demanding to agree with Ralf et al. (2020) who suggest that attending to the individual need of learners is quite overwhelming, especially with large numbers of students. The finding concurs with Cardno (2003), which brings out the issue of increased workload and responsibilities as a teacher attends to the various need of individual learners.

The study findings on the usage of ICT in teaching agree with Kenyon (2017) who states that some high school students use ICT gadgets for video games and pornography which has negatively influenced their behaviour. Govender (2018) conducted a study on teachers and teacher educators about using technology successfully in their classrooms however, it is not optimally used. The findings also agree with Chien (2014) who suggest that most teachers are not adequately trained to use ICT in teaching.

The findings on the shortage of instructional materials concur with a study conducted by Mugabo et al. (2021) in Rwanda and Makunja in Tanzania (2016) where inadequate text books reference materials and syllabus information were indicated as a major challenge in a new curriculum. It should be noted that resources are vital in curriculum management since the success largely depends on available resources in a school. Adopting a new curriculum without relevant resources comprises the quality

Attitude of senior teachers was another significant matter identified where senior teachers influenced teachers on school practice to continue using the old curriculum. This agrees with a study by McNeill et al. (2016) who established that teachers' attitudes, values, and perceptions be greatly determined their practices in the teaching- learning process. It should be noted that teacher's willingness to adopt changes determines the extent a curriculum will be successful.

On assessment and evaluation, the study established that most student teachers were not quite sure how to grade learners using the proposed ranking system. The findings concur with Komba and Mwandanji

(2015) who state that most teachers in Tanzania lacked sufficient Knowledge on assessment and evaluation in the new curriculum. Similarly, the findings are in agreement with Makunja (2016) who suggested most teachers in Tanzania had limited knowledge on assessment and evaluation while implementing a new curriculum.

Marzooghi (2016) conducted a study to identify how students view a new curriculum. It was revealed that the students were taking it for granted especially since there were no frequent assessments which is in agreement with the findings of this study. In attending to individuality among learners, the study revealed the student had limited knowledge of how to engage all learners especially in activities of integration. Learners who are not naturally assertive were also left unattended

## CONCLUSIONS

The study documented several pedagogical experiences which are quite helpful in implementation of the new ordinary-level curriculum. This shall help in the attainment of Uganda's Vision 2040 which is seeing Uganda become a middle-income country by 2040.

## Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- There is a need for more training on integration of ICT in the teaching-learning process, attitude change for teachers, assessment and evaluation since most student teachers are not quite sure how to grade learners using the proposed ranking system.
- Increased supply of instructional materials shall improve the implementation of the new curriculum
- There is a need for constant monitoring and improvement in financing activities of the new curriculum.

- There is also a need for planning for afternoon sessions so that students are not left redundant.
- It is imperative that teacher training institutions support systems for equipping student teachers with knowledge and skills of the new curriculum.
- Individuality among learners in activities of integration should be given adequate attention regardless of age, gender, culture, and ability, so that no student feels isolated.

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