



MODERN KAREMA

EARLY FRUITS OF THE NEW CURRICULUM

PHOTO BY EDWARD LUKIIZA



Students of Immaculate Heart Girls in Rukungiri baking during the Food and Nutrition practical lesson under the new curriculum

In 2020, the education ministry rolled out the competency-based curriculum for lower secondary. The curriculum was changed after research showed that the products of the old syllabus lacked the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed in the world of work. The curriculum change was, therefore, an effort to plug these loopholes in the education system to produce a holistic learner ready to thrive after school. However, the implementation of the new curriculum has faced challenges, including its limited appreciation and buy-in by teachers, and poor parental and community engagement,

partly because of a lack of effective sensitisation of the public and mindset change among teachers, who are now required to change from a teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy.

It is also true that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the curriculum's implementation as schools were closed for two years, and attention shifted to healthcare. But there are already bright spots in the teaching and learning processes since the roll-out of the curriculum.

During my interaction with school leaders and teachers as part of my field-based support in the Teacher Change Maker Development Programme currently implemented in 79 districts by the Association of Secondary School Headteachers of Uganda, the education ministry and STIR Education, I have heard inspiring stories of change from headteachers, teachers and learners.

The teachers, who have taken

up the new curriculum with an open and growth mindset say the new methodologies of teaching are less tiring since tutors are expected to facilitate learning and make lessons learner-centred. This reduces the time a teacher spends talking and learners are active participants in the classroom –

which is different from the old curriculum, which encouraged the teachers to do most of the talking.

Teachers also say the curriculum change has improved their relationship with the learners, as well as encouraged the students to consult and ask questions in

and outside the classroom. This enables learners to develop self-esteem, confidence and critical thinking – key 21st-century skills needed in the world of work and business.

It has also improved the relationship among learners as it is hinged on group work, presentations and projects. This is helping the students to learn to collaborate, which is one of the life skills the products of the old curriculum do not have.

The new teaching methodology also enables the students to develop presentation and public speaking skills. Employers will tell you stories of graduates with First Class and Upper Second degrees who cannot express or make a presentation in an interview room or cannot move up the career ladder because of their inability to speak before an audience of more than three people.

During the headteachers' training in Kigezi sub-region, a headteacher said learners

between Senior One and Three classes are different from their counterparts in Senior Four (the last cohort of lower secondary students being taught under the old curriculum), Senior Five and Senior Six (where teachers are still using the old curriculum).

She said learners in the classes (where the old curriculum is still taught) are shy and laid back while their counterparts in the lower classes are confident and outspoken.

In Masaka sub-region, a headteacher gave her experience of how the new curriculum was promoting teamwork and critical thinking because of the peer learning strategy. This may not be the case in all schools, but is an indicator of what we might soon reap from this curriculum.

The writer is the Uganda country director for STIR Education, and the country co-lead for RELI Uganda

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