

Research Article

Bridging the Gaps: Enhancing Teachers' Proficiency in Marking and Feedback Practices for Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), introduced in 2020, aims to equip learners with 21st-century skills through learner-centred teaching, formative assessments, and criterion-referenced evaluation. Despite its potential, teachers in Mpigi District face significant challenges in implementing marking and feedback practices essential to CBC's success. This qualitative multiple-case study, grounded in Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory, examined teachers' proficiency in these practices in two public lower secondary schools. The findings revealed systemic gaps, including inconsistent marking methods that rely on traditional practices, limited use of rubrics for competency-based evaluation, and generic, non-actionable feedback. Structural constraints, such as oversized classes, inadequate training, and resource shortages, exacerbate these issues, undermining CBC's intended objectives of fostering critical thinking and problem-solving. Recommendations include mandatory rubric training, targeted continuous professional development (CPD), collaborative marking systems, resource investments, and efforts to reduce class sizes. Addressing these issues is critical to bridging the policy-practice gap, aligning formative assessment practices with CBC's transformative goals, and improving educational outcomes in secondary schools across Uganda

KEYWORDS

Competency-based curriculum, formative assessment, teacher proficiency, marking and feedback, formative assessment literacy

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INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Uganda's secondary education system in 2020 marks a transformative shift from traditional content-driven approaches to learner-centred paradigms that prioritise the acquisition of practical skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values (NCDC, 2019; MoES, 2020). Rooted in global educational trends influenced by thinkers such as John Dewey (1916) and Benjamin Bloom (1956), CBC emphasises real-world application and 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and innovation (Voogt & Roblin, 2012; OECD, 2008). At its core, formative assessment plays a pivotal role in CBC, serving as an ongoing process to monitor learner progress, identify gaps, and adjust instruction accordingly (Vegilante, 2025).

In Uganda, the CBC framework integrates formative assessment through projects, portfolios, Activities of Integration (AOI), observations, and rubrics, aiming to provide evidence of mastery of competencies rather than rote memorisation (NCDC, 2020; UNEB, 2023). However, effective implementation depends on teachers' proficiency in key assessment components, particularly marking (scoring) and feedback. Marking in CBC involves criterion-referenced evaluation using rubrics to assess performance against predefined competencies, while feedback must be timely, specific, and actionable to guide learners' improvement (Wandera et al., 2025). Despite policy directives, challenges persist in Ugandan secondary schools, particularly in rural districts such as Mpigi, where resource constraints, large class sizes, and limited professional development hinder teachers' ability to align assessment practices with CBC goals (Atuhura & Nambi, 2024; Ahabwe, 2022). Mpigi District in Central Uganda, with seven public secondary schools, exemplifies these issues, as evidenced by poor performance in the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and inconsistent adoption of the CBC (UNEB, 2022). Teachers often revert to traditional summative methods, undermining the potential of formative assessment to foster learner autonomy and skill development (Mukiza, 2024; Wambi et al., 2024).

This study investigated teachers' ability to mark and provide effective feedback within CBC formative assessment practices. Marking and feedback are interconnected processes essential for constructive alignment, as per Biggs' theory (1996, 2014), ensuring that assessments reflect intended outcomes and support deep learning. Poor proficiency in these areas compromises CBC's effectiveness, resulting in misaligned instruction and suboptimal learner outcomes.

The introduction is structured as follows: first, it provides historical and contextual background on CBC in Uganda; second, it outlines the problem statement; third, it states the purpose and scope; and fourth, it discusses the significance and justification. Uganda's education system evolved from colonial rote-learning models to post-independence reforms emphasising professionalisation (Gyagenda, 2023; MOES, 1992). The 2019 National Teacher Policy and the 2020 CBC launch aimed to address gaps in teacher competency, aligning with SDG 4 and Vision 2040 (MoES, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). Yet formative assessment implementation remains fragmented, with teachers struggling to mark against competencies and to provide feedback that promotes self-regulation (Namaalwa et al., 2024; Passy & Deha, 2024).

The problem lies in teachers' limited ability to mark and provide effective feedback, often resulting in subjective scoring and vague comments that fail to guide improvement (Kyaruzi et al., 2018; Stiggins, 2017). This misalignment risks undermining CBC's goals and contributes to Mpigi's low UCE results (UNEB, 2022).

The purpose is to examine this proficiency and inform interventions to improve alignment. The scope is limited to two public secondary schools in Mpigi, focusing on marking and feedback from 2020 to 2025.

The significance lies in enhancing teacher assessment literacy, improving learner outcomes, and supporting policy refinement by MOES, NCDC, and UNEB. It contributes to the literature on CBC in Sub-Saharan Africa by extending Biggs' theory to secondary contexts. The justification is the need to bridge policy-practice gaps, ensuring that CBC fosters 21st-century skills and national development (MOES, 2023; Vision 2040).

Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory (Biggs, 2014), which holds that effective education requires coherence among intended learning outcomes (ILOs), teaching and learning activities (TLAs), and assessment tasks (ATs). In CBC, ILOs are competencies such as problem-solving and collaboration; TLAs employ active, learner-centred methods; and ATs, including marking and feedback, must provide evidence of achievement. Constructive alignment draws on constructivism, in which learners build knowledge through engagement and alignment, ensuring that all elements support deep learning (Preeti, 2019). For marking and feedback, this means using rubrics to assess against competencies and providing feedback that scaffolds improvement, aligning with CBC's formative focus (NCDC, 2020). Strengths include promoting coherence (Hamdoun, 2023) and learner-centred pedagogy (Prosser & Trigwell, 2014). In Uganda, it supports CBC's emphasis on authentic tasks, such as projects. However, criticisms highlight its assumption of linear learning and limited consideration of teacher capacity (Nakawuki, Kyasanku, & Tebenkana, 2025). In low-resource contexts, large classes and exam cultures hinder alignment (Kyaruzi et al., 2018). Applied to objective three, the theory frames marking as a rubric-based evaluation aligned with ILOs and feedback as a tool for knowledge construction. Misalignments, such as generic scoring, indicate gaps in teacher proficiency and inform recommendations for CPD to enhance alignment.

Although the CBC outlines ILOs that emphasise 21st-century competencies, problems arise when assessments fail to reflect these outcomes due to systemic barriers. This framework sets the stage for examining gaps in Mpigi teachers' marking and feedback practices and their implications for constructive alignment.

Literature Review

The literature on teachers' ability to mark and provide feedback in CBC formative assessment highlights persistent challenges in assessment literacy, consistency, and alignment with competencies.

Marking and Scoring in Competency-based Curriculum

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) fundamentally shifts assessment from norm-referenced, content-heavy evaluation to criterion-referenced approaches that measure learners' mastery of specific competencies, skills, values, and attitudes (Wandera et al., 2025; KNEC Competency-Based Assessment Framework, 2021). Central to this paradigm is the use of rubrics as structured scoring tools that define clear performance criteria, achievement levels, and descriptive indicators, enabling transparent, objective, and formative feedback to guide learner improvement rather than mere ranking (Wandera et al., 2025; Cañadas, 2021; learnercentered.org on competency-based progressions). Despite these theoretical advantages, empirical evidence points to persistent implementation challenges, particularly in teachers'

capacity for reliable, consistent rubric-based scoring. Teachers frequently lack adequate training in developing, applying, and interpreting rubrics, leading to inconsistent application and reduced assessment validity (Schneider & Bodensohn, 2017). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where CBC reforms have been widely adopted (e.g., in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania), teachers often default to familiar, traditional, norm-referenced, or exam-oriented marking practices due to limited preparation, resource constraints, and entrenched habits (Andiema, 2020; Namaalwa et al., 2024; studies on CBC challenges in SSA). Pre-service and in-service teachers express uncertainty about CBC grading mechanisms, often citing the absence or inadequate provision of standardised rubrics and guidelines (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2023). Efforts to enhance scoring reliability include collaborative task design and joint rubric development among educators, which have shown potential to improve inter-rater agreement (Tetsuro et al., 2021). However, practical barriers, including heavy workloads, large class sizes, time constraints, and insufficient institutional support, frequently undermine collaborative approaches (Quyén & Khairani, 2016; multiple SSA implementation studies highlight overcrowded classrooms and resource shortages).

Assessment tools, such as the Teacher Feedback and Assessment Practices Scale (TFAPS), have been used to examine teachers' practices, revealing strong cultural and contextual influences on how scoring is perceived and enacted (Yan & Pastore, 2022). Emerging technologies offer supplementary support for scoring efficiency and consistency (e.g., automated or digital rubric tools; Mao et al., 2018), yet human professional judgement remains indispensable for interpreting complex competencies, providing nuanced feedback, and ensuring fairness across diverse educational settings.

Overall, although criterion-referenced, rubric-based marking aligns closely with CBC's emphasis on authentic competency demonstration and continuous improvement, effective implementation in contexts such as Sub-Saharan Africa requires sustained teacher professional development, accessible resources (including exemplar rubrics), collaborative structures, and policy alignment to overcome entrenched challenges and realise the curriculum's transformative potential.

Feedback Provision in Competence-based Curriculum

Effective feedback is a cornerstone of successful learning in competency-based curriculum (CBC) frameworks. Mandouit & Hattie (2023) emphasise that feedback must be timely, specific, and forward-looking, focusing on where learners are, where they need to go, and how to bridge the gap, to maximise its impact on achievement. However, empirical evidence from low-resource and Sub-Saharan African contexts reveals persistent challenges in realising these ideals. Studies frequently report generic, delayed, or infrequent feedback, which limits its formative value (e.g., Kidega et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2021). In Rwanda, formative assessment practices, including feedback, remain rare and largely ineffective, often overshadowed by traditional teacher-centred approaches and inadequate pedagogical support (Kazinyirako et al., 2024; Ukobizaba et al., 2023). Teacher-related factors further complicate feedback quality. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in the effectiveness with which educators deliver constructive feedback (Schütze et al., 2017), and emerging evidence suggests that digital tools hold promise for scaling personalised and timely feedback (Voogt et al., 2018). Systemic constraints exacerbate these issues. Large class sizes, heavy workloads, and limited resources diminish teachers' capacity to provide individualised, actionable feedback (Dayal, 2021). In Uganda, feedback practices within CBC implementation often lack actionability and specificity, tending towards oral, vague comments that fail to guide

learner improvement (Kyaruzi et al., 2019) - a pattern consistent with broader observations of generic oral feedback in the current study.

Despite the growing adoption of CBC across Sub-Saharan Africa, significant research gaps persist. There is limited empirical attention to the interplay between marking practices and feedback processes in CBC environments, particularly in low-resource regional settings. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining feedback dynamics in Ugandan CBC classrooms, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how to enhance formative practices in the face of contextual constraints.

Objectives

To examine how teachers' marking and scoring practices align with the principles of Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).

To assess the quality of feedback provided by teachers and its effectiveness in supporting student improvement.

Research Questions

How do teachers' marking practices align with CBC's emphasis on competency-based assessment?

How effective is the feedback provided by teachers in addressing student strengths, weaknesses, and next steps?

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study utilised a qualitative multiple-case study design to provide an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in its natural setting (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). A case study approach was chosen for its ability to provide a holistic examination of complex social processes, such as teachers' assessment practices, within bounded contexts, specifically two public lower secondary schools in Mpigi District. The design focused on multiple cases (the two schools) to enable comparison and triangulation, thereby enhancing the depth and transferability of findings. The approach was interpretive and phenomenological, aiming to understand participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing CBC formative assessments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected iteratively between September 2024 and January 2025, allowing emergent insights to inform subsequent data collection and focusing on post-roll-out maturity. The researcher adopted a reflexive stance, maintaining a research journal to document biases (e.g., prior experience in Ugandan education) and decisions, thereby promoting transparency.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised stakeholders directly involved in CBC implementation in public lower secondary schools in Mpigi District, Central Uganda. This included teachers, school administrators (headteachers), and national education officials from the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants based on their expertise and relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). Two SEED (Secondary Education Expansion and Development) schools were purposively selected: one in Muduuma sub-county (rural, resource-constrained) and one in Kiringente sub-county (semi-urban, slightly better resourced) to capture contextual variation. Within these schools, five teachers

were selected (three from arts subjects and two from sciences) based on criteria including at least five years' experience teaching under CBC, involvement in formative assessments, and willingness to participate. Additionally, the two headteachers were included for their oversight roles. At the national level, one NCDC representative (curriculum specialist) and one UNEB representative (assessment expert) were purposively sampled through official channels to provide policy perspectives. The total sample size was 9 participants (5 teachers, 2 headteachers, 2 officials), determined by data saturation, with recruitment ceasing when new interviews yielded no novel insights (Saunders et al., 2018). This non-probabilistic approach ensured information-rich cases but limited generalizability beyond similar contexts. The study focuses on two public lower secondary schools within Mpigi District, Uganda. This decision reflects a targeted approach to exploring gaps in marking and feedback practices in specific contexts, allowing for qualitative depth over quantitative breadth. Furthermore, secondary school teachers in rural areas face systemic constraints, including large class sizes and limited professional development opportunities, which are critical variables in evaluating proficiency. Selecting two schools aligns with available research resources, enabling focused data collection and analysis (Economic Policy Research Centre, 2025).

Inclusion Criteria

Participants must be certified teachers with at least a bachelor's degree in education or an equivalent qualification. They must have at least five years' teaching experience in secondary schools implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). They must be employed full-time in public or private secondary schools within Mpigi District. They must be willing to participate in the study and provide written informed consent. Priority will be given to teachers who have attended training or workshops on Competency-Based Curriculum principles organised by the Ministry of Education or other educational partners.

Exclusion Criteria

Teachers employed as part-time or temporary staff may have limited involvement in assessments. Teachers who were recently transferred (within the last 6 months) to a CBC school may not have had substantial interaction with CBC assessment practices. Teachers unwilling to participate or to give informed consent.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a triangulated approach that combined in-depth interviews, non-participant lesson observations, and documentary reviews to enhance validity and provide multifaceted perspectives (Denzin, 2017). All data collection took place on-site in the schools or through face-to-face meetings with officials.

In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all nine participants to explore their perceptions and experiences. The interview guide included open-ended questions (e.g., "Describe your process for marking a formative assessment task under CBC") and probes for elaboration (e.g., "Can you give an example?"). Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed. Teachers and headteachers were interviewed in school offices for privacy; officials were interviewed face-to-face. A total of nine interviews were completed, scheduled at participants' convenience to minimise disruption.

Non-Participant Lesson Observations: Observations were conducted in classrooms to capture real-time marking and feedback practices. A structured observation schedule focused on key indicators, including the use of rubrics, scoring consistency,

and feedback delivery. Each observation used a four-point rating scale: Highly Effective (HE: practice fully aligns with CBC principles), Effective (E: practice mostly aligns), Developing (D: practice partially aligns), and Not Evident (NE: practice does not align). Five lessons were observed (three in the arts and two in the sciences), each lasting 40-80 minutes, across the two schools. The researcher sat unobtrusively at the back, taking field notes without intervening. Observations were scheduled in advance and focused on formative assessment activities such as Activities of Integration (AOI) or group projects.

Documentary Review: Relevant documents were reviewed to corroborate interview and observational data. A structured review guide assessed evidence of marking proficiency on a three-level scale: Yes (evident and comprehensive), Partial (some evidence), and No (not evident). Documents included schemes of work, lesson plans, student work samples (e.g., portfolios, AOI tasks), assessment records, and feedback notes from the past two academic terms (Feb-August 2024). With the headteacher's permission, approximately 7 documents per school were accessed, reviewed on-site, and photographed for analysis, with sensitive information redacted.

Ethical protocols included verbal and written informed consent, assurances of confidentiality (using pseudonyms), and the right to withdraw. No incentives were offered, and data were stored securely on password-protected devices.

Data Quality Control

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, multiple strategies were employed to enhance the credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and authenticity of the data. The instruments' credibility and validity were assessed with input from experts in teacher proficiency and Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) assessment. Transferability was supported by detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, interpretations, and theoretical underpinnings (Drisko, 2024). Dependability was achieved through repeated transcript reviews to reach saturation and objective supervisory checks to reduce bias (Stahl & King, 2020). Confirmability was demonstrated by verifying that interpretations aligned with participants' responses and research objectives. Authenticity was maintained by including direct participant quotations to faithfully represent their lived experiences (Chambers & Broadbent, 2025). Reflexivity was practised through a research diary to examine researcher assumptions, power dynamics, and biases (Olmos-Vegas et al., 2023; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2017). Prolonged engagement in school settings builds trust, minimising reactivity. Triangulation combined semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations for cross-validation (Dado et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

This study employed a rigorous qualitative analysis to interpret rich information gathered from multiple sources. All data from in-depth interviews, non-participant lesson observations, and document reviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts and observation notes were then imported into ATLAS.ti for systematic coding and analysis. A comprehensive thematic analysis was adopted as the primary method. Initial open coding identified emerging concepts directly from the raw data. These were grouped into focused codes and organised hierarchically into main themes and sub-themes that corresponded directly to the research objective: teachers' proficiency in marking and scoring CBC formative assessments. A coding framework was developed inductively, remaining aligned with the study's conceptual framework and Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory, and was verified against patterns observed during lessons and evidence from documents. Triangulation was central to enhancing credibility: insights from interviews were cross-content

analysed to supplement thematic analysis during document review (schemes of work, lesson plans, student work samples, AOI tasks, and assessment records). Documents were skimmed, read thoroughly, and interpreted iteratively, with information organised into predefined and emergent categories linked to the research questions. Predefined codes from interview transcripts were applied consistently to documentary data to ensure coherence across sources. Frequencies of key codes and co-occurrence patterns were examined to highlight dominant issues, recurring challenges, and variations in practice. Irrelevant or off-topic data that did not illuminate teachers' proficiency in marking and scoring CBC formative assessments were systematically excluded. Verbatim quotations were retained to preserve participants' authentic voices and provide illustrative evidence. This iterative, multi-source thematic process ensured a trustworthy, transparent, and comprehensive interpretation of teachers' proficiency in marking and scoring CBC formative assessments in the selected schools.

Findings and Discussion

Findings from interviews, observations, and document reviews indicate underdeveloped proficiency. The findings reveal that teachers' competency in marking and scoring Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) formative assessment tools remains significantly underdeveloped. Multiple sources of evidence, including lesson observations, document reviews of student work and assessment records, and interviews with teachers and education officials, consistently point to inconsistent, largely traditional scoring practices that fail to align with CBC principles.

Theme 1: Inconsistent and Traditional Marking and Scoring Practices

Triangulation reveals a pervasive reliance on outdated, binary, or numerical scoring methods that prioritise factual recall over competency demonstration. Document reviews of student work samples, assessment records, schemes of work, and Activities of Integration (AOI) tasks showed a predominant use of ticks, crosses, numerical marks (e.g., 8/10), or right/wrong judgments, with no evidence of rubrics, performance descriptors, levelled criteria, or progression indicators. Lesson observations confirmed this in real time: for instance, during a Physics practical activity, learner participation was not assessed using checklists or competency-aligned recording, leaving performance undocumented despite active engagement. Interviews with teachers described occasional attempts at advanced marking guides or peer discussions to ensure fairness, but these were neither observed nor documented. When asked about the strategies used to ensure consistency when scoring students' responses, one teacher participant noted that.

"By making a marking guide before marking, one can help with scoring. Also, involving students in scoring through a discussion with students so that it is fair... engage learners in scoring and emphasise the key points".
(TAS)

However, these practices (marking guides and involving students in scoring) were not evident in lesson observations or document reviews, which showed little differentiation of levels. In line with this observation, an education official added that teachers are not competent in scoring.

"The challenge is that scoring is subjective because teachers are only supposed to put everything on the Checklist. Teachers are still locked into the old curriculum and, therefore, need more training in scoring"
(NCDC).

Teachers were “still locked into the old curriculum” and submitting superficial checklist results without detailed evaluation. Lesson observation findings also confirmed a focus on right or wrong answers rather than on progression, indicating a lack of proficiency in CBC-aligned scoring. An education official from UNEB clarified this.

The theme of inconsistent marking and scoring practices highlights a fundamental misalignment with CBC principles, which require criterion-referenced, rubric-based marking to provide transparent evidence of mastery of competencies (NCDC, 2020; Wandera et al., 2025). It directly contravenes Biggs’ constructive alignment, in which assessment tasks (ATs) must mirror ILOs (e.g., problem-solving, collaboration) through structured tools that promote deep learning rather than surface-level recall. This inconsistency undermines validity and reliability, echoing broader Sub-Saharan African challenges in which teachers default to familiar norm-referenced practices due to inadequate training and resources (Ahesibwe & Barigye, 2023; similar patterns in rural Ugandan contexts). According to constructive alignment, assessment tasks must be criterion-referenced, utilising tools such as rubrics to objectively evaluate learner progress against intended competencies. However, the study found that teachers rely on traditional marking techniques (e.g., numerical scores) without employing rubrics or performance descriptors (Biggs & Tang, 2014). This disconnect between assessment practices and CBC principles undermines the alignment between assessment tasks (ATs) and intended learning outcomes (ILOs). For example, during a Physics practical, learner participation was observed but not assessed systematically—contrary to the competency-driven outcomes of CBC. Traditional marking practices reveal a misalignment between ATs and ILOs, undermining the CBC’s deeper learning goals. Moving forward, addressing this inconsistency is pivotal to aligning assessment practices with CBC standards.

Theme 2: Limited Use of Rubrics and Alignment with CBC Competencies

Teachers demonstrated minimal proficiency in developing or applying rubrics or scoring guides, resulting in a disconnect between assessments and intended competencies. Interviews revealed difficulties with rubric development, with officials noting that teachers “grapple with the development of rubrics and prioritise ‘facts rather than evidence of the learner’s knowledge.’” National guidelines from NCDC and UNEB exist, but teachers’ awareness does not translate into effective implementation. One education official noted that:

“There are guidelines available from NCDC, UNEB, called assessment guidelines. Teachers are aware of the challenges, but many do not check at least the websites and school portals” (UNEB).

Similarly, another education official noted that:

“Teachers and school administrators are aware of the guidelines. At the school level, they ignore and follow school guidelines and yet the guidelines are very clear.” (NCDC)

Hence, the findings suggest a disconnect between awareness and practical application. Document analysis found no attached rubrics or descriptive indicators in student portfolios and records, and observations showed no differentiated performance levels or student involvement in self- or peer-assessment. Although some teachers expressed awareness of national guidelines (via NCDC/UNEB portals), implementation was weak and often ignored in favour of school-level routines. Rubrics are crucial for assessing competencies, as they provide structured criteria linked to ILOs. The absence of rubric use demonstrates a failure to align assessment tasks (ATs) with CBC’s intended focus on critical thinking, collaboration,

and problem-solving (Mandouit & Hattie, 2023). Without rubrics, teachers' practices remain disconnected from the curriculum's learner-centred methodology, perpetuating surface-level learning. Teachers' struggles with rubric development reflect a lack of alignment necessary to ensure that formative assessment guides improvement and competency mastery (Lestari & Yusuf, 2025). Without rubrics, assessments lack consistency and transparency, further exacerbating the challenge of scoring and providing meaningful feedback.

Summary comparison of lesson observations.

The table addresses the research question regarding teachers' proficiency in grading and scoring formative assessments. Ratings use the provided scale: HE (Highly Effective), E (Effective), D (Developing), NE (Not Evident). If no explicit rating is given but the evidence indicates absence, NE (Not Evident) is applied. Evidence is summarised concisely from observations. SSWA was school 1, and SSB was school 2.

Table.1

Area of Focus/Indicator	School (History) Evidence Rating	SSWA – and	School SSB (Physics Practical) Evidence and Rating
Samples of completed FA tools showing clear scoring/grading	Samples of AOI/tasks just scores, but not grading; others marked without scores. P (Partial towards NE for proper grading)		Not directly addressed in samples; teacher marks, but no scores/grades are evident on the work. NE
Scoring/grading aligns with formative purpose (e.g., identifying improvement, informing instruction)	Teachers marked without scores/comments on improvement or informing instruction. NE		Teacher marks/scores without comments; no specific information on strengths/improvement. NE
Scoring/grading reflects progression of competencies (not just right/wrong)	No evidence; just right/wrong answers. NE		Not evident; focus on marking without progression in competency. NE
Consistent/accurate application of rubrics/scoring guides	No evidence of teacher-developed rubrics/scoring guides. NE		No evidence of rubric or scoring criteria. NE
Differentiation in scoring/grading levels	Scores/grades not included, but tasks marked. P/NE		The teacher marks all tasks, but no scoring/grading or differentiation.
Feedback alongside scores/grades (specific, descriptive on development)	No samples with scores/grades plus specific feedback. NE		No comments/feedback; marking without feedback for learning. NE
Consistency in scoring/grading across students/tasks	No evidence of multiple samples reviewed for consistency. NE		Not demonstrated; no scoring/grading consistency shown. NE

Both observations show very limited or no effective scoring and grading aligned with CBC principles (e.g., criterion-referenced, competency-based progression, use of rubrics, formative focus over right/wrong or numerical grades alone). Practices remain traditional (marking without detailed criteria, feedback, or progression tracking). SSWA had partial evidence of scores in some cases, but SSB shows even less (mostly oral guidance during activity, with no post-activity scoring/grading).

Theme 3: Generic, Non-Actionable Feedback Hindering Formative Potential

Feedback was infrequent, vague, and rarely forward-looking, limiting its ability to guide improvement. Observations noted minimal or no individualised comments during activities, while document reviews revealed oral or generic remarks (e.g., “good” or “try harder”) that lacked specificity about strengths, gaps, or next steps. Teachers and officials acknowledged the importance of feedback but cited workload and class-size barriers to timely, personalised provision. When asked to describe their approaches to giving feedback and the methods they use, a teacher participant noted:

“I talk to them directly in class, tell them how they are progressing and how to improve. Maybe I can design a second activity to encourage learners to practise more and improve. After the assessment, I record scores and provide individual feedback, encouraging them to improve for future tasks” (Teacher)

However, lesson observations revealed limited detail in feedback. The findings showed effective oral feedback during group work, but it lacked written comments or guidance on specific skill development. Teachers recognised correct answers in class but did not provide descriptive feedback on how learners could improve. Feedback was brief, oral, and general (e.g., “Correct,” “Good”), and it lacked clarity, guidance, and a focus on skills. No feedback tools were used, such as reflection sheets, peer assessment prompts, or success criteria charts. This indicates that although teachers interact with students, the feedback they provide does not meet CBC formative assessment standards. Actionable feedback is essential for guiding learners towards improvement. The current dearth of meaningful feedback diminishes the formative potential of CBC assessments and denies learners critical opportunities for growth.

Summary comparison of lesson observation.

The table addresses the research question regarding teachers’ proficiency in providing CBA feedback to students. Ratings use the provided scale: HE (Highly Effective), E (Effective), D (Developing), NE (Not Evident). If no explicit rating is given but the evidence indicates absence, NE (Not Evident) is applied. Evidence is summarised concisely from observations. SSWA is school 1, and SSB is school 2.

Table.2
Observation Findings on Teachers' Ability to Provide CBA Feedback to Students

Area Focus/Indicator	of School History, and Rating	School (SSWA) Evidence	School (SSB) Physics Evidence and Rating
Student work samples with written feedback related to competencies/outcomes		No samples with written feedback; just scores. NE	Not addressed (focusing on oral during lesson); no written feedback evident. NE

Feedback identifies strengths and areas for improvement (re: competence development)	No feedback identifying strengths/improvement (e.g., just “Good) NE	Not directly evident in written form; oral encouragement, but not specific strengths/improvement pinpointed. NE
Differentiated feedback tailored to individual needs/progress	No evidence of differentiated feedback. NE	Not evident; general group/oral guidance. NE
Timelines of feedback	Not addressed NE	Prompts oral feedback during practical/group work to inform immediate learning. E
Specificity of feedback (relates to Los/competencies, pinpoints strengths/improvement)	Not addressed. NE	Oral feedback fairly related to Los/focus but not specific on strengths/improvement (mostly encouragement). E (fairly) / NE (for pinpointing)
Focus on competency development (skills, knowledge, attitudes; progress understanding)	Not addressed. NE	Fairly encourages development; tasks are done as a class, then as a group to build progress. D
Actionability of feedback (clear guidance on next steps)	Not addressed. NE	Guided during the lesson with specific steps/resources (e.g., practical guide). E
Variety of feedback methods	Not addressed. NE	Mostly oral explanations; frequent but limited to oral. D
Student engagement with feedback (understanding checked, used in subsequent learning)	Not addressed. NE	Not evident for checking understanding; fairly used to inform subsequent practical activities. NE / E (fairly)

The table above shows that SSWA provides virtually no feedback (written or otherwise) aligned with CBC (specific, competency-focused developmental). SSB performs better in real-time oral feedback during the practical activity (timely, somewhat actionable, integrated), but lacks written feedback specifically addressing strengths/improvement, variety, differentiation, and checks for understanding. Oral guidance during the lesson serves as a substitute for formal post-assessment feedback.

Therefore, effective feedback must be specific, timely, and focused on task, process, or self-regulation to close learning gaps (Mandouit & Hattie, 2023). Its weakness here further disrupts constructive alignment, as feedback is a key mechanism for linking TLAs to ILOs and enabling iterative improvement. This pattern aligns with Ugandan CBC studies reporting vague oral feedback and systemic constraints that overshadow formative intent (Kyaruzi et al., 2019; broader SSA evidence of ineffective practices in rural settings). These findings align with and extend the

broader literature on assessment in competency-based reforms. The reliance on right/wrong or fact-based scoring, rather than progression-oriented evaluation, contradicts Biggs' (constructive alignment) principle, which emphasises that assessments must align with intended learning outcomes to promote deep understanding and competency development rather than surface recall. Similarly, the absence of clear criteria, consistent standards, and descriptive feedback undermines high-quality formative assessment, as Brookhart (2013) emphasises these elements as essential for transparency, learner growth, and informed instructional decisions. The observed gaps echo studies in similar contexts, such as those by Aheisibwe and Barigye (2023), in which uncertainty persisted regarding the integration of competency-aligned grading into the overall evaluation.

The persistence of an "implementation gap" in which awareness of guidelines fails to translate into practice mirrors Guskey's (2002) model of teacher change, which holds that meaningful shifts in beliefs and practices often require evidence of improved student outcomes before attitudes change through training alone. Without structured support, follow-up, and contextual relevance, teachers revert to familiar methods. This also aligns with Kennedy (2014), who argues that professional learning must connect directly to classroom practice and school realities to effect change; abstract knowledge of frameworks rarely suffices without targeted application. The EPRC follow-up survey conducted in 2025 highlighted emerging trends in the implementation of Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). While there were gains in teacher acceptance and growing confidence in the CBC framework, significant assessment gaps persisted. The findings indicated that teachers were increasingly integrating CBC principles into lesson planning but continued to struggle to adopt effective marking and feedback mechanisms (EPRC, 2025). Additionally, systemic issues such as oversized classes and insufficient resources remained unchanged, as highlighted in the 2025 report. There was progress in professional development initiatives, which contributed to improved teacher alignment with CBC's learner-centred goals, yet formative assessment practices lagged behind the required standards (APHRC, 2025). These findings reinforce the themes identified in the Mpigi District case study, particularly the challenges of rubric development and the provision of actionable feedback. By addressing assessment literacy and tackling systemic barriers, further progress in CBC adoption can be scaffolded. However, achieving full alignment will require sustained policy refinement and investment in resources (EPRC, 2025).

Feedback in formative assessment not only validates alignment but also guides learners in bridging the gap between their current performance and expected competencies. The findings indicate that feedback is often vague, sporadic, and generic (e.g., "good" or "try harder"). Consistent with Biggs' theory, effective feedback must be competency-focused, providing actionable steps for improvement (Mandouit & Hattie, 2023). The failure to deliver specific, forward-looking feedback limits students' ability to reflect and make meaningful progress, undermining the essential link between TLAs and ILOs.

Overall, these themes collectively demonstrate underdeveloped teacher proficiency in marking and providing effective feedback, characterised by inconsistent practices, underutilisation of rubrics, and generic feedback that fails to support competency development. Grounded in Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory, the findings expose a clear misalignment: while ILOs emphasise practical skills and competencies, teaching-learning activities (TLAs) may incorporate learner-centred elements, yet ATs (marking and feedback) remain rooted in traditional paradigms, hindering deep learning and learner progress. This directly addresses the study's core objective of investigating teachers' ability to mark and provide effective

feedback within CBC formative assessment practices in Mpigi District's public lower secondary schools, and it answers the research question about how teachers describe and enact these processes. The evidence reveals not mere isolated gaps but a systemic implementation disconnect: awareness of CBC and national guidelines (NCDC/UNEB) exists, yet practical enactment falters due to inadequate training, resources, and support. This undermines CBC's transformative goals in rural Ugandan contexts, contributing to persistent challenges, including low learner outcomes and poor alignment with 21st-century skills. By linking empirical patterns to theory, the findings reinforce the need for targeted interventions (e.g., CPD on rubric design, feedback literacy, and guideline enforcement) to achieve constructive alignment, thereby bridging policy-practice gaps and enhancing educational quality as intended by the study.

Study Limitations

This qualitative multiple-case study offers rich, contextualised insights into teachers' marking and feedback practices under Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in two public lower secondary schools in Mpigi District. However, like all interpretive, bounded case studies, it is subject to several inherent limitations.

First, the study is geographically and contextually bounded to two purposively selected SEED schools (one rural in Muduuma sub-county and one semi-urban in Kiringente sub-county) within Mpigi District. While Mpigi exemplifies common rural and peri-urban challenges in Uganda—such as oversized classes, resource shortages, and uneven CBC adoption—the findings may not fully transfer to urban settings, private schools, higher-resourced districts, or regions with different implementation dynamics (e.g., those with stronger district-level support or better infrastructure). Recent national reports (e.g., EPRC, 2025; APHRC/Namatovu-Sakwa et al., 2025; UNEB, 2026) highlight widening equity gaps between affluent/urban and low-resource/rural schools, suggesting that Mpigi may represent more challenging rather than typical cases.

Second, reliance on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews, combined with researcher-conducted non-participant observations and document reviews, introduces potential biases. These include social desirability (participants may present practices more favourably during interviews), observer effects (despite unobtrusive positioning), and researcher positionality (e.g., prior experience in Ugandan education, documented through reflexivity). Triangulation across sources and prolonged engagement mitigated these risks, but they remain inherent to qualitative inquiry in school settings.

Third, the cross-sectional design captures practices at a specific point in time (September 2024-January 2025), shortly after the initial CBC rollout phases and during the post-COVID recovery. It does not track longitudinal changes, such as potential improvements following intensified teacher retooling, moderation efforts, or resource investments reported in later national assessments (e.g., UNEB's 2025-2026 research on CBC impacts, which noted ongoing large-class and material constraints but some progress in project work). The evolving nature of CBC implementation, as evidenced by persistent challenges in assessment alignment, ICT access, and workload in 2025-2026 reports, means the findings reflect an early-to-mid rollout phase rather than mature enactment.

Fourth, the small sample size (nine participants: five teachers, two headteachers, two national officials) prioritises depth, saturation, and information-rich cases, consistent with qualitative principles. However, the limited national-level representation (only one NCDC and one UNEB official) may under-represent

broader policy perspectives or variations across districts. Similarly, the focus on public schools excludes private or better-resourced institutions, where recent studies indicate stronger CBC fidelity due to differential resourcing.

Fifth, the study does not directly assess learner outcomes or the long-term impacts of observed marking and feedback practices on competency development (e.g., critical thinking, self-regulation). Although aligned with the research questions, this limits insights into downstream effects, particularly given equity concerns raised in recent analyses (e.g., APHRC, 2025), which indicate that under-resourced schools risk deepening disparities.

Contribution to Knowledge

Despite these limitations, the study makes several meaningful contributions to curriculum implementation and assessment literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly within Uganda's CBC context.

It provides triangulated empirical evidence from public lower secondary schools in a rural district (Mpigi), documenting underdeveloped teacher proficiency in rubric-based marking, criterion-referenced scoring, and actionable feedback, all of which remain misaligned with CBC principles. This addresses a gap in localised qualitative data on formative assessment enactment, where much prior research focuses on policy intentions, teacher knowledge broadly, or urban/primary levels. Recent studies in Mpigi and similar settings confirm patterns of limited assessment tool design, reliance on traditional methods, and systemic barriers (e.g., inadequate training, large classes), but few offer in-depth case-based exploration of marking and feedback specifically.

By grounding findings in Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory, the research extends the theory's application to low-resource secondary contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, illustrating how misalignments among intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning activities, and assessment tasks (particularly ATS involving marking and feedback) perpetuate surface learning and undermine competency development. This theoretical framing highlights structural rather than individual deficits, adding nuance to discussions of CBC fidelity in constrained environments.

The study also offers policy-relevant insights for stakeholders (MOES, NCDC, UNEB, district officials), emphasising root causes (e.g., training gaps, resource constraints) rather than symptoms, and supporting recommendations such as mandatory rubric certification and moderation protocols. In a landscape where CBC implementation faces persistent challenges, including inconsistent formative practices and a reversion to old methods, the findings serve as a benchmark for targeted interventions and comparative research across districts or regions. Overall, by illuminating the policy-practice gap in a representative rural setting, this work strengthens the evidence base for enhancing assessment literacy, fostering equitable competency development, and advancing Uganda's Vision 2040 and SDG 4.

Conclusion

There is a critical misalignment between Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) aspirations and the implementation of formative assessment in public lower secondary schools in Mpigi District. Teachers' proficiency in marking and providing feedback remains markedly underdeveloped, characterised by inconsistent traditional scoring (e.g., ticks, crosses, or numerical marks without criteria), a near-total absence of rubrics or performance descriptors, and predominantly generic, non-actionable feedback that fails to specify strengths, weaknesses, or pathways for improvement. These practices directly undermine Biggs' Constructive Alignment

Theory, as assessment tasks (ATs) fail to provide valid evidence of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) focused on competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. Instead, they perpetuate surface-level learning rooted in rote recall, contradicting CBC's emphasis on learner-centred, formative processes that foster deep skill development and self-regulation. The deficiencies are not primarily attributable to individual teacher shortcomings but to entrenched systemic constraints common in rural, low-resource Ugandan contexts: oversized classes (often exceeding 60-80 learners), severe time poverty from heavy workloads, inadequate pre- and in-service training on CBC-specific assessment tools (particularly rubric design and feedback literacy), chronic shortages of instructional materials and digital supports, and limited institutional mechanisms for moderation or collaborative marking.

Recommendations

To address the identified gaps and achieve genuine constructive alignment, the following multi-level, systemic recommendations are proposed, prioritising structural supports over isolated teacher training.

Mandate and certify the development and use of rubrics. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), in collaboration with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), should introduce mandatory certification for teachers in rubric design and application. This could include pre-service integration in teacher training colleges and compulsory in-service modules with practical assessment, with recertification every 2-3 years. Standardised exemplar rubrics for common AOI tasks and competencies should be disseminated nationally via portals and printed guides.

Establish national and school-level moderation protocols. Implement structured moderation systems, including national sampling of marked student work for quality assurance, district-level moderation clusters, and school-based collaborative marking sessions (e.g., weekly or termly peer review of AOI tasks). These measures would enhance consistency, inter-rater reliability, and shared understanding of competency criteria, thereby reducing subjective scoring.

Promote collaborative, peer-supported marking practices. Schools should adopt timetabled collaborative marking (e.g., co-marking sessions or professional learning communities focused on formative tasks) to distribute the workload, build collective expertise, and model effective feedback. Headteachers should receive training to facilitate these structures.

Invest in targeted capacity building and continuous professional development (CPD). Expand and decentralise CPD programmes, with a strong focus on formative assessment literacy, including hands-on workshops on actionable feedback, rubric co-creation, and digital tools to improve efficiency. Prioritise rural districts, such as Mpigi, through mobile training units, peer mentoring, and benchmarking visits to better-resourced schools. Integrate follow-up coaching and classroom-based application to ensure transfer to practice.

Address systemic resource and workload constraints. The government should invest in reducing class sizes (targeting phased reductions to 50-60 learners), providing low-cost digital assessment supports (e.g., offline rubric apps or shared tablets), and supplying essential materials (portfolios, checklists, exemplars). Incentives such as workload adjustments or allowances for assessment-heavy subjects could alleviate time poverty. Strengthen policy alignment and monitoring. MOES, NCDC, and UNEB should refine assessment guidelines to explicitly weight formative contributions (including the quality of marking and feedback) in school performance

evaluations. Regular national monitoring surveys (building on recent UNEB studies) should track progress in formative practices, with differentiated support for low-resource schools to prevent further inequities.

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