

# "Strategic Management in Addressing Uganda's Unemployment Crisis: The Role of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Bridging the Skills Gap between Primary and Higher Education"

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## ABSTRACT

Uganda's unemployment crisis continues to escalate, with a growing number of university graduates unable to secure employment due to a skills mismatch. The traditional Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC) has focused on theoretical learning, leaving graduates underprepared for the practical demands of the labor market. The introduction of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in primary education offers a promising solution to this challenge by emphasizing practical, real-world skills over rote memorization. However, while CBC has been implemented at the primary education level, higher education institutions remain largely focused on the KBC, exacerbating the skills gap. This research explores the role of Strategic Management in facilitating the integration of CBC into higher education in Uganda. By employing strategic management theories such as Porter's Five Forces, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the study investigates how universities can align their curricula with labor market demands. The paper identifies strategic challenges and opportunities in curriculum redesign, faculty development, and industry partnerships. By leveraging strategic management, universities can improve graduate employability, align education with market needs, and contribute to reducing Uganda's unemployment crisis.

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), Skills Gap, Unemployment Crisis, Higher Education, Uganda, Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Curriculum Design, Employability

## INTRODUCTION

Uganda's unemployment crisis, particularly among university graduates, is primarily driven by a mismatch between the academic knowledge provided by educational institutions and the practical, job-specific skills required by employers. Despite the expansion of higher education in Uganda, many graduates find themselves ill-prepared for the demands of the modern workforce. The traditional Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC), which has been the foundation of Uganda's education system, emphasizes theoretical knowledge and academic performance, often neglecting practical competencies.

In response to these challenges, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) was introduced at the primary education level, focusing on the development of practical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. While CBC is making strides at the primary level, its integration into higher education remains limited, leaving a disconnect between primary and tertiary education. Strategic management, a discipline that focuses on aligning an organization's resources, capabilities, and activities with external market demands, offers valuable frameworks to help higher education institutions adapt to CBC and address Uganda's unemployment crisis.

This research examines how strategic management principles can support the integration of CBC into Uganda's higher education system, focusing on curriculum redesign, faculty development, and partnerships with industry. By leveraging strategic management theories, universities can better align their curricula with labor market needs, improving graduate employability and contributing to reducing unemployment in Uganda.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Strategic management in education refers to the process of aligning an institution's resources, capabilities, and strategies to meet the external demands of the labor market and internal objectives. In Uganda, the existing education system heavily relies on a Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC), which prioritizes academic knowledge over practical skills. This model, while historically effective, has not kept pace with the needs of a rapidly evolving labor market, leaving graduates with limited job-specific competencies.

The introduction of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the primary education level is a response to these challenges. CBC focuses on developing practical competencies that are directly applicable in the workplace, emphasizing skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and technical abilities. This shift offers a promising solution to Uganda's skills gap. However, the challenge lies in extending CBC's principles to higher education. Strategic management theories, such as Porter's Five Forces (1980) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), suggest that universities can achieve a competitive advantage by aligning their curricula with the needs of the labor market, leveraging internal resources like faculty expertise and teaching infrastructure. By adopting strategic management principles, universities can ensure that the competencies developed through CBC are relevant to employers, improving the employability of graduates and contributing to the reduction of Uganda's unemployment crisis.

### Motivation for the Research

The motivation behind this research is driven by the urgent need to reduce unemployment in Uganda by improving the employability of graduates. Despite the growing number of university graduates, the lack of practical, job-ready skills continues to hinder their ability to secure employment. The introduction of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the primary education level is a step in the right direction, but higher education institutions must also adapt to this new paradigm. By strategically aligning university curricula with the principles of CBC, this research aims to bridge the skills gap between primary and higher education, providing graduates with the competencies required by employers. The study is motivated by the need to explore how Strategic Management can facilitate this alignment by guiding universities in curriculum redesign, faculty development, and fostering industry collaborations.

Moreover, this study contributes to the academic field of Strategic Management in Education, particularly within the context of developing countries. While much research has been conducted on strategic management in businesses, fewer studies have explored its application in the educational sector, especially in addressing unemployment and bridging the skills gap. This research fills an important gap by applying strategic management principles to the integration of CBC in higher education.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Uganda's higher education system continues to produce large numbers of graduates with academic qualifications, but many lack the practical skills that are highly sought by employers. Despite the introduction of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in primary education, higher education institutions have been slow to adopt similar changes, resulting in a disconnect between the skills learned at the primary level and the competencies required at the tertiary level. The central research problem is how Uganda's higher education institutions can integrate CBC principles into their curricula to better align educational outcomes with labor market needs. Without strategic management intervention, universities may continue to produce graduates who are academically qualified but lack the practical skills needed to succeed in the workforce. This study seeks to explore how strategic management decisions regarding curriculum design, faculty training, and industry partnerships can bridge this skills gap and enhance graduate employability.

## **Underlying Philosophies**

Several educational and strategic management philosophies underpin the successful integration of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Uganda's higher education system.

### **Constructivism**

Learning is seen as an active process where students construct knowledge based on prior experiences and interactions (Piaget, 1952). This philosophy supports CBC's emphasis on hands-on learning and problem-solving, enabling students to acquire practical skills.

### **Pragmatism**

Dewey (1938) argued that education should focus on preparing students for real-world challenges. CBC's focus on practical competencies aligns with this philosophy, ensuring that students are ready for the workforce.

### **Humanism**

Humanistic education (Maslow, 1943) focuses on developing the whole person—intellectually, emotionally, and socially. CBC nurtures these values by fostering a learner-centered approach that encourages personal development and lifelong learning.

### **The Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991)**

Universities can leverage their resources—such as faculty expertise, teaching technologies, and industry partnerships—to create a competitive advantage by offering relevant, competency-based education.

### **Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997)**

Universities must develop the ability to continuously adapt their curricula to meet the changing demands of the labor market, ensuring that students are equipped with up-to-date competencies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research draws on key Strategic Management theories to understand how higher education institutions can integrate Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and improve graduate employability:

### **Porter's Five Forces (1980)**

This model identifies the competitive forces in the labor market that influence the demand for specific competencies. By understanding these forces, universities can adapt their strategies to align with labor market needs and ensure that their curricula are relevant to industry demands.

### **Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991)**

The RBV focuses on leveraging internal resources, such as faculty expertise, teaching methods, and infrastructure, to gain a competitive advantage. Higher education institutions can use this view to align their internal capabilities with the competencies required by employers, thus enhancing graduate employability.

### **Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997)**

This theory emphasizes the ability of organizations to adapt to environmental changes. Universities in Uganda must develop dynamic capabilities to continuously update their curricula and teaching methods to reflect labor market shifts, ensuring that students acquire the competencies required for the modern workforce. These theories provide a solid foundation for understanding how strategic management can guide universities in aligning their curricula with the needs of the labor market and bridging the skills gap.

## **Literature Review on Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Its Role in Bridging the Skills Gap in Uganda's Higher Education**

Competency-Based Education (CBE) has become a globally recognized model for improving graduate employability, primarily by focusing on practical, job-specific skills. Sturgis (2015) underscores that CBE enables students to master competencies that align directly with employer demands, providing a more targeted approach to workforce preparation. Countries such as Finland, Canada, and Singapore have successfully integrated CBE into their educational systems, with positive outcomes in workforce readiness and a reduction in skills gaps (OECD, 2016). These countries report significant improvements in their graduates' ability to meet the practical requirements of their respective labor markets.

In Uganda, the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the primary education level represents an attempt to address these gaps. However, Nsubuga (2016) highlights that the adoption of CBC in higher education has been slower, and universities continue to rely on the traditional Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC), which limits the development of practical competencies. This gap between academic training and labor market needs has contributed significantly to the country's high unemployment rates among university graduates. The transition to CBC in higher education is therefore essential for aligning graduate competencies with job market demands.

Strategic management theories offer valuable insights into how universities can improve their educational practices to better equip students for the workforce. The Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991) suggests that universities can create a competitive advantage by leveraging their internal resources, such as faculty expertise and teaching technologies, to design curricula that focus on competencies. Additionally, Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) emphasizes that higher education institutions must develop the ability to adapt their curricula and teaching methods to meet the evolving demands of the labor market. By adopting CBC principles and fostering industry partnerships, universities in Uganda can better address the skills gap and enhance graduate employability.

## **Empirical Literature Review on Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Its Role in Bridging the Skills Gap in Uganda's Higher Education**

Empirical evidence from various studies emphasizes the effectiveness of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in improving employability by focusing on job-specific, practical skills. A study by Sturgis (2015) demonstrated that CBE empowers students to showcase mastery in specific competencies, thus making them more attractive to employers. This aligns with findings from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016), which reported that countries like Finland, Canada, and Singapore have successfully implemented CBE in their education systems, resulting in significant improvements in workforce readiness. In these countries, the integration of CBE has facilitated a reduction in the skills gap, making graduates more adaptable and capable of meeting industry requirements.

In Uganda, the integration of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the primary education level has shown promise in addressing the skills gap; however, its application at the higher education level remains underdeveloped. A report by Nsubuga (2016) highlights the slow adoption of CBC in Ugandan universities, where the traditional Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC) still dominates. The gap between the skills that students acquire and those required by employers remains wide. This misalignment has contributed to high unemployment rates among university graduates, who often lack the practical skills demanded by the labor market. Studies by Mwesigwa (2021) have also revealed that graduates from universities still relying on KBC often report difficulty in securing jobs because their qualifications do not align with industry needs.

The role of strategic management in education, specifically in the integration of CBC into higher education, is supported by a growing body of empirical research. For instance, a study by Kayondo et al. (2020) found that universities in Uganda, when using strategic management frameworks, were better equipped to adapt their curricula to labor market demands. These universities that embraced strategic curriculum design saw improved graduate employability and better alignment between academic training and industry expectations. On the contrary, universities that resisted change and stuck to the traditional KBC struggled with addressing the



growing demand for practical skills in the workforce. The same study also found that universities with more robust faculty development programs were more successful in implementing CBC principles, highlighting the need for continuous professional development to support such a shift.

The importance of industry partnerships in successfully implementing CBC has also been emphasized in various studies. Nakimuli and Tumwesigye (2023) observed that Ugandan universities with strong industry linkages offered more opportunities for internships, practical training, and joint curriculum development. These partnerships allowed students to gain hands-on experience, improving their practical competencies and making them more competitive in the labor market. However, these collaborations remain limited in most universities, contributing to a significant gap between education and employment outcomes.

Furthermore, a study by Kamanda and Nkwanzu (2023) on student perceptions of CBC at Ugandan universities revealed that students enrolled in CBC-focused programs felt better prepared for the job market. The study found that 80% of students in CBC programs reported greater confidence in their ability to secure employment, compared to only 45% of students in KBC programs. This supports the claim that CBC provides students with the practical skills employers seek, thereby enhancing their employability.

Despite these positive findings, there are challenges in fully implementing CBC in higher education institutions. Mbabazi and Ndyabahika (2023) highlighted that faculty members at Ugandan universities faced significant resistance to adopting CBC due to a lack of resources, inadequate training, and unfamiliarity with competency-based teaching methods. Overcoming these challenges is critical for the successful integration of CBC in higher education, as suggested by the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), which stresses the importance of leveraging institutional resources, including faculty expertise, to create a competitive advantage.

In summary, empirical literature strongly supports the idea that integrating CBC into higher education can help bridge the skills gap and improve graduate employability in Uganda. However, the slow adoption of CBC, coupled with challenges in faculty training, resource limitations, and insufficient industry collaborations, continues to hinder its full implementation. Strategic management frameworks and theories, such as the RBV and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), provide useful tools for addressing these challenges and facilitating the effective integration of CBC into higher education institutions.

### **Empirical Evidence on Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Its Impact in Bridging the Skills Gap in Uganda's Higher Education**

Empirical evidence from Ugandan universities highlights the potential of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in addressing the country's unemployment crisis by enhancing graduate employability. Several case studies reveal the challenges and successes in implementing CBC, shedding light on the practicalities of aligning higher education with labor market demands.

#### **Case Study: Makerere University and the Pilot CBC Program**

Makerere University, Uganda's largest and most prominent institution of higher learning, initiated a pilot CBC program in 2022 to address the skills gap. The program was implemented in selected faculties, including engineering and business administration, with a focus on integrating practical skills into the curriculum. According to a report by Makerere University (2023), graduates from the CBC pilot programs showed a 25% increase in job placement rates compared to their counterparts in traditional Knowledge-Based Curriculum (KBC) programs. Employers reported higher satisfaction with the practical competencies of CBC graduates, particularly in technical fields where hands-on experience is critical (Nsubuga, 2023). This pilot program demonstrated the effectiveness of CBC in enhancing workforce readiness, suggesting that such an approach could be scaled up across other programs.

#### **Case Study: Kyambogo University and Industry Partnerships**

Kyambogo University has been proactive in developing industry partnerships to support the integration of CBC into its curriculum. The university formed a strategic partnership with the Uganda Manufacturers

Association (UMA) in 2021, aimed at aligning its programs with industry demands. According to Kyambogo University's annual report (2022), the collaboration resulted in a significant increase in internships and work-based learning opportunities for students. As a result, the engineering and business administration faculties at Kyambogo University reported a 30% increase in the employability of their graduates. Employers who participated in the program highlighted the improved job readiness of students, especially in fields such as manufacturing, where technical skills are in high demand (Mwesigwa, 2022). This case illustrates the importance of industry partnerships in enhancing the effectiveness of CBC and addressing the skills gap in Uganda's labor market.

### **Employer Feedback on Graduate Employability**

A survey of over 100 employers in and around Uganda conducted by WIPs in 2023 found that 65% of employers were dissatisfied with the practical skills of university graduates. Many employers noted that graduates often lacked critical competencies such as problem-solving, communication, and technical skills. This gap was particularly noticeable in sectors such as information technology, agriculture, and healthcare, where practical knowledge is essential (Nakimuli & Tumwesigye, 2023). Employers also emphasized the importance of a competency-based education system that integrates real-world learning experiences. This finding aligns with the theoretical perspective that a shift towards CBC could enhance the employability of graduates by providing them with the practical skills needed by employers (Tebandeke, 2021).

### **Faculty Resistance to CBC Implementation: A Challenge**

Despite the positive outcomes associated with CBC, challenges remain in its full implementation. A study by Mbabazi and Ndyabahika (2023) found that faculty resistance was one of the major barriers to CBC adoption at Ugandan universities. The study, which surveyed over 50 faculty members from four universities, revealed that 45% of faculty members expressed concerns about the feasibility of implementing CBC due to a lack of training, resources, and support. Many faculty members were accustomed to the traditional KBC approach and were reluctant to adopt a competency-based approach that emphasized practical skills. This resistance was particularly prevalent in disciplines like humanities and social sciences, where theoretical content had traditionally been prioritized. Overcoming this resistance requires a strong focus on faculty development and training, as well as creating a culture that values practical skill acquisition.

### **Proposed Strategic Framework for CBC Integration**

#### **Step 1: Curriculum Design and Review**

Universities should review and redesign their curricula to integrate CBC principles, focusing on competency-based learning outcomes rather than solely theoretical knowledge. This can be done by involving industry experts in curriculum development to ensure that it aligns with labor market needs.

#### **Step 2: Faculty Development**

A robust professional development program for faculty should be established, with a focus on training educators in competency-based teaching methods. Faculty members must be equipped with the skills necessary to deliver CBC effectively.

#### **Step 3: Industry Partnerships**

Universities should form strategic partnerships with local industries to provide students with internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities. These partnerships should also be leveraged for joint curriculum development to ensure the relevance of academic programs.

#### **Step 4: Student Engagement**

Students should be actively engaged in the design and delivery of CBC programs, ensuring that their learning needs and career aspirations are addressed. Continuous feedback mechanisms should be implemented to refine programs based on student experiences and industry trends.

## Step 5: Continuous Evaluation

A system of regular evaluation should be implemented to monitor the effectiveness of CBC programs. This includes tracking graduate employment rates, employer satisfaction, and student performance in practical competencies. Adjustments to the curriculum should be made based on these evaluations to ensure continuous improvement.

### Stakeholder Perspectives

#### ▪ Employers

Employers expressed a strong need for graduates who possess practical, job-specific skills. Industry surveys revealed a preference for candidates who are adept in problem-solving and critical thinking, skills emphasized in CBC programs.

#### ▪ Faculty

Faculty members generally recognized the need for curriculum reform but expressed concerns about the resources and training required to effectively implement CBC.

#### ▪ Policymakers

Policymakers highlighted the importance of aligning education with labor market needs, but noted that adequate support and guidelines for CBC implementation are still lacking.

#### ▪ Students

Students in CBC programs reported higher satisfaction and greater job readiness, underlining the importance of practical learning in improving employability.

### Evaluation Metrics

To assess the effectiveness of CBC, the following KPIs should be used:

#### ▪ Graduate Employment Rate

Tracking the percentage of graduates employed within six months of graduation.

#### ▪ Skills Proficiency Assessments

Measuring student competencies in key areas such as communication, problem-solving, and technical skills.

#### ▪ Employer Satisfaction

Conducting surveys with employers to gauge their satisfaction with the practical skills of graduates.

#### ▪ Curriculum Relevance

Evaluating the alignment of curricula with industry standards and labor market needs.

## CONCLUSION

Strategic management plays a pivotal role in addressing Uganda's unemployment crisis by guiding higher education institutions in aligning their curricula with labor market demands. The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) provides a strategic opportunity for universities to improve the employability of graduates by equipping them with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. By applying strategic management

theories such as Porter's Five Forces, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, this research provides actionable recommendations for universities to integrate CBC, bridge the skills gap, and contribute to reducing Uganda's unemployment crisis.

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