

## **A tiresome but rewarding task: Teachers' experiences of assessment within the Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum**

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### **Abstract**

*The Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC) in Uganda, launched in February 2020, is a competence-based curriculum that has informed the shift in assessment from a focus on knowledge to competences, including the emphasis on formative rather than summative assessment. Despite efforts by Government of Uganda through the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) to equip teachers with competencies to facilitate assessment under the LSC, there are observations that teachers still have limited knowledge about assessment. Moreover, little is known about how teachers cope with the new assessment modalities. This qualitative study thus explored teachers' experiences of assessment while using the LSC. It was guided by two research questions: What are the teachers' experiences of using the Uganda LSC assessment modalities, and how would teachers want to be supported to optimize assessment while using the Uganda LSC assessment modalities?*

**Keywords:** Assessment, experiences, curriculum, teachers, Uganda

### **Introduction**

Assessment, one of the critical roles of a teacher during the curriculum implementation process, provides an avenue in which the expected learning outcomes prescribed in a curriculum can be measured, evaluated or enhanced. Coates (2015) observes that assessment provides assurance to several stakeholders that learners have attained various knowledge, skills, values and attitudes and

are ready for further study or employment. Irfan (2018) further observes that appropriate assessment not only provides specific feedback to students to enable them improve or support their learning but also enables teachers to shape their teaching to help students attain the learning outcomes. Assessment information in form of grades provides information to students, employers, teachers and other stakeholders about students' academic achievement as well as behavioral factors such as student conduct, attitude and effort (Allen 2005 as cited in Chiekem, 2015). Amua-Sekyi (2016) defines assessment as all the activities students and teachers engage in to gain information that can be used to direct teaching and learning. Assessment has been categorized as formative or summative depending on its purpose (Caffrey, 2009; Yambi, 2018). Formative assessment takes place during the teaching and learning process, focuses on learners' progress, provides learners with feedback to inform the next steps in teaching and learning (Yambi, 2018). Summative on the other hand, occurs at the end of an educational activity and is designed to judge or certify the learner's overall performance or achievement, award a qualification, make decisions for grading as well as determine readiness for progression and provides formal evidence of a learners' competence (Awoniyi & Fletcher, 2014 as cited in Amua-Sekyi, 2016; Caffrey, 2009).

Teachers' experiences in implementing curriculum are crucial for these experiences influence how a curriculum is implemented (Alsubaie, 2016; Phaiphai, 2017). Moodley 2013 (as cited in Phaiphai, 2017) for instance reported that teachers' negative experiences in assessment gave rise to higher failure grades when implementing a curriculum and assessment policy statement at a foundation phase in South Africa. Ilter (2018) observed that gaining insights about teachers' experiences might play an important role in understanding their approaches to the teaching of certain subject aspects. Some scholars consider experience as the daily flow of a happening that people live in (Van-Manen, 2014; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Others define it as the reality of anything that people encounter that is inseparable from their awareness or consciousness of that encounter. These daily encounters range from a number of dimensions including challenges, concerns, perspectives, interactions, practices among many others. Teachers encounter difficulties when implementing curricula and these might seem numerous and strange especially when a new curriculum is being implementing like the case is currently in Uganda. It was therefore important to understand teachers' experiences in curriculum implementation in the Uganda context.

In this study, experience was conceptualized as the realities teachers encounter while carrying out assessment as stipulated in the LSC. Most studies on implementing the LSC in Uganda have focused on establishing challenges encountered in implementing the curriculum as a whole (Atuhura & Nambi, 2024; Kidega et al., 2024) as well as teacher perspectives towards the new curriculum (Namubiru et al., 2024; Wambi et al., 2024) without investigating aspects of implementation like assessment. An in depth investigation of discrete aspects of the LSC implementation is more likely to provide better insights than a “whole approach” investigation. This is why this study aimed at understanding teachers’ experiences of assessment in the new curriculum in Uganda.

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Uganda Education System***

Uganda’s education system consists of four main levels: the pre-primary level, seven years of primary education, six years of secondary education split into the first four years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary and then tertiary or university education. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) oversees the education sector in Uganda and promotes both public and private education systems. The ministry has affiliated institutions such as the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) that develops and manages curricula for pre-primary, secondary and tertiary institutions as well as the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB). UNEB conducts and manages examinations at the end of certain educational cycles including primary, secondary coupled with conducting examination related research. The secondary school level curriculum has undergone revisions in Uganda compelling teachers to take on new practices in curriculum implementation.

### ***The Lower Secondary Curriculum in Uganda***

The Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC) in Uganda, launched in February 2020, is a competence-based curriculum that emphasizes the acquisition of competencies required for the world of work. The old examination-oriented secondary school curriculum was problematized as unproductive in contributing to the acquisition of competencies demanded by the 21<sup>st</sup> century changing workplace in addition to being overloaded, inadequate in addressing secondary school student needs among other criticisms (Clegg, Bregman, & Ottevanger 2007). In this regard, a review based on the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP, 2009-2018) by the MOES through the NCDC was carried

out to address the aforementioned issues and this resulted into the LSC (NCDC, 2018). The LSC goal is to produce a secondary school graduate with competencies required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication) and to reduce unemployment among school graduates (NCDC, 2018).

The curriculum framework stipulates 21 subjects on the subject menu and teachers are supposed to develop values and generic skills as well as address cross cutting issues (NCDC, 2018) in the course of teaching the subjects. The teaching approaches the teachers should take should include but not limited to research, presentations, use of media, problem solving, developing ideas and learning through interactions (NCDC, 2020). The LSC has also informed the shift in assessment from a focus on knowledge to competences as well as the emphasis on formative rather than summative assessment. In formative assessment teachers are required to make professional judgements about student learning during the teaching and learning process by determining the extent learners meet the stipulated learning outcomes set out in the syllabi through a method called “triangulation” (NCDC, 2019). This involves conducting classroom observations to assess acquisition of skills and values; conversation (talking to learners and asking questions) for the purpose of assessing knowledge and understanding; appraising learners' products (reports, presentations, paintings, diagrams and many others) (NCDC, n.d). More so, learners are required to do end of unit activities called activities of integration developed by the teacher which are criterion assessed. The activities of integration consist of a scenario, context, an issue about society, a complex pertinent and perplexing situation. The purpose of formative assessment is to collect detailed information that can be used to improve and support student learning as well as instruction (NCDC, 2019). Related to formative assessment is the assessment as learning practice in which students engage in self and peer assessment (NCDC, 2019). Summative assessment is carried out at the end of the year through teacher-developed examinations (NCDC, 2019). However, the summative assessment results are accrued from the cumulative formative assessment results on end of unit activities coupled with the results from the end of year examination. The end of cycle (senior 1-4) summative assessment comprises 20% from the cumulative formative assessment results and 80% from the final examination at the end of senior four.

Most research on the implementation of the LSC in Uganda has concentrated on investigating the challenges faced in implementing the curriculum as a whole (Atuhura & Nambi,

2024; Kidega et al., 2024; Tumuheise et al., 2023) and teacher perspectives towards implementation (Namubiru et al., 2024; Wambi, 2024) and a gap still exists in studying discrete aspects like assessment. Atuhura and Nambi examined the challenges Uganda's secondary school teachers of English faced while implementing the LSC. Their study revealed that there was scarcity of teaching resources, large class size which hampered application of learner-centered methodologies and assessment, and limited stakeholder support. Tumuheise et al. explored the factors affecting implementation of the LSC using a case of a district in Uganda while Wambi et al. aimed at establishing teacher preparedness in implementing the LSC with a focus on the methods teachers were using, the extent they were implementing the curriculum and the challenges they faced in assessment. Some of the aforementioned research have reported findings relating to assessment of the LSC, mostly on the challenges teachers face. Still left unresearched are the experiences and perspectives of teachers on assessment, what teachers consider to be enablers and how they would like to be supported to optimize assessment. The current research sought to fill this gap

### ***The Concept of Assessment***

Assessment, which is most often narrowly regarded as meaning tests and examinations (Beets, Bitzer & Carl 2014), encompasses a range of activities for the purpose of measuring or improving learning (Yambi, 2018). Teachers mostly carry out two types of assessment: formative and summative. The former is used during the teaching and learning process in order to improve curriculum and instruction (Caffrey 2009; Sardareh, Rashid & Saad 2013; Yambi, 2018) and the latter at the end of an educational activity designed to judge the learner's overall performance as well as make decisions for grading or determining readiness for progression (Aloovi, 2016; Yambi, 2018). While formative assessment is usually not graded and is conducted in such forms as formal quizzes, assignments, informal questioning techniques and discussions, summative assessment entails use of such methods as tests, examinations, assignments or projects which are graded (Aloovi, 2016; Bhat, 2019).

Research, however, indicates that for teachers to carry out assessment effectively, they must possess relevant knowledge/skills about assessment concepts, principles, techniques, tools, strategies and procedures (Alkharusi, 2011; Hamidi, 2010; Vingsle, 2014). In view of this, research recommends that teachers should be given adequate support, training and appropriate resources to

enhance their classroom assessment practices (Koloi-Keaikitse, 2017; Onyefulu, 2018). Coupled to these is the consideration of teachers' experiences in assessment (Tazawell, 2018).

### ***Teachers' Experiences in Assessment***

Tazawell (2018) examined teachers' experiences with formative assessment using narrative inquiry. Tazawell found that teachers were initially confused when asked to conduct formative assessment but their understanding improved with time. Erickson (2016) investigated students and teachers' experiences and perspectives of formative assessment and found that teachers and students reported difficulties using formative assessment. Research shows that teachers face a number of challenges in assessment including inadequate teaching resources/materials, large classes, insufficient time to pay individualized attention to each student, inadequate teacher knowledge and skills in assessment among many others (Altinyelken, 2010; Caffrey, 2009; Mandukwini, 2016). These challenges impact on how teachers assess learners. Altinkyelken (2010) study for instance revealed that teachers' failure to assess learners effectively was as a result of inadequate teacher training, inadequate teaching materials and monitoring of teaching. Thus, research recommends that teachers require support during the implementation of new curriculum (Heather, 2009; Lashley, 2019). In the area of assessment teachers require school administrators' and other stakeholders' support, resources, professional training on a regular basis (Kibuna, 2013; Koloi-Keaikitse, 2011).

### **Problem**

Assessment is a key component of educational practice as it provides students and teachers the opportunity to meaningfully reflect on learning and how best learning can be delivered respectively (Widiastuti, 2018). Teacher practices, experiences, knowledge and skills in assessment are crucial factors to be considered when carrying out assessment for they contribute to worthwhile assessment and in turn meaningful learning (McMillan, 2001). With the introduction of the LSC that has informed the shift in assessment from a focus on knowledge to competences and emphasis on formative rather than summative assessment, the GOU through NCDC has made effort to train teachers in the LSC assessment modalities through refresher courses (Masaba, 2022). The purpose of these courses is to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to facilitate assessment of the LSC with fidelity (Masaba, 2022).

However, there are observations that teachers still have limited knowledge about the LSC assessment forms (Ahabwe, 2022; Nantambi, 2022). In a study carried out to establish how teachers who carried on with implementation of the LSC during the COVID-19 crisis had planned, taught and assessed learners, teachers revealed they had limited knowledge on the new curriculum assessment forms (Ahabwe, 2022). Findings from a professional development action research study to enhance critical thinking among teachers using the LSC show that teachers have limited knowledge on formative assessment (Nantambi, 2022). Moreover, little is known about how the teachers are coping with the new assessment modalities of the LSC.

Since assessment has the potential to shape education, define and direct the life chances of an individual if carried out appropriately (Coates, 2015); and teacher practices, experiences, knowledge and skills are crucial in conducting worthwhile assessment (Rasyidah, 2020, Tazwell, 2018), it is important that teachers' experiences in assessment be understood. This qualitative study, therefore, explored teachers' experiences with the LSC assessment modalities and sought to understand how they would want to be supported to optimize assessment. This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' experiences of using the Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum assessment modalities?
2. How would teachers want to be supported to optimize assessment while using the Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum assessment modalities?

## **Methodology**

### ***Study Design***

The present study employed a qualitative case study research design. Case study involves an in-depth investigation in which researchers explain, describe or explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). Schoch (2020) further observes that in case study researchers typically focus on a specific person, place, event, thing or organization, which they comprehensively and intensively analyse. Case study research design was deemed appropriate for this study because it allowed for an exploration of teachers' experiences in assessment while using the LSC assessment modalities with a focus on certain categories of schools (cases).

### ***Study Participants and Cases of the Study***

A total of 30 respondents participated in this study. These included 10 teachers from an affluent government-aided single sex boarding school located in Mbarara city-Southwestern Uganda; 11 teachers from a non-affluent mixed day and boarding government school in Isingiro district-South Western Uganda and 9 teachers from a less affluent private mixed day and boarding school in Mbarara city. The affluent school is a well-resourced school in terms of physical structures with laboratories, two libraries and adequate classroom space. The non-affluent school on the other hand, is not a very well-resourced school. It has an incomplete building for science laboratories, a room that is used as a library, a computer laboratory and a classroom for elective subjects. The private school selected in this study is fairly resourced with science laboratories, fairly adequate classroom space but inadequate for the computer laboratory.

The different categories of schools were purposively selected because they would allow for comparison of teachers' experiences in assessment among the different schools as well as provide a range of avenues from which the aspect of assessment of the LSC can be learnt about. The teachers who participated in this study were also purposively selected and these included teachers that handle one of the compulsory subjects of the LSC including: Mathematics, English, Geography, Physics, Physical Education, Christian Religious Education, Biology, Chemistry, Kiswahili and Entrepreneurship and have used the curriculum since 2020 when it was first rolled out. These teachers were assumed to have interacted with the LSC more than their counterparts who teach electives, hence, have more varied experiences in assessment.

### ***Methods of Data Collection***

One-on-one in-depth interviews which lasted about 30 minutes each were used to elicit participants' own accounts using a researcher developed interview guide. The interviews focused on teachers' perspectives towards assessment, their ability to carry out assessment, enablers, challenges and recommendations for improving assessment.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

Data from the different categories of schools was first analyzed individually following data analysis procedures in qualitative research as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018). All interview responses were first transcribed followed by reading through the transcriptions to get a

general sense of information from them as well as determining the emerging themes with reference to the research questions. The next step involved coding, beginning with systematic analysis of data (open coding) and then categorized by identifying the relationship between and within categories (axial coding) (Mills et al., 2010). Themes were then generated from the data as guided by the research questions. A cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) was then carried out to understand how the findings from each case related to one another. The final step involved making interpretations of the research findings.

## **Findings**

The findings are presented following the sequence of the research questions.

- *What are the teachers' experiences of using the Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum assessment modalities?*

Experience in this study was conceptualized as the realities teachers encounter while carrying out assessment as stipulated in the LSC. Thus, this research question sought to examine the teachers' experiences of using the LSC assessment modalities with regard to their perspectives towards the LSC assessment modalities and their ability to carry out assessment; enablers that facilitate assessment as well as challenges encountered. Most of the respondents from the affluent, less affluent and non-affluent schools stated that they employ formative and summative forms of assessment while using the LSC. Some of the formative assessment modes included observation, activities of integration, class exercises/tasks, interviews and the summative ones were end of year examinations and tests. With regard to their perspectives towards the LSC assessment modalities, most of the teachers from the three categories of schools described both formative and summative modalities as appropriate, "good", "best" and beneficial to the teachers and learners in a variety of ways. One of the teachers for instance indicated that formative assessment was good "because as the lesson is being conducted assessment is being done... both the teacher and learner are learning" and another stated "the current assessment for lower secondary is appropriate and the best because it assesses the learner in many aspects compared to the old assessment which focused on only the last scores." Another teacher further indicated that the end of year examination was "good since it helps identify those that gained a good number of competencies and can move on to the next level"

The respondents in this study, however, perceived assessment as a tiresome, time consuming and confusing task. According to the teachers in all the three categories of schools,

summative assessment requires a lot of effort and time to conduct especially during the grading process that involves the combination of cumulative scores from the end of unit assessment results and end of year examination ones. Furthermore, teachers were of the view that summative assessment does not aid retention of information because it takes place at the end of the year students and by that time students will have forgotten what they had studied in the previous terms-one and two. The use of RACE (Relevancy, Accuracy, Coherence, Excellence) tool to assess students' work was described as confusing and difficult because according to some teachers "it is not easy to determine/assess relevancy, accuracy", "scoring by RACE is hard...some statements are broad...it becomes hard....where do you put the relevance?, where do you put coherence?", "RACE is challenging...some teachers are not well versed with it".

With regard to the teachers' perspectives about their ability to carry out assessment, most of the participants from the affluent, less affluent, and non-affluent schools indicated that they possess considerable ability to use the LSC assessment modalities. One teacher for instance stated, "I have the ability to give activities of integration", another indicated "I know how to grade, score activities of integration", yet another echoed "I have the ability-quite well above average". The teachers attributed their ability to the NCDC trainings from which they had acquired information and skills to carry out assessment as well as the school-based training. Teachers for example mentioned "I have the ability due to training from NCDC", "carrying out assessment is not all that hard since the teacher was trained on how to assess learners". On the other hand, a few teachers felt that they were not excellent in conducting the LSC assessment modalities although they possessed some skills while others divulged that they were not conversant, which they ascribed to the occasional trainings from NCDC. The teachers from the less affluent private school mentioned that the school-based trainings were few, hence, not enough to enable them acquire adequate skills for conducting assessment.

Furthermore, among the experiences this research set out to examine was the enablers that facilitate assessment of the LSC. Findings indicate that learners' books, teachers' guides, assessment frame works from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) were very instrumental in helping teachers carry out assessment. According to the teachers, these course books provided direction and a lay out on how to carry out assessment as well as educated them on the purpose of assessment. A teacher for example stated: "you get direction about this new type

of assessment.” Another responded, “we have learners’ guides to further guide us.” Coupled to the course books were the trainings from NCDC and school-based ones from which teachers picked some ideas about assessment and developed skills to improve their assessment proficiency. A teacher from the affluent school for instance affirmed: “NCDC has provided samples of assessment tools that we can use.” These trainings were as well an avenue for social networks that provided learning platforms in form of sharing experiences according to the respondents. More so, teachers from the affluent school indicated that they received support from their school in monetary form, supervision of the teaching and learning process and resource provision. This notwithstanding, the teachers from the three categories of schools felt that the school-based support forms and trainings were slightly below the required standard. The training, for instance were insufficient and irregular in addition to inadequate material provision.

The teachers in this study encountered challenges related to resources, training, as well as the actual process of carrying out assessment. Teachers for instance observed that they lacked resources that would facilitate preparation for assessment and aid the grading process such as computers and other instructional materials. The training sessions for assessment were occasional, insufficient and moreover involved a few teachers which the teachers described as “selective training.” One teacher for instance said, “some teachers were trained once, others not trained at all”, another observed “training was not thorough, it was just basic.” As a result, some teachers still face difficulties designing assessment activities or questions, activities of integration and do not feel well equipped to carry out assessment. The assessment process according to the teachers from all the three categories of schools was observed to be tedious and time consuming due to the process of grading when using the RACE tool, data entry of cumulative assessment results at the end of the year as well as the use of many forms of assessment. A teacher from the non-affluent school for instance stated: “it takes a lot of time”, another affirmed: “there’s limited time for assessment”, another teacher stated: “it is surely tedious.” Learner absenteeism made it difficult to administer activities of integration in the non-affluent and less affluent schools coupled with the high teacher to learner ratio which limits assessment of all learners during the triangulation process. The latter challenge mostly affected the less affluent and affluent schools. One major concern teachers from all the three categories of schools expressed was that they did not know what the examination would be like at the end of the cycle (senior four).

- ***How would teachers want to be supported to optimize assessment while using the Uganda Lower Secondary Curriculum assessment modalities?***

This research question sought to explore the forms of support teachers require to optimize the LSC assessment modalities. According to the teachers from all the three categories of schools, resource provision, professional development, recruitment and remuneration for teachers are the major forms of support required to optimize assessment of the LSC. The teachers were of the view that provision of resources such as computers and other ICT gadgets including radios, television sets, projectors; course books; scholastic materials and the internet by schools, the government, parents and other stakeholders was critical in optimizing assessment of the LSC according to the teachers. A teacher from the affluent school for instance stated: “we need more gadgets like projectors, laptops,” another teacher affirmed: “the government should equip schools with enough equipment like coloured printers, books and stationery.” With regard to the course books, there was also a need to correct errors in some books. Relatedly, teachers require more guidance on the format and kind of questions the end of cycle examinations will be like so that they can confidently prepare their learners for the examination.

Most of the respondents from the three categories of schools in this study highlighted the need for professional development in order to undertake assessment of the LSC with fidelity. According to the teachers, the training should be non-selective, more frequent, appropriate and adequate. A teacher from the non-affluent school for example said: “training every term should be done”, another teacher from the affluent school added: “...regularly conduct workshops aiming at availing all the necessary information”, another teacher from the less-affluent school affirmed: “conduct more workshops, retool teachers...when you are implementing intensively, train teachers”, a teacher from the non-affluent school was of the opinion that training should bring all teachers on board and not a few; “we need non-selective training”. Teacher training according to the teachers should also focus on teacher trainees to enable them acquire competencies to handle the LSC assessment forms. The teachers believed that the professional development activities would enable them to improve their skills in assessment.

More so the respondents in this study from the affluent and less-affluent schools divulged that there is need for teacher recruitment to reduce on teacher to student ratio as well as remuneration especially of Arts teachers because the work related with implementation of the LSC

was demanding. A teacher from the less-affluent school for instance stated: “remuneration on the teachers’ salaries should be done to boost their teaching morale,” Another teacher from the affluent affirmed: “some allowances for some subjects like science subjects, Geography for moving out of school allowances.” Another teacher confirmed: “...remuneration to help teachers during assessment.”

## **Discussion**

Teachers’ experiences in this study focused on their perspectives towards the LSC assessment modalities and their ability to carry out assessment; enablers that facilitate assessment as well as challenges encountered. The finding that most of the that most of the teachers who participated in this study employed formative and summative forms of assessment is an indication that teachers are aware of the stipulated assessment modalities of the LSC, hence, a likelihood that they might carry out assessment appropriately. Mellati and Khademi (2018) assert that teachers’ assessment literacy has significant impact on teachers’ assessment practices. Assessment literacy according to Mertler (2003) includes among other aspects the possession of knowledge about basic principles of assessment practice such as terminology of assessment related concepts. Thus, the teachers’ ability to use appropriate assessment terminology with reference to the LSC assessment modalities suggests that teachers possess considerable understanding about what assessment under the LSC is like. This study, however, did not use classroom observations to corroborate the data from the interviews and ascertain how teachers were actually employing formative and summative assessment. Further research could be carried out to determine teachers’ practices in assessment using the LSC assessment modalities.

The perception that both formative and summative modalities were beneficial to the teachers and learners in a variety of ways suggests that teachers are appreciating the LSC curriculum, which in turn may increase their possibility of intending to or using the LSC assessment modalities. This finding builds on existing evidence that teachers with positive attitudes towards assessment view it as a useful tool to improve student learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness, hence, are more likely to implement formative assessment practices (Karaman & Sahin, 2017; Yan & Cheng, 2015). Whereas some studies on assessment have revealed that educators’ conception of assessment is synonymous to testing (Dayal & Govinda, 2015; Rahmani, 2018; Yao, 2015), teachers in this study seem to have an understanding that

assessment is more than testing. According to the teachers in this study, assessment is important for determining learners' progress as well as providing learning experiences for both the teacher and the students. These positive perceptions towards assessment provide an opportunity the MoES in Uganda should exploit to further enhance positive attitudes that are critical in contributing to teacher engagement in assessment of the LSC modalities with fidelity.

The respondents in this study, however, perceived assessment as a tiresome, time consuming and confusing task. This finding resonates with earlier findings which demonstrated that teachers described assessment as a complex, confusing and contradictory process (Rahmani, 2018). It can be argued that although teachers in this study conceptualized assessment as beneficial, it is still a tiresome, confusing and time consuming task. The implication for NCDC, MoES, and head teachers is that there is need to devise more enabling structures to help teachers carry out assessment with minimal effort and increased understanding. These structures should be tailored to cater for the diverse needs according to school categories so as to make the support forms more appropriate and beneficial.

The present study indicated that the majority of the teachers who participated in this study from all the three school categories possess considerable ability to use the LSC assessment modalities. The teachers attributed their ability to the NCDC training from which they had acquired information and skills to carry out assessment. This finding suggests that professional development has made teachers feel empowered in conducting assessment under the LSC. Such a finding correlates with what other previous studies have reported that teachers with greater self-efficacy in assessment are more likely to both intend to and actually implement assessment practices (Crichton & McDaid, 2016; So & Lee, 2011). Brown, et al. (2011) and Heitink et al. (2016) further found that successful implementation of assessment modalities is dependent on personal factors such as teacher knowledge, skill, beliefs and attitudes. In examining the aforementioned scholarship about teacher efficacy and contributory factors to assessment, one can deduce that teachers' confidence as developed from personal knowledge and skills is crucial in implementing stipulated assessment modalities of any curriculum. Hence, the need to build teachers' capability to enable them build a repertoire of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make them confident enough to carry out effective implementation of the LSC assessment modalities.

On the other hand, some teachers had the feeling that they were not excellent in conducting assessment although they possessed some skills. Others mentioned that they were not conversant with the use of assessment tools such as rubrics. This they ascribed to the occasional nature of trainings from NCDC, showing that some teachers might not be conducting the LSC assessment modalities as required. Difficulties related to the use of assessment tools affected teachers from all the three school categories. Research indicates that if educators lack proper assessment-based training in the various assessment components such as interpreting, and applying assessment results, designing and administering assessment they may possess poor assessment practices (Kanjee & Sayed, 2008; Masole, 2011). This therefore calls for an evaluation of assessment trainings as well as acquiring teachers' feedback about the trainings in order to devise means of conducting appropriate and meaningful assessment training.

One of the enabling factors teachers from all the three school categories reported to have been instrumental in supporting their assessment practices was the trainings from NCDC and school based ones despite being occasional. This finding is in line with Zhang and Burry-Stocks (2003) findings which indicated that assessment training for in-service teachers might have a significant impact on their assessment skills. Indeed, teachers who received in-service assessment training perceived themselves to be more skilled than those without in-service training and were more likely to use recommended practices such as statistical applications, communicating assessment results, writing test items among other practices (Alkahurusi, 2011; Koloji-Keaikitse, 2016). The fact that teachers were able to learn about assessment from the NCDC or school based training is an indication that these training sessions are a major determinant of teachers' assessment practices. On the other hand, the few school-based assessment training sessions conducted in the less affluent private school as reported by the teachers suggest that the teachers' assessment knowledge and skills may still be deficient which would impact on the teachers' assessment practices. The conclusion is that government aided and government schools stand a better chance of implementing the LSC assessment modalities than their less affluent private school counterparts do leading to disparities in the implementation of the LSC.

Consistent with previous research which concluded that providing teachers with relevant assessment resources can improve their assessment practices (Kanjee, 2009), this research as well reported that the LSC course books enabled teachers to carry out assessment. Kanjee found that

assessment resource banks were a valuable resource for planning and presentation of lessons as well as assigning homework exercises and class work. The LSC course books provided direction and a lay out on how to carry out assessment as well as educated teachers on the purpose of assessment. This finding seems to suggest that the course books are a guide to conducting assessment under the LSC, hence, their availability should be ensured.

The challenges that teachers encounter with assessment in the LSC accord with previous research findings (Aschalew & Aemero, 2018; Chand, 2017; Enu, 2021; Lumadi, 2013; Moti & Tamiru, 2022). In a study to investigate teachers' perceptions of competence based assessment for learning practices, Moti and Timuru found that lack of learning resources was one of the major challenges that hindered teachers' assessment practices. Such a finding had earlier been reported by Enu (2021) among teacher educators adopting formative assessment strategies in Mathematics classrooms. The teachers had indicated that the inadequacy of instructional materials hindered their implementation of various assessment strategies. Chand (2017) study reported that teachers required a lot of time to carry out assessment as one of the challenges that constrained their formative assessment practices. Aschalew and Aemero (2018) identified assessment training gap, lack of resources and shortage of time as the major factors that hindered high school teachers' classroom assessment in the Southwest Shoa zone, Ethiopia. The challenges identified in these earlier studies related to resources, training, as well as the actual process of carrying out formative assessment. In this study, however, the challenges reported by teachers affected both formative and summative assessment. Thus, to understand the impediments that affect assessment under the LSC, both summative and formative modalities should be given attention to better improve the assessment process in its entirety. In agreement with Enu (2022) it is important that the facilitators and impediments of teachers' assessment practices be understood to develop suitable support structures or measures to enable teachers enhance their assessment practices as well as overcome the impediments to optimize assessment within the LSC.

The forms of support teachers require to optimize assessment included: stakeholder involvement, resource provision, professional development as well as recruitment of more teachers in the teaching field to reduce the large teacher to student ratio that impedes application of the LSC assessment modalities. Additionally, teachers desired that their salaries and/or incentives be increased to motivate them to conduct the tiresome tasks related to assessment. This finding

resonates with earlier study findings on teacher assessment practices (Charlton, 2017; Kanjee, 2009; Kibuna, 2013; Koloi-Keaikitse, 2016; Ming & Cheng, 2022). Resource provision according to Kanjee and Charlton influences teacher assessment practices. Kibuna's study reported that teachers felt that they needed professional development in order to improve their assessment practices. Ming and Cheng (2022) study revealed that contextual factors among which is school support, number of teachers significantly impact on teachers' assessment practices. In the Uganda context, the forms of support as stated by the teachers need to be given critical consideration because the LSC is new and research has shown that teachers need support when implementing curriculum reforms (Lashley, 2019). Theories on curriculum implementation have as well advanced that successful implementation of educational programmes or innovations depend on such factors as availability of managerial support, capacity building focused on results, and tri-level engagement of school, community and district (Fullan, 2006; Gross et al. as cited in Ruto, 2013). The implication of this finding for the MoES in Uganda is that various forms of support as deemed significant, appropriate, and necessary by the teachers should be provided to facilitate effective assessment under the LSC.

### **Implications**

The present study findings have implications for teacher training, teacher support and further research. The teachers in this study seem to have considerable understanding of the assessment modalities under the LSC and perceive these modalities as appropriate and beneficial to both students and teachers in optimizing the teaching and learning process. Despite the challenges encountered by the teachers implementing the LSC assessment modalities with regard to training, resources and use of assessment tools, the teachers believe they possess a sense of self-efficacy to conduct assessment. This was attributed to the NCDC training sessions and provision of course books by the MoES. These findings suggest that the MoES/NCDC efforts to educate and support the teachers in implementing the LSC through in-service training and provision of course books are worthwhile. However, the teacher training needs to focus on mitigating the negative experiences that come along with the assessment processes of the LSC as reported by the teachers. Teachers find assessment a challenging task because of inadequate resource provision, because it is time consuming and tedious, and because of high teacher to student ratio among other

challenges. The implementation of the LSC assessment modalities will continue to be problematic to the teachers unless means of alleviating these challenges are devised.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The teachers' perceptions of assessment in this study is positive; an indicator that the teachers appreciate and consider the LSC assessment modalities beneficial. Despite them identifying enablers that facilitated assessment processes for them, a lot of support in terms of professional development, resource provision still remains desired to augment assessment under the LSC. This study therefore recommends that:

School-based and off-station training in assessment continues to be carried out. These, however, need to be more frequent, adequate, and they must address the pertinent needs of the teachers. This should include arranging for and collecting critical, evaluative and forward feedback about assessment training from the teachers. Such a practice could assist in identifying teacher concerns, misconceptions, strengths and weaknesses of the training and in turn contribute to the design and implementation of more beneficial and appropriate trainings. Since teachers described the NCDC trainings as a platform for sharing experiences, the training sessions could deliberately include a sharing component to allow teachers collaborate and share experiences as a means of enriching their learning experiences and competencies in assessment.

School support could take on interactive learning platforms such as teacher learning communities to allow for peer support in assessment or reflective practices both of which may enable teachers take on informed practices in assessment. Also, resource support in the form of ICT gadgets, course books and other instructional materials should be provided or enhanced to enable teachers carry out assessment effectively.

Research be conducted to ascertain how exactly teachers are conducting assessment and in turn address any emerging issues or needs to optimize assessment under the LSC. Research could be broadened to even other areas of the implementation of the LSC such as teaching, planning, resource provision, support systems among others and the teachers' perspectives towards these be understood. Overall, a bottom-up approach should be used to plug the gaps in training, teacher support and other areas reported to be challenging in the subsequent phases of the implementation of the LSC.

## Limitations

In exploring teachers' experiences in assessment, this study focused on teachers' perspectives, enablers, challenges and support required to optimize assessment under the LSC. This study, however, did not look at teacher assessment practices. More so, the study used only one type of data collection method and did not employ classroom observations which could have helped to corroborate data from the interviews. The limited time for data collection did not allow for our use of observations but the participants' accounts through the interviews still provided an in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences of assessment as they recounted their own incidents and stories or encounters about or with assessment. The study findings are limited to the experiences of teachers who participated in this study in those particular schools, hence, they cannot be generalized over all of Uganda. However, important lessons or insights could be learnt from this research to contribute to further study of assessment within the LSC.

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