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FROM PEDAGOGICAL PREPAREDNESS TO INCLUSIVE PRACTICE: TEACHERS NAVIGATING UGANDA'S COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULUM IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF RUKUNGIRI DISTRICT, UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

Uganda's competence-based curriculum (CBC) expects teachers to facilitate active learning while responding to substantial learner diversity, yet evidence remains limited on how inclusive pedagogical competence is enacted in resource-constrained secondary schools. This descriptive mixed-methods study examined teachers reported inclusive pedagogical practices in selected secondary schools in Rukungiri District. Survey data from 89 teachers were complemented by semi-structured interviews with seven school administrators. Quantitative results were analysed descriptively, while interview accounts were analysed thematically and integrated at interpretation. Across 13 pedagogical practices, the mean of item means was 4.36. Teachers most frequently reported using learners' everyday experiences ($M = 4.58$), adjusting instruction when learners did not understand ($M = 4.51$), monitoring learner progress ($M = 4.51$), and using group work ($M = 4.46$). Differentiating tasks by learner ability was comparatively weaker and more variable ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.24$). Administrators linked this difficulty to large classes, limited instructional time and materials, and pressure to cover the curriculum. Taken together, the findings suggest that inclusive pedagogical preparedness is a situated capacity: teacher knowledge and adaptive skill matter, but their sustained enactment depends on the conditions in which teachers work. The study therefore treats the survey results as patterns of reported practice rather than evidence that practices are effective. Teacher development should combine differentiation skills with school-level support for planning, collaboration, and adaptive assessment.

KEYWORDS: inclusive education; competence-based curriculum; differentiated instruction; pedagogical preparedness; Rukungiri District; secondary schools; Uganda

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is increasingly judged not by whether diverse learners are physically present in the same school, but by whether classroom practices allow them to participate, learn, and demonstrate progress. This shift matters because policy commitments can coexist with classroom routines that still privilege a narrow range of learners. Contemporary scholarship therefore treats inclusive pedagogy as a question of what teachers actually do with curriculum, assessment, interaction, grouping, explanation, and support, rather than as a general endorsement of inclusion [10, 12, 20]. Recent reviews likewise show that teachers require a combination of professional knowledge, classroom-management capacity, responsive instruction, and differentiated teaching to address heterogeneous learning needs [16, 18].

The challenge is especially acute in secondary schooling. Subject specialisation, examination and accountability pressures, restricted lesson time, and the compartmentalisation of teaching can make inclusive pedagogies difficult to sustain even when teachers value them. Koutsouris et al. [12] argue that these features create distinctive tensions between common curriculum expectations and the need to respond to learner differences. Differentiated instruction illustrates the tension clearly: it asks teachers to identify variation in readiness and support needs, make purposeful adaptations, monitor responses, and still maintain meaningful participation in a common learning community. Evidence from secondary schools suggests that this work is demanding and is shaped by workload, planning time, resources, confidence, and organisational support [9, 13, 14].

These questions have become particularly important in education systems pursuing competence-based reforms. Learner-centred pedagogy is often embedded in such reforms because competence is expected to be demonstrated through application, problem-solving, interaction, and practical performance rather than recall alone. Yet a policy preference for learner-centred teaching does not automatically produce learner-centred practice. Systematic reviews from low- and middle-income countries show that implementation is mediated by teacher preparation, assessment expectations, learner experiences, available resources, school culture, and wider system conditions [4, 19]. The distinction between policy intention and pedagogical enactment is therefore central to understanding whether competence-based reform is genuinely inclusive.

Uganda introduced its revised lower-secondary competence-based curriculum in 2020. The curriculum emphasises active participation, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, continuous assessment, and the application of knowledge to real-life situations [15]. These principles create a potentially productive relationship between competence-based education and inclusive pedagogy: both require teachers to attend to how learners engage with tasks and to provide meaningful opportunities for participation and progress. However, recent Ugandan research has documented significant implementation constraints. Studies report large classes, shortages of instructional materials, limited planning and professional support, uneven teacher preparation, and pressures associated with

curriculum and assessment demands [1, 5, 11]. Equity concerns are also emerging because schools differ in the resources and organisational capacity available to implement the reform [2].

What remains less clear is how teachers reported pedagogical competence translates into specific inclusive practices within these conditions. Much research on teacher preparedness asks whether teachers possess knowledge, confidence, or positive attitudes. Such indicators are important, but they do not establish how teachers respond when a learner is struggling, whether they plan for differences in advance, how they use assessment information, or whether they can vary tasks without fragmenting the classroom. Recent international work similarly cautions against treating teacher competence as equivalent to enacted inclusion [10, 14]. The practical question is therefore not simply whether teachers are “prepared,” but which aspects of inclusive pedagogy are relatively easy to enact, which are more difficult, and what contextual conditions explain the difference.

This study addresses that problem using evidence from selected secondary schools in Rukungiri District, Uganda. It focuses on five connected dimensions of practice: learner-centred teaching, instructional adaptation, identification and support of learners experiencing difficulty, professional collaboration, and differentiated instruction. Rather than treating these as interchangeable indicators of a single competence, the analysis examines variation across them. The study asks: How do secondary-school teachers report using inclusive pedagogical practices under Uganda’s CBC, and what contextual conditions appear to enable or constrain their enactment? The paper contributes to international debates by proposing a more cautious understanding of pedagogical preparedness as a situated capacity: competence resides partly in the teacher but becomes educationally consequential only when classroom and institutional conditions allow it to be enacted.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive pedagogy is a broad and contested field. At its most useful for classroom research, however, it directs attention to how teachers create access to worthwhile learning without assuming that one uniform route will work for every learner. Recent reviews identify inclusive communication, responsive pedagogical practices, curriculum design, professional knowledge, and differentiation as recurring areas of teacher competence [10, 16, 18]. At the same time, the literature warns against reducing inclusion to a checklist of techniques. Secondary-school inclusion involves persistent tensions: teachers must recognise differences without lowering expectations, provide additional support without isolating learners, and work within common curriculum and assessment structures while adapting to varied readiness and learning needs [12].

This tension makes the distinction between competence and enactment analytically important. A teacher may understand differentiation and still struggle to implement it consistently in a large class. A teacher may value group work but organise groups in ways that reproduce marginalisation. Likewise, a teacher may monitor progress but lacks the time or resources to act on the information gathered. Evidence on differentiated instruction supports this interpretation. Gibbs [9] found that

teachers and school leaders experienced practical difficulties implementing differentiation in a mainstream secondary-school setting, while Langelaan et al. [14] concluded that successful preparation for differentiated instruction depends on active learning, collaboration, reflection, sustained development, and supportive school conditions. More recently, Fu et al. [8] linked a supportive inclusive-education climate with teachers' differentiated instruction, reinforcing the view that individual efficacy and institutional context are intertwined.

Learner-centred pedagogy and inclusive pedagogy overlap but should not be treated as synonymous. Learner-centred approaches invite participation, discussion, collaboration, problem-solving, and active construction of knowledge. Inclusive pedagogy asks the additional question of who can access those opportunities and what adaptations are necessary when learners differ. A lesson can therefore be highly interactive yet still exclude learners who require alternative explanations, additional time, modified tasks, accessible materials, or more deliberate peer support.

This distinction is particularly relevant to competence-based reform in low- and middle-income contexts. Bremner et al. [4] found that learner-centred pedagogy is often viewed positively, but objective evidence of its effects is more limited than policy rhetoric can imply. Sakata et al. [19] similarly showed that implementation is influenced by interacting factors at teacher, classroom, school, policy, and societal levels. In Uganda, the CBC's emphasis on participation and application provides an important opening for inclusive practice, but teachers still have to translate broad curriculum principles into concrete decisions about pacing, grouping, questioning, assessment, scaffolding, and feedback. Ugandan studies have documented precisely the kinds of system pressures that can complicate this translation [1, 2, 11].

Differentiated instruction provides a useful test of whether inclusive intentions have moved beyond general responsiveness. It requires teachers to use evidence about learners to vary aspects of instruction while maintaining coherent learning goals. This may involve changing the complexity or form of tasks, varying explanations and representations, adjusting grouping, providing different levels of scaffolding, or allowing varied ways to demonstrate competence. High-quality differentiation is therefore not simply "giving weak learners easier work." It is a cycle of diagnosis, planning, teaching, monitoring, and adjustment.

Recent research consistently presents differentiation as cognitively and organisationally demanding. Kupers et al. [13] describe it as a complex process requiring careful preparation. Langelaan et al. [14] show that professional development is more likely to improve differentiation when it combines knowledge with repeated practice, reflection, collaboration, and sustained support. Pozas and Letzel-Alt [17] further demonstrate that more intensive forms of teacher collaboration, including co-construction and synchronisation, are associated with differentiated instructional practice. These findings suggest that variation in teachers' use of differentiation may reveal more about the conditions of inclusive teaching than a single overall score of preparedness.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a focused interpretive lens for the classroom processes examined in this study. Learning is understood as socially mediated, with development supported through interaction, guidance, language, tools, and participation with others [21]. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development is particularly relevant to teachers' attempts to identify what learners can do independently and what they can accomplish with appropriate support. Practices such as adapted explanation, questioning, peer-assisted learning, progress monitoring, and scaffolded tasks can therefore be understood as forms of mediated support.

The theory is used here cautiously. It does not, by itself, explain school resourcing, workload, or curriculum governance. Rather, it helps interpret why learner monitoring and adaptive support matter pedagogically. The wider empirical literature is then used to explain the institutional conditions that make such support more or less feasible. This separation avoids treating a learning theory as a complete organisational theory and keeps the analysis close to what the data can support.

In this article, situated pedagogical capacity refers to the practical ability to translate professional knowledge, judgement, and adaptive skill into inclusive classroom action under specific institutional conditions. It is not proposed as a new universal theory. Rather, it is an interpretive concept that connects teacher-level competence with the conditions that make its enactment more or less feasible, including class size, time, materials, collaboration, and assessment expectations. This framing shifts the question from whether a teacher is competent in the abstract to whether that competence can be used consistently in the classroom in which the teacher actually works.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design and Context

The study used a descriptive mixed-methods design combining a teacher survey with semi-structured interviews with school administrators. The quantitative strand described teachers' self-reported use of inclusive pedagogical practices, while the qualitative strand was used to understand the school conditions surrounding those practices. The two strands were integrated during interpretation rather than treated as independent studies. This design was appropriate because the research question concerned both the pattern of reported practices and the contextual conditions that may help explain variation within that pattern [6]. The design supports descriptive and interpretive conclusions; it does not establish causal effects.

The research was conducted in selected secondary schools in Rukungiri District, Uganda. The setting is relevant because schools in the district are implementing the national lower-secondary CBC while serving learners with varied educational backgrounds, abilities, and support needs. The study did not seek to estimate a national prevalence of inclusive practice; its purpose was to examine patterns within the participating schools and consider what those patterns suggest for the enactment of inclusive pedagogy under CBC.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The final sample comprised 96 participants: 89 secondary-school teachers who completed the questionnaire and seven school administrators who participated in interviews. Teachers were selected using stratified random sampling within the school categories represented in the study so that the participating categories were not treated as a single undifferentiated group. Administrators were selected purposively because they held school-level responsibilities related to curriculum implementation, teacher supervision, and support for teaching. A complete population denominator was not available for the present analysis. Consequently, the article does not report a district response rate and does not treat the sample as an estimate of the prevalence of inclusive practice across Rukungiri District.

Teachers completed a structured questionnaire containing 13 Likert-type items on practices associated with inclusive pedagogy under CBC. The items addressed identification of learners needing additional support, adjustment of teaching methods, planning for different abilities, group work, differentiated tasks, use of everyday examples, varied assessment, confidence with mixed-ability classes, use of locally available materials and ICT, collaboration with colleagues, and maintenance of learner-progress records. Valid responses ranged from 87 to 89 because a small number of responses were missing on some items. The item-specific N values reported in Table 1 therefore show the number of available responses used for each descriptive statistic.

Administrators participated in semi-structured interviews addressing teacher preparedness, classroom practice, learner support, professional collaboration, and school-level conditions affecting inclusive pedagogy. The qualitative strand is reported only to the level supported by the retained analytical record. Verbatim extracts were not available for inclusion in the article; to avoid reconstructing participants' words from summaries, the findings are presented as thematic accounts rather than as direct quotations.

3.3 Instrument Quality and Analysis

Content validity was addressed through expert review before data collection, with attention to the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items and their alignment with the study constructs. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$). Quantitative analysis used frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Because the research question was descriptive and the available sampling information did not support population-level estimation, differences among item means were interpreted comparatively rather than subjected to significance testing. The reported means are therefore treated as evidence of the frequency and pattern of reported practices, not as evidence that practices were effective or caused learner outcomes.

Interview data were analysed thematically through familiarisation, coding, pattern identification, theme development, and interpretive review, consistent with Braun and Clarke [3]. The analysis

focused on recurring explanations of teacher preparedness, classroom adaptation, collaboration, and constraints on inclusive practice. Credibility was strengthened by comparing administrators' accounts with the survey pattern, especially where the two strands converged or where the qualitative evidence qualified a high survey rating. Integration occurred at the interpretation stage: qualitative themes were used to explain, qualify, or contextualise the quantitative results rather than to imply direct verification of teachers' self-reports.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from relevant educational authorities before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, participation was voluntary, and informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were maintained.

The article reports only anonymised and aggregated findings; no participant names or school identifiers are included.

4. RESULTS

The survey responses indicate frequent reported use of several pedagogical practices, but the pattern is more informative than the overall average. Across the 13 items, the mean of item means was 4.36. Most items clustered above 4.20, whereas differentiated tasks recorded a noticeably lower mean and substantially larger variability. The item-level results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusive Pedagogical Practices under the Competence-Based Curriculum

Co de	Item	N	M	SD
B1	I can identify learners who need extra academic support	89	4.44	0.768
B2	I adjust my teaching methods to meet different learning needs of pupils	88	4.45	0.757
B3	I prepare lesson plans that consider learners with different abilities	88	4.22	0.837
B4	I use group work to support learners with different needs	89	4.46	0.784
B5	I give different tasks to learners based on their ability levels	88	3.84	1.240
B6	I use examples from learners' daily life to make lessons easier to understand	89	4.58	0.736
B7	I assess learners in different ways (oral, written, practical work)	89	4.37	0.803
B8	I adjust my teaching methods when learners do not understand the lesson	87	4.51	0.729
B9	I feel confident handling a class with learners of mixed abilities	89	4.28	0.853
B10	I use locally available teaching materials to support learning	88	4.41	0.853
B11	I work with other teachers to help learners who struggle academically	88	4.41	0.737

Co de	Item	N	M	SD
B12	I use available ICT tools (such as mobile phones, radio, or computers) to support learners	89	4.26	0.873
B13	I keep records of learners' progress to guide my teaching	87	4.51	0.729

Study data (2026).

The strongest reported practice was the use of examples from learners' daily lives to make lessons easier to understand ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.74$). Teachers also reported adjusting teaching methods when learners did not understand ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.73$), adjusting methods to meet different learning needs ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.76$), and using group work to support learners with different needs ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.78$). Administrators' accounts were broadly consistent with this pattern: they described teachers connecting lessons to everyday experience, encouraging group activities, and changing explanations or approaches when learners encountered difficulty.

These results indicate that responsiveness during instruction was frequently reported in the participating schools. The pattern is also consistent with the orientation of Uganda's CBC, which encourages teachers to connect learning to real-life contexts and facilitate active participation [15]. A useful contrast, however, appears between responding during a lesson and anticipating variation before the lesson begins. Preparing lesson plans that considered learners with different abilities had a lower mean ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.84$) than adjusting instruction when learners did not understand. The difference should not be treated as a statistically tested gap, but descriptively it suggests that in-the-moment adaptation may be easier to sustain than designing differentiated pathways in advance.

Teachers reported frequently keeping records of learner progress to guide teaching ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.73$), identifying learners who needed extra academic support ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.77$), and working with colleagues to support learners who struggled academically ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.74$). Administrators described remedial support, individual follow-up, peer-assisted learning, departmental discussion, joint planning, and consultation among colleagues. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that learner monitoring and teacher collaboration were important parts of the participating in schools' response to learner difficulty.

The interview evidence also qualified the survey results. Administrators indicated that identifying a learner who needed support did not always mean that sustained individualised assistance could be provided. Large classes, limited lesson time, and inadequate materials reduced the amount of focused support available to individual learners. Collaboration sometimes functioned as a professional strength, but also as a practical coping mechanism when specialist support or resources were limited.

The lowest mean was recorded for giving different tasks to learners according to their ability levels ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.24$). The mean remained above the scale midpoint, but its relative position and much larger standard deviation are important. They indicate both weaker reported use and greater variation among teachers. This was the clearest point at which the otherwise high self-reported profile became uneven.

Administrators' accounts provided a plausible contextual explanation. They identified large class sizes, limited instructional time, inadequate teaching materials, and pressure to complete curriculum requirements as barriers to preparing multiple activities and providing individualised support. Differentiation requires more than recognising that learners differ; it requires planning, diagnostic judgement, task design, monitoring, and feedback. Under constrained conditions, teachers may therefore be able to alter an explanation, use group work, or provide remedial help more readily than they can systematically vary tasks and assessment opportunities throughout a lesson.

This pattern should not be interpreted as evidence that teachers lack commitment to inclusion. Rather, it reveals a gap between broad adaptive competence and the sustained organisation required for more demanding forms of differentiation. The gap is central to the paper's argument: reported preparedness and enacted inclusive practice are related, but they are not the same phenomenon.

5. DISCUSSION

The principal finding is not simply that teachers reported "high pedagogical skills." Such a conclusion would flatten meaningful variation in the data. The stronger interpretation is that teachers reported a broad repertoire of learner-centred and responsive practices, while the most systematic form of differentiation was less consistent. This distinction matters because teacher preparedness is often measured as a global perception, yet inclusive teaching is made up of decisions that differ in complexity, planning burden, and dependence on school conditions.

The pattern resonates with recent international research. Nistal Anta et al. [16] and Rapisa et al. [18] identify teacher competence as central to inclusion, but they also show that differentiated teaching is a distinct and demanding element of that competence. Jackson-Summers et al. [10] similarly conceptualise inclusive pedagogy as multidimensional rather than reducible to one technique. The present findings add a contextual point that is easy to overlook: within a competence-based reform, some inclusive practices may become normalised more quickly than others. Using familiar examples, group work, or an alternative explanation can be integrated into ordinary teaching with relatively modest reorganisation. Designing different tasks, monitoring several pathways, and providing differentiated feedback place greater demands on planning time, materials, and classroom management.

This helps explain why the differentiated-task item was not only the lowest but also the most variable. A standard deviation of 1.24, compared with values mostly below .90 on other items, suggests that

teachers' experiences of this practice differed substantially. In a resource-constrained system, such variation may reflect more than individual knowledge. It may also reflect class size, subject demands, timetabling, access to materials, leadership expectations, and opportunities to plan with colleagues. This interpretation is consistent with Gibbs [9], who documented implementation challenges in secondary-school differentiation, and with Langelaan et al. [14], who found that professional development outcomes depend partly on contextual school factors.

Differentiation is sometimes presented as a simple prescription: know the learner, vary the task, and provide support. In practice, the process is recursive. Teachers need information about learner readiness; they must decide which differences are educationally relevant; they have to design alternatives that remain connected to common learning goals; and they need to monitor whether the adaptation is helping. Kupers et al. [13] describe differentiated instruction as a complex process requiring careful preparation, while Fu et al. [8] show that a supportive inclusive climate is associated with stronger differentiated practice. The current study's findings fit this emerging view.

The implications are particularly significant for competence-based curricula. CBC asks learners to demonstrate competence through varied forms of application and performance. In principle, this creates room for flexibility. In practice, however, continuous assessment and competency demonstration can increase teacher workload if class sizes are large and record-keeping is extensive. Uganda-specific evidence points to exactly this tension. Atuhura and Nambi [1] reported time constraints, large classes, limited materials, planning difficulties, and insufficient stakeholder support in the implementation of competence-based language curricula. Kidega et al. [11] likewise identified training and resource challenges, while Barasa et al. [2] showed that differences in school capacity can produce unequal opportunities to benefit from reform. The Rukungiri findings therefore should not be read as an isolated local problem; they exemplify a broader implementation dilemma in which ambitious pedagogical reforms are enacted through uneven institutional capacity.

A second important finding concerns progress monitoring. Teachers reported strong use of learner-progress records and identification of learners needing additional support. From a sociocultural perspective, this information can support scaffolding because teachers need some understanding of a learner's current performance before deciding what assistance may be productive [21]. Yet the qualitative evidence indicates that the value of monitoring is contingent on teachers' capacity to act. Recording that a learner is struggling is not itself inclusion. It becomes pedagogically meaningful when the information changes explanation, grouping, task design, feedback, pacing, or the allocation of support.

This distinction is useful for CBC implementation because continuous assessment can become procedural if it is disconnected from subsequent instructional decisions. The strong monitoring scores are encouraging, but the lower differentiation score suggests that the feedback loop from "knowing" to "adapting" may be incomplete for some teachers. Professional development should therefore move

beyond training teachers to collect assessment information and focus more explicitly on how to convert evidence of learner progress into manageable classroom adaptations.

Teacher collaboration emerged as a relative strength. This matters because inclusive pedagogy can become unrealistic when framed as the responsibility of an isolated classroom teacher. Pozas and Letzel-Alt [17] found that more intensive forms of collaboration were associated with differentiated instruction, and Langelaan et al. [14] identify collaboration and reflection as important features of effective preparation for differentiation. The administrators in this study described departmental meetings, peer discussions, joint planning, and consultation as ways teachers addressed learner difficulty.

At the same time, collaboration should not be romanticised. In the present study, it also appeared to compensate for shortages of materials and specialist support. Peer exchange can improve practice, but it cannot remove structural constraints such as very large classes or insufficient instructional time. A school that depends on teacher goodwill to bridge persistent resource gaps may sustain isolated examples of good practice without creating conditions for consistent inclusion. Collaboration is therefore best understood as professional infrastructure: it is necessary, but most powerful when combined with time, leadership support, access to materials, and coherent assessment expectations.

Taken together, the findings support a situated-capacity interpretation of inclusive pedagogical preparedness. This concept is deliberately modest. It does not claim a new universal theory of inclusion; rather, it names an empirical relationship visible in the data and increasingly supported in the literature. Teachers' knowledge, confidence, and adaptive skill are necessary resources, but whether these resources become sustained inclusive practice depends on the conditions in which teachers work. The relevant unit of explanation is therefore not only "the competent teacher," but the teacher-in-context.

This interpretation also helps avoid two common errors. The first is to blame teachers for implementation problems that are partly organisational. The second is assuming that improving resources alone will produce inclusive pedagogy. The data supports neither position. Teachers in the study reported substantial adaptive competence, while administrators simultaneously identified contextual constraints. Effective reform requires both: pedagogical expertise and institutional arrangements that make expertise usable. This conclusion is compatible with Sakata et al.'s [19] multilevel account of learner-centred pedagogy and with more recent evidence linking inclusive climate and differentiated practice [8].

Internationally, the Rukungiri case contributes evidence from a setting that is still underrepresented in inclusive-pedagogy scholarship. Effendi et al. [7] found very limited Global South representation in the literature they reviewed on disability and inclusive pedagogy in initial teacher education. Although their review concerns a more specific field than the present study, the broader geographical imbalance

remains relevant. Context-rich studies from African secondary schools are important not because resource constraints make them exceptional, but because they expose implementation assumptions that may remain hidden in better-resourced systems. They show that inclusion is not simply the transfer of a pedagogical technique; it is the negotiated enactment of curriculum, learner diversity, professional judgement, and institutional capacity.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several boundaries are important when interpreting these findings. First, the teacher survey captures reported practice rather than directly observed classroom behaviour. High ratings may reflect confidence, professional expectations, or social-desirability pressures as well as actual practice; they should therefore not be read as proof that the reported practices were implemented consistently or effectively. The study did not include systematic classroom observation or learner-outcome measures that could independently verify the survey responses. Second, the research was conducted in selected secondary schools within one district. Because a complete population denominator was not available for the present analysis, a response rate cannot be calculated and the findings should not be generalised to all teachers in Rukungiri District or Uganda.

The qualitative strand adds useful school-level explanation, but it also has limits. It drew on seven administrators rather than a wider range of voices such as classroom teachers, learners, parents, or specialist support staff. Verbatim interview extracts were not available for inclusion in this article; for that reason, the qualitative evidence is presented as thematic summaries and not as reconstructed quotations. Finally, the descriptive, cross-sectional design identifies patterns and plausible contextual explanations but cannot establish causal relationships. These limitations do not remove the value of the convergence between the survey pattern and administrators' accounts, but they define the level of claim the study can reasonably make. Future research should combine teacher reports with classroom observation, learner evidence, and multi-site sampling.

7. CONCLUSION

Teachers in the participating Rukungiri secondary schools reported frequent use of several practices that support inclusion under CBC, particularly familiar real-life examples, instructional adjustment, learner monitoring, group work, and professional collaboration. Yet differentiated task design was less strongly and less consistently reported. Administrators' accounts located that gap at the intersection of pedagogy and working conditions: large classes, limited time and materials, and curriculum-coverage demands made systematic differentiation difficult to sustain.

The findings therefore support a situated understanding of pedagogical preparedness. Inclusive competence matters, but its educational value depends on whether teachers have the time, resources, collaborative support, and curriculum flexibility to turn professional judgement into action. For competence-based reform, asking teachers to be learner-centred is not enough. Systems must make it practically possible for teachers to notice differences, plan for it, respond to it, and keep diverse

learners engaged in common and worthwhile learning. At the same time, the evidence reported here remains evidence of perceived and reported practice in the participating schools; stronger claims about enacted inclusion will require direct observation and learner-level evidence.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. The strongest practical implication is to treat differentiated instruction as a developmental skill rather than a slogan. Pre-service and in-service programmes should require teachers to work with realistic class scenarios: diagnose different levels of readiness, redesign a common task at several levels of support, plan flexible grouping, adapt assessment evidence, and reflect on whether changes preserve high expectations. Training should model differentiation with locally available materials rather than assuming technology-rich or low-enrolment classrooms.

2. Schools should protect structured time for joint planning and professional learning. The existing collaborative culture reported by administrators provides a useful foundation. However, collaboration should move beyond informal exchange toward co-construction of lessons, shared analysis of learner work, and collective problem-solving around difficult cases. Department-level banks of adaptable tasks and assessments could reduce the workload of differentiation without requiring every teacher to design multiple resources independently.

3. Curriculum and assessment agencies should examine whether pacing, coverage expectations, class conditions, and reporting requirements are aligned with the differentiated and learner-centred practices expected under CBC. The Ugandan evidence suggests that reform quality will remain uneven when schools are asked to implement the same pedagogical expectations with markedly different material and organisational capacity [2]. Support should therefore be differentiated at system level as well: schools with larger classes or fewer resources may require additional materials, targeted professional development, mentoring, or implementation support.

4. Evaluation should not rely only on teacher self-reports or the presence of learner-centred activities. Observation and learner evidence should examine whether classroom participation is substantively inclusive: who receives feedback, whose progress changes instruction, whether tasks provide meaningful access to common goals, and whether learners who need additional support remain engaged in the intellectual work of the lesson.

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