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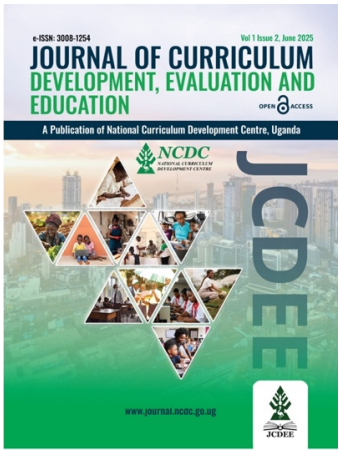
Barriers to Adopting Innovative Teaching Methods in Private Secondary Schools in Gulu City: Implications for Curriculum Implementation



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Abstract

The study examined the barriers to adopting innovative teaching methods and proposed actionable strategies to enhance their use within private secondary schools implementing Uganda's Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC) in Gulu City. Although the Government introduced the LSSC to promote more meaningful and student-centred learning, different stakeholders have raised concerns about its practical implementation in classrooms. Utilising a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design, we collected quantitative data from 96 teachers using semi-structured questionnaires and qualitative data from nine school administrators through interviews at 10 purposively selected Laroo-Pece and Bardege-Layibi Division schools. Quantitative results show that innovative pedagogies, such as Project-Based Learning, Group Discussions, and Debates, were most often utilised (mean = 2.69–2.63), while resource-demanding teaching methodologies, including the Flipped Classroom (mean = 0.73) and Contextual Learning (mean = 0.82) methods, were seldom employed. The most significant barriers were funding constraints (mean = 3.95), lack of access to educational technology (mean = 3.73), lack of institutional support (mean = 3.71), and inadequate teacher training (mean = 3.49). Qualitative findings supported these, with low teacher efficacy, lack of pedagogical support, large class sizes, limited instructional time, and poor administrative support being the most dominant barriers. Budget constraints and competing priorities were also cited by administrators as significant barriers to implementing innovative pedagogy, reflecting broader systemic and contextual factors that continue to work against the effective implementation of the LSSC. The research recommends additional teacher professional development, the provision of more teaching materials, and institutional-based support to spur intensive pedagogical change in private Ugandan secondary schools.

Keywords: *Innovative Teaching Methods, Implementation Challenges Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC), Private Secondary Schools, Professional Development.*

Background

The Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC) was introduced in Uganda in 2020, marking a policy reform that shifts from content-based to competence-based and learner-centred pedagogies. The reform is among the global education trends aimed at achieving 21st-century competences, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and flexibility (Gulu District Education Office, 2023). The LSSC envisions a shift towards pedagogy that is participatory and interactive in nature, further engaging learners and achieving improved learning outcomes. Despite the curriculum's potential, its actual implementation in practice often falls short, particularly in private secondary schools.

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Kidega et al. (2024) determined, during their studies, that most teachers in the schools still adopt teacher-centred approaches. Musunguze et al. (2023) also document low interactivity in Ugandan schools' classrooms and find the continuation of centuries-old pedagogies within the post-reform period. These gaps between policy and practice underscore an urgent concern over the effectiveness of the LSSC in transforming education.

Several researchers have already documented several barriers that prevent the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy. These include limited professional development opportunities (Mitchell et al., 2024), inadequate access to learning resources (Muchunguzi et al., 2023), resistance to change from organisations (Torquato & Ghanem, 2024), and a lack of systemic support for pedagogical innovation in general (Kidega et al., 2024). Although many teachers have received initial training in the LSSC, the absence of continuous follow-up, mentoring, and enabling conditions has limited the impact of such endeavours on actual classroom practices (Kidega et al., 2024). Consequently, the gap between curriculum intention and realisation persists. If these challenges persist, they will most certainly compromise the quality of education, rendering students ill-equipped to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. They also exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly for students in under-resourced private schools (DevelopmentAid, 2024). As Fullan (2016) and Angura (2017) argue, without effective implementation strategies, even well-designed curricular reforms are unlikely to yield meaningful change.

There remains an urgent need for context-specific research to illuminate the challenges to pedagogical transformation and propose pragmatic solutions to overcome them. Despite on-going reforms, empirical information on how such issues unfold at the school level, especially in urban settings such as Gulu City, is limited.

We undertook this study to fill this gap. Specifically, it aimed to examine the challenges to the use of learner-centred teaching methods in private secondary schools in Gulu City and explore feasible strategies for overcoming these challenges. By addressing both the challenges and potential solutions, the study contributes to on-going efforts to enhance curriculum implementation and the quality of secondary education in Uganda.

Research Questions

The use of the following research questions guided the study:

1. What innovative pedagogies are recommended under the LSSC?
2. To what extent are private secondary schools in Gulu City embracing these pedagogies?
3. What are the major hindrances to the implementation of innovative pedagogies in these schools?
4. What strategies can be employed to promote the adoption of innovative, learner-centred teaching methods in the implementation of the LSSC?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Everett Rogers' Theory of Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003), which provides a sound theoretical foundation for understanding how new practices and ideas are adopted or rejected within a social system. The theory posits that the adoption of innovation goes through five distinct phases: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation (Rogers, 2003). These phases represent a journey from initial contact with a novel concept to continued engagement with it, ultimately leading to either continued use or rejection of it.

In the context of this study, we viewed the introduction of Uganda's Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC) as an educational innovation. While the curriculum promotes learner-centred pedagogies, their successful adoption by teachers hinges on progressing through Rogers' five stages. Teachers becoming sensitised to recommended pedagogic improvements is part of the knowledge stage. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the merits of adopting these new methods in the persuasion stage. Teachers must decide whether to adopt or not to adopt innovative teaching methods during the decision stage, and in the fourth

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stage, they implement new teaching methods in the classroom. Lastly, in the confirmation stage, teachers seek affirmation of their choices and assess the outcome of the innovation.

However, as Rogers (2003) noted, adoption is not a matter of knowledge among people. Institutional support, peer access, training, and cultural norms are significant factors in determining how people progress through these stages. We believe that this theoretical framework offers a more comprehensive explanation for the paradox observed in Gulu City's private secondary schools: although many teachers possess knowledge of learner-centred teaching approaches, few have incorporated them into their teaching practices. In applying the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, we sought to identify the multi-level barriers to adopting innovative pedagogy and the catalyst conditions that would facilitate the implementation of the curriculum.

Related Literature

Teaching Strategies Recommended in the LSSC

Globally, there has been a shift towards learner-centred pedagogy, with an emphasis on approaches such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative learning. Uganda's Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC) has aligned itself with this goal, aiming to develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving capacity among learners (Tendo, 2025). Recent research emphasises the application of student-centred practices, such as group discussions, role-playing, debates, and discussions, in Ugandan classrooms, which have enhanced the skills of speakers and listeners, fostered self-discovery, and increased learners' confidence (Tendo, 2025). Additionally, the curriculum makers recommend integrating technology into instruction, with a focus on digital literacy and how the use of ICT tools facilitates learning. The new curriculum incorporates ICT as a method of learning in all subjects, promoting its use as a pedagogical tool and as an independent subject of study, thereby cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities among students (ICT Teachers Association of Uganda [ITAU], 2020).

While curriculum reformers strongly advocate for the adoption of learner-centred pedagogies—such as project-based, inquiry-based, and collaborative learning—these approaches are well-documented globally. However, there is a lack of literature on how these pedagogies are contextualised and translated into practice in Uganda's education system, particularly in under-resourced environments. Recent studies emphasise that successful pedagogical change involves more than policy alignment; it requires sensitivity to local cultural, institutional, and infrastructural contexts. For instance, a synthesis of research on teachers' experiences with Uganda's National Teacher Policy revealed significant gaps between policy ideals and classroom realities, highlighting the need for pragmatic, context-specific training that addresses immediate classroom issues (Makerere University, 2024).

Similarly, some studies on the implementation of Uganda's Lower Secondary Competence-Based Curriculum attest that bottom-up policy making neglects school environmental heterogeneity and begets heterogeneous and occasionally dysfunctional curriculum implementations (Emerald Insight, 2024). All these accounts fail to develop pedagogical solutions tailored to the actual demands and contexts of Ugandan classrooms.

Recent research highlights that effective pedagogic change is more than just policy uptake; it is also an issue of responsiveness to local infrastructural, institutional, and cultural conditions. For instance, a meta-analysis of Ugandan National Teacher Policy research on teacher experience revealed disjunctures between policy and classroom practice across the board, alongside calls for pragmatic, context-responsive training tied to immediate classroom needs (Makerere University, 2024). This situation aligns with the recognition that research on LSSC roll-out confirms that top-down initiatives often neglect school environment heterogeneity, resulting in uneven and sometimes failed curriculum roll-outs (Emerald Insight, 2024). These reports confirm the priority of grounding pedagogical intervention in ways responsive to the particular needs and contexts of Ugandan classrooms. Although the competence-based curriculum requires the application of learner-centred teaching methods, recent studies indicate that the

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majority of teachers in Uganda still do not employ these innovative teaching methodologies; instead, many teachers remain accustomed to traditional teacher-centred methods (Tendo, 2025). Even the ICT Teachers Association of Uganda (2020) reveals that several factors, including insufficient digital infrastructure, a lack of technical support, and ad-hoc teacher training, are hindering the uptake of learner-centred pedagogies. These are structural concerns that are most visibly brought to the surface in less-resourced locations, such as Gulu City, where schools continue to be underserved with digital materials and modern teaching resources. In light of these findings, this research seeks to investigate the specific strategies employed within the LSSC and determine the extent to which they are relevant and applicable to the unique educational context of Gulu City.

Adoption of Innovative Teaching Methods Among Teachers

Studies on the adoption of innovative pedagogies within the competence-based curriculum are being conducted worldwide, where this type of curriculum has been introduced. The majority of these studies reveal that the adoption of student-centred pedagogies is still slow in most parts of the world, despite the many curriculum reforms that have taken place. According to UNESCO (2021) and the OECD (2023), many teachers are failing to adopt innovative, learner-centred teaching methodologies due to several barriers, including teacher preparation, limited financial and other resources, and resistance to organisational change. These factors continue to hinder the effective implementation of competence-based curricula worldwide. In Uganda, these issues are further exacerbated by huge class sizes, high-stakes examination pressure, and the continued use of conventional didactic instructional methods (Tendo, 2025).

Social and institutional norms and expectations in Uganda are aligned to sustain rote learning and teacher-centred teaching, even among teachers who are familiar with more innovative pedagogies. For example, Kidega et al. (2024) confirmed that in private secondary schools, particularly in Gulu City, the pressure to attain high academic grades often outweighs plans for implementing learner-centred approaches. While some schools in the city have attempted to implement modern pedagogical practices, these efforts are frequently superficial, poorly funded, and non-institutionalised (Kidega et al., 2024).

This asymmetrical take-up underscores the importance of long-term support in embedding pedagogical innovation. As Schleicher (2023) highlights, it requires more than teacher enthusiasm to alter teaching practice, relying on policy consistency, quality leadership, and robust institutional capacity. It is within this context that this study aimed to determine the extent to which learner-centred pedagogies have been implemented in private secondary schools in Gulu City, as well as the facilitative or constraining factors that influence their implementation.

Obstacles to the Implementation of New Modes of Teaching in Schools

The factors inhibiting the adoption of new pedagogies in the teaching process have been widely reported in both global and local literature. At the global level, teacher education, financial limitations, and institutional resistance have emerged as key issues inhibiting the adoption of student-centred teaching (Fullan, 2016; Schleicher, 2018). Some of the barriers in Uganda, as identified, include a lack of capacity building among teachers on new pedagogical approaches, inadequate study materials (e.g., textbooks and computer software), and the rigidity of examination systems that emphasise rote memorisation (Lugangira, 2021). Furthermore, private secondary school teachers in Gulu City face special challenges, such as high student-to-teacher ratios, which make it difficult to incorporate individualised instructional approaches into learner-centred teaching (Okware & Okello, 2019). These are further exacerbated by demands to prepare students for national exams, which emphasise the memorisation of facts rather than developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Kanyesigye, 2021).

Despite such evidence, few literature studies examine the dynamics of this barrier in the Ugandan context, particularly in private schools from remote urban centres, such as Gulu. Even with known troubles, the literature does not subject those local conditions that influence the adoption of new approaches in private secondary schools in Gulu to an adequately rigorous analysis. For example, the impact of pedagogical

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cultural biases, administrative commitment, and geographical socio-economic status remains to be thoroughly researched (Balidawa, 2019). It is within this void that the study seeks to contribute by examining the specific challenges that limit teachers in Gulu and how these specifically undermine the implementation of learner-centred approaches to pedagogy in private secondary schools in the district.

School-Level Strategy for Encouraging the Implementation of Learner-Centred Pedagogies

Current studies underscore a range of strategies to hasten the implementation of learner-centred pedagogies, particularly in contexts of scarcity (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023). These include on-going teacher development, flexible and place-specific curriculum adjustments, the adoption of digital technologies, and effective school leadership practices (Tendo, 2025). Implementing these will entail a shift from sporadic teacher training to on-going, embedded professional learning communities that foster reflection and innovation (Tendo, 2025).

In Uganda, a multi-pronged teaching strategy has been recently proposed. According to Kintu (2022), pedagogic reform must be based on long-term investments in teacher capacity, the broader availability of learning and teaching materials, and organisational policies that support innovative practices. Nassaka (2024) also emphasises that participatory curriculum development—engaging both teachers and learners—is crucial for ensuring ownership, usefulness, and improved instructional outcomes.

Despite these newly emerging strategies, there is also an existing research gap on how they can be localised effectively in areas like Gulu City. The majority of private secondary schools in the region are experiencing severe resource shortages and issues with their examination systems; therefore, adopting progressive pedagogy is a significant challenge (Okidi & Ocen, 2023). In addition, there is limited research on how local interpretations of pedagogic authority and student roles impact the adoption of student-centred pedagogies within such communities.

This study contributes towards filling some of that gap by prescribing pedagogically sound and contextually appropriate strategies for private secondary schools in Gulu City. In bringing together global best practices and local context, the research aims to establish implementable, locally context-specific models for the application of learner-centred pedagogies.

Methodology

Research Design

The research employed a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design to achieve a valid and verified understanding of the barriers to implementing the Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC) in private secondary schools in Gulu City, Uganda. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), concurrent triangulation refers to the simultaneous gathering of quantitative and qualitative data, which are analysed independently and later merged in the interpretation phase. This type of design is most appropriate for verifying and complementing findings through the potential cross-validation between the two forms of data. The choice of this design was informed by the interest in obtaining quantifiable patterns from a larger number of teachers and a deeper understanding from school administrators, who play a crucial role in implementing the curriculum.

In line with this approach, data were collected simultaneously using a semi-structured questionnaire completed by the teachers and semi-structured interviews conducted with the school administrators. This methodological overlap enabled research into not only how frequently and to what extent they confronted obstacles, but also what contextual and institutional forces determined the implementation process. Triangulation of this sort has widely been acknowledged to consolidate the validity, credibility, and interpretive capacity of findings in educational research (Johnson et al., 2007).

Study Location and Participants

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The study was conducted in Gulu City, Northern Uganda. Gulu City is divided into two administrative areas: Laroo-Pece and Bardege-Layibi, both of which host several private secondary schools involved in delivering the revised lower secondary curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2020. Out of 24 private secondary schools, 10 purposive samples were selected based on their participation in LSSC training programs and their geographic spread across the two divisions. This purposeful sampling ensured representativeness in administrative reach and institutional familiarity with curriculum change.

The study had two broad groups of participants. Initially, 96 teachers from the sample schools completed a semi-structured questionnaire. They were all pre-trained in LSSC and were therefore well-equipped with information on the opportunities and challenges created by its application. In the second instance, nine school leaders, including headteachers and deputy headteachers, were purposively selected to conduct in-depth interviews. Strategically placed in school leadership, they provided valuable information regarding administrative and systemic barriers that affect curriculum uptake.

Sampling Strategies

We employed a combination of purposive and convenience sampling strategies to recruit participants for the study and select the schools we researched. The approach is best suited for implementation research, where participants should have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Etikan et al., 2016). For these schools, teachers were also conveniently sampled, with attention given to those available and willing to respond during data collection. Although this sampling lacks representativeness, it facilitated access to expert respondents in a naturalistic school setting (Cohen et al., 2018).

The selection procedure for school administrators to be interviewed was criterion-based purposive sampling. We included only those administrators who had hands-on supervision of LSSC implementation and could provide authoritative comments on institutional preparedness, instructional guidance, and logistical challenges. This procedure ensured credibility and richness in the qualitative data (Yin, 2018).

Data Collection Methods

We employed two instruments that were concurrently designed and administered to gather data. We initially administered a semi-structured questionnaire to the 96 teachers. We adapted the questionnaire from Gudu (2019), who had created a parallel instrument to examine curriculum implementation issues in Ugandan secondary schools. It included both closed-ended questions, which suited quantitative analysis, and open-ended questions, designed to elicit qualitative responses. The tool was piloted with some teachers in a non-participating school to ensure clarity, internal consistency, and content validity. Pre-testing helped refine the wording of items and make them relevant to the research objectives (Bryman, 2016).

The survey addressed three thematic areas: the application of learner-centred teaching approaches by teachers, obstacles to the effective implementation of the curriculum, and strategies to enhance the uptake of the curriculum. Concurrently, we conducted semi-structured interviews with nine school administrators. The interviews delved more profoundly into issues such as resource constraints, teacher preparation, stakeholder engagement, and institutional support from policy. Semi-structured interviews proved effective in exploring both the subjective and institutional domains of curriculum reform (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The simultaneous use of both data collection approaches permitted the study to combine teacher-level and school-level viewpoints in real-time. Triangulated mixed methods research is highly effective because it enables an enriched understanding to be attained, allowing the researcher to contrast and compare viewpoints from multiple stakeholder groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Data Analysis

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The collected data were handled in parallel, in the sense that quantitative and qualitative data were treated separately and incorporated into the interpretation stage. We analysed the quantitative data using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and percentages, to identify general trends and patterns. This approach presented a statistical overview of teachers' practices and opinions on the LSSC.

Qualitative data from interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire answers were examined using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved transcribing interview information, coding critical units, identifying recurring themes, and grouping them into thematic categories related to the study objectives. Triangulation of findings at the interpretation level enabled the researcher to support and interpret statistical data with the aid of qualitative narratives, thereby ensuring the much-needed triangulation of evidence (Fetters et al., 2013).

Ethical Problems

The study adhered to the guidelines for ethical research in the conduct of research involving human participants to the last detail. The participants were approached for informed consent after an adequate explanation of the purpose, procedure, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Participation was voluntary, and incentives were not given to avoid coercion. We maintained anonymity and privacy throughout the research by using unique codes instead of names in all data records and by holding the collected data in safe, password-protected electronic files (Cohen et al., 2018).

Limitations of the Study

Even as concurrent triangulation design facilitated an in-depth and well-rounded exploration of the research question, the study had limitations. The use of convenience sampling among teachers, although pragmatic, may have introduced selection bias, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings to schools beyond the sampled ones. Additionally, the focus on private secondary schools within Gulu City means that the experiences of teachers and administrators in public schools or other urban and rural contexts may differ. However, the integration of multiple data sources and perspectives within the selected schools enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings (Creswell & Plano, 2018). Future studies may consider expanding the sample to include a broader range of schools and stakeholders, including students and district education officials.

Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question guiding this study was: **"*What innovative pedagogical approaches are recommended under Uganda's LSSC?*"** To address this query, a comprehensive review of relevant literature—encompassing government policy documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, educational media publications, and practitioner forums—was conducted. The synthesis of this literature revealed a range of pedagogic approaches recommended to facilitate the effective implementation of the LSSC. These approaches, accompanied by descriptions and source details, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Innovative Teaching Methods Recommended under Uganda's LSSC

Method	Description	Source
Project-Based Learning (PBL)	Engages students in solving real-world problems through structured projects, enhancing critical thinking and creativity. Example: sustainable gardens to explore ecology.	SchoolNet Africa (2023)
Research-Based Learning	Encourages learners to conduct research using textbooks, encyclopedias, or online sources before class, fostering independent thinking.	Golden Headlines (2022)

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Debates and Group Discussions	It helps learners develop communication and argumentation skills. Topics like "The Impact of AI in Education" stimulate analytical reasoning.	Golden Headlines (2022)
Collaborative Learning	Promotes teamwork, peer interaction, and interpersonal skills through group assignments and peer assessments.	STiR Education (2022)
Integration of Technology	Uses ICT tools (e.g., digital whiteboards, educational apps) to enhance engagement through interactive methods such as virtual tours or quizzes.	SchoolNet Africa (2023)
Role-Playing and Simulations	Provides experiential learning through activities such as mock court sessions or debates, enabling an understanding of real-world systems.	SchoolNet Africa (2023)
Problem-Solving Approach	Focuses on identifying and addressing real-life problems to build analytical and solution-oriented thinking.	STiR Education (2022)
Contextual Learning	Relates academic content to learners' everyday experiences—e.g., teaching mathematics through market scenarios.	Namukwaya & Mutekanga (2021)
Active Learning	Involves activities such as brainstorming and case studies to deepen student engagement and critical reflection.	Namukwaya & Mutekanga (2021)
Flipped Classroom	Delivers instructional content outside class (e.g., videos), reserving class time for practical engagement and collaboration.	Kampala Eye (2024)

The results in Table 1 show that Uganda's LSSC is grounded on a constructivist pedagogy espousing competencies such as learner autonomy, imagination, and critical thinking. Pedagogies such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), Research-Based Learning, and the Problem-Solving Approach are indicators of the curriculum's commitment to experiential learning and inquiry-based learning, aligning with constructivist pedagogy. Such pedagogies engage learners in authentic tasks that require the use of theoretical concepts, thereby deepening their understanding. This intellectual concentration is complemented by the curriculum's emphasis on interpersonal and emotional growth. Teaching pedagogies such as Collaborative Learning, Debates and Group Discussions, and Role-Playing promote communication skills, empathy, and teamwork—each crucial to navigating" today's multicultural and complicated societies.

Besides, the curriculum honours technological innovation with the integration of ICT tools and the Flipped Classroom pedagogy. These learning strategies promote digital literacy and individualised learning, reshaping the role of the teacher from an information transmitter to a learning facilitator. Likewise, Contextual and Active Learning strategies bridge the gap between academic material and learners' everyday lives, making learning more meaningful and effective.

It is against this background that the curriculum's success relies primarily on the education system's preparedness. Successful implementation is based on continued professional learning by teachers, adequate teaching material, and a move towards competency-based evaluation. Lacking these facilitative

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conditions, the" curriculum's innovative approaches can end up being goal-oriented but fail to be transformational.

During the interviews with instructors and administrators, the interviewees reported an everyday awareness of the suggested pedagogy in LSSC but noted varying levels of its implementation. Although the interviewees acknowledged that they often give teaching methods, such as Project-Based Learning,research-oriented exercises, and debates, were given priority in training sessions and were being implemented incrementally in classrooms, one teacher described in the following manner: "We have been encouraged to use a lot of project work—students are now making models, carrying out community surveys, and presenting findings in class". Another one shared: "Before lessons, I usually distribute research tasks. Students come with some background and ideas, and therefore, our lessons become more co-operative". These anecdotes illustrate a growing respect for learner-centred methods, which align with the LSSC's competence-based approach.

However, some interviewees stated that there were barriers to on-going implementation. Strategies such as flipped classrooms, contextual learning, and the use of technology were reported to be difficult to execute due to infrastructural constraints and socio-economic challenges. One school administrator opined: "The idea of a flipped classroom sounds good, but the truth is, many of our students don't have smartphones or internet at home, so we can't do it effectively".

Similarly, a teacher said: "Contextual learning is best, but in reality, we have crowded classrooms and limited teaching resources. Sometimes we have to resort to traditional practices simply to cover the syllabus". These are just a few of the inconsistencies between curriculum policy and classroom realities. Even though LSSC's pedagogies of innovation are theoretically sound, their realisation is often limited by logistical and contextual conditions, particularly in under-resourced schools.

Research Question 2

To respond to the second research question—"***To what degree are these methods being implemented by teachers in private secondary schools in Gulu City?***"—a detailed analysis was conducted to examine the frequency and adoption rates of various learner-centred teaching methods. The study was performed on ten various instructional methods, ranging from Project-Based Learning to Flipped Classrooms, and classified adoption levels as Not Adopted, Slightly Adopted, Moderately Adopted, and Fully Adopted. Each level was graded numerically to compute mean adoption scores and corresponding standard deviations.

The information presented in Table 2 provides essential insight into the prevalence and range of strategy use among the sampled teachers.

Table 2

Adoption Levels of Learner-Centred Teaching Strategies among Teachers in Private Secondary Schools in Gulu City (N = 96)

Teaching Strategy	Not Adopted	Slightly Adopted	Moderately Adopted	Fully Adopted	Mean Score	SD (Approx.)	Interpretation
1. Project-Based Learning (PBL)	2 (2.1%)	4 (4.2%)	16 (16.7%)	74 (77.1%)	2.69	0.63	Very highly adopted
2. Research-Based Learning	5(5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	16 (16.7%)	66 (68.8%)	2.49	0.80	Highly adopted

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3. Students' Debates & Discussions	4 (4.2%)	8 (8.3%)	8 (8.3%)	76 (79.2%)	2.63	0.78	Very highly adopted
4. Collaborative Learning	11 (11.5%)	14 (14.6%)	20 (20.8%)	51 (53.1%)	2.16	1.05	Moderately adopted
5. Integration of Technology	22 (22.9%)	50 (52.1%)	15 (15.6%)	9 (9.4%)	1.11	0.89	Slightly adapted
6. Role-Playing & Simulations	6 (6.3)	22 (22.9%)	30 (31.3%)	38 (39.6%)	2.04	0.96	Moderately adopted
7. Problem-Solving Approach	12 (12.5%)	39 (40.6%)	30 (31.3%)	15 (15.6%)	1.50	0.96	Slightly to moderately adopted
8. Contextual Learning	50 (52.1%)	22 (22.9%)	15 (15.6%)	9 (9.4%)	0.82	0.89	Lowly adopted
9. Active Learning	32 (33.3)	32 (33.3%)	20 (20.8%)	12 (12.5%)	1.13	1.00	Slightly adapted
10. Flipped Classroom	53 (55.2%)	23 (24.0%)	12 (12.5%)	8 (8.3%)	0.73	0.91	Lowly adopted

The findings in Table 2 show that student-centred teaching practices, such as Project-Based Learning (mean = 2.69) and Student Debates and Group Discussions (mean = 2.63), are strongly adopted by teachers in private secondary schools in Gulu City. This finding reflects a strong preference among teachers towards participatory problem-solving approaches that open opportunities for students to participate and think critically. These methods are likely favoured due to their minimal technical infrastructure needs and ease of implementation in the typical classroom environment at these schools. Research-based learning (mean = 2.49) is also highly utilised, which could indicate a heightened emphasis on inquiry and autonomous learning as a result of policy initiatives or increased teacher experience with student-centred practices. However, Collaborative Learning (mean = 2.16) and Role-Playing & Simulations (mean = 2.04) are moderately well-accepted, perhaps due to administrative challenges such as sustaining group dynamics, time constraints, or larger class sizes.

On the other hand, practices such as Integration of Technology (mean = 1.11), Flipped Classroom (mean = 0.73), and Contextual Learning (mean = 0.82) are the least widely adopted, indicating significant impediments to the adoption of digital and contextualised pedagogies. These low adoption levels can be attributed to inadequate access to ICT facilities, insufficient institutional training in technology-supported pedagogies, and insufficient institutional support in terms of digital infrastructure. The Problem-Solving Approach (mean = 1.50) and Active Learning (mean = 1.13) are also adopted at a low level, perhaps due to teachers lacking confidence in using these methods or systemic issues that do not support flexible, learner-focused learning. The high standard deviations (e.g., 1.05 for Collaborative Learning and 0.96 for Problem-Solving) also suggest widespread variation in teacher adoption levels, suggesting variations in training, resource availability, or pedagogical orientation across schools. In general, although some learner-centred approaches are reasonably well adopted, the adoption of more resource-intensive methods is at issue, and the gap must be bridged by targeted professional development and infrastructure investment.

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During the personal interviews conducted with a few teachers and school administrators, the interviewees generally confirmed the patterns reflected in the quantitative results regarding the adoption of learner-centred teaching strategies in private secondary schools in Gulu City. Most of them reported high usage of Project-Based Learning (PBL), students' debates and discussions, and research-based learning, describing these methods as both effective and practical within their school contexts. One teacher shared, "Project-based learning works very well for us because students get to work in groups and present what they have learned. It keeps them engaged and makes the lessons more meaningful." Similarly, another respondent stated, "We organise weekly debate sessions, especially for arts subjects. It not only improves confidence but also helps students to think critically and speak out." These statements align with the highest adoption scores for PBL (M = 2.69), students' debates and discussions (M = 2.63), and research-based learning (M = 2.49), confirming their widespread use and perceived effectiveness.

However, when asked about the use of more technologically intensive or unconventional methods, such as flipped classrooms, contextual learning, and the integration of ICT tools, most respondents expressed significant challenges. One administrator admitted, "Honestly, we don't do flipped classrooms because many students don't have internet access at home. Even in school, we have just one computer lab, and it's not enough for all classes." A teacher similarly explained, "Contextual learning sounds good in theory, but we lack the materials and environment to make it happen. Most of the time, we stick to what the syllabus demands." These reflections align with the low mean scores for Flipped Classroom (M = 0.73), Contextual Learning (M = 0.82), and Integration of Technology (M = 1.11), indicating that while teachers appreciate the value of these methods, practical constraints, such as limited resources and infrastructure, hinder their full implementation.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, "***What are the major hindrances to the implementation of innovative pedagogies in these schools?".*** This question aimed to identify the major hindrances to the adoption of innovative teaching methods in secondary schools in Gulu City. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' views on various potential barriers. A five-point Likert scale—ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely"—was employed to rate the perceived severity of each hindrance. Descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies (F), percentages (%), mean, and standard deviations (SD), were used to analyse the data and determine the relative prominence of each barrier.

The results, presented in Table 3, provide a clear summary of the most significant obstacles to implementing innovative pedagogical approaches.

Table 3

Significant barriers to the adoption of innovative teaching methods in secondary schools in Gulu City

Questionnaire Items	Not at all F (%)	Slightly F (%)	Moderately F (%)	Very Much F (%)	Extremely F (%)	Mean	SD
Lack of adequate teacher training	1 (1.2%)	9 (11.0%)	26 (31.7%)	41 (50.0%)	5 (6.1%)	3.49	.820
Inadequate learning materials	6 (7.3%)	28 (34.1%)	20 (24.4%)	23 (28.0%)	5 (6.1%)	2.91	1.080
Overcrowded classrooms	4 (4.9%)	24 (29.3%)	20 (24.4%)	21 (25.6%)	13 (15.9%)	3.18	1.167

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Resistance to change by teachers/administrators	4 (4.9%)	4 (4.9%)	11 (13.4%)	59 (72.0%)	4 (4.9%)	3.67	.847
Time constraints to cover the curriculum	3 (3.7%)	25 (30.5%)	23 (28.0%)	27 (32.9%)	4 (4.9%)	3.05	.993
Inadequate support from the Ministry of Education	1 (1.2%)	4 (4.9%)	18 (22.0%)	54 (65.9%)	5 (6.1%)	3.71	.711
Limited access to technology	2 (2.4%)	7 (8.5%)	6 (7.3%)	63 (76.8%)	4 (4.9%)	3.73	.786
Parental involvement	1 (1.2%)	6 (7.3%)	16 (19.5%)	55 (67.1%)	4 (4.9%)	3.67	.738
Assessment and evaluation complexities	1 (1.2%)	5 (6.1%)	17 (20.7%)	54 (65.9%)	5 (6.1%)	3.70	.732
Financial limitations	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.2%)	8 (9.8%)	67 (81.7%)	6 (7.3%)	3.95	.469

Findings indicate that the most severe limitation is financial constraints (M = 3.95, SD = .469), reflecting a general belief that schools lack the necessary resources to implement successful innovative instructional practices. This lack of funds presents challenges, including the limited availability of resources for teacher training, educational technologies, and inadequate classroom facilities.

The second and third most significant constraints were limited access to technology (M = 3.73, SD = .786) and weak support from the Ministry of Education (M = 3.71, SD = .711). These reflect larger systemic barriers that hinder the use of digital tools and innovative practices in teaching and learning processes.

The other highly rated barriers were the complexity of assessment and evaluation (M = 3.70), resistance to change, parental involvement among teachers and administrators (M = 3.67), as well as inadequate parental involvement (M = 3.67). These are cultural and institutional barriers to moving towards participatory and learner-focused teaching approaches. The reasonably high rating of insufficient teacher training (M = 3.49, SD = .82) identifies a sine qua non for professional training in innovative pedagogy. Yet, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms (M = 3.18), time constraints placed on curricula (M = 3.05), and insufficient appropriate materials for learning (M = 2.91) were less highly valued but are significant operational challenges that hamper teachers' flexibility and scope for pedagogic innovation.

The qualitative data derived from interviews reinforced these findings. School administrators and teachers all consistently emphasised financial constraints and the absence of proper institutional support as key impediments. One administrator remarked: "You can't talk about innovation when schools can't even afford textbooks or chalk. We're always trying to do more with less". This view substantiates the quantitative finding that the most severe constraint is economic. Another teacher highlighted the issue of weak support systems: "The Ministry comes up with new education policies, but they don't provide you with what you require or show you how to do it. We have to figure it out for ourselves."

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Similarly, several interviewees consistently highlighted the issues of technological deficiencies and overcrowding in the classrooms. A complaint from one teacher was: "We're instructed to utilise projectors and computers, but not all the schools get electricity consistently. Therefore, how do we make these things work?" Another added: "Teaching 70 students in one room makes it nearly impossible to try group activities or any interactive methods. You end up resorting to the traditional lecture method to maintain order."

Resistance to change also surfaced as a recurring theme. One school leader observed: "Some teachers have been doing things the same way for decades. They don't believe these new methods can work in our setting." These qualitative results offer a richer appreciation of the limitations identified in quantitative studies. Together, the findings suggest that while awareness of the value of innovative pedagogy is increasing, its implementation remains hindered by a combination of economic, structural, cultural, and institutional constraints. It will require profound policy changes, strategic investment in capacity building, and concerted action across stakeholders to create an enabling environment for pedagogical rejuvenation in Ugandan secondary schools.

Research Question 4

The fourth question of research sought to identify: ***"What are the strategies to enhance the use of learner-centred pedagogies in curriculum implementation?"*** To answer this, we collected quantitative data through a structured questionnaire designed to assess the perceived utility of the various proposed strategies.

Teachers rated each strategy on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Not at all helpful' to 'Extremely helpful'. Teachers' answers were analysed using descriptive statistics—frequencies (F), percentages (%), means (M), and standard deviations (SD)—to determine the relative strength of support for each strategy. Table 4 presents teachers' views of the helpfulness of different strategies in promoting learner-centred pedagogy in private secondary schools in Gulu City.

Table 4

Teachers' Perceptions of the Helpfulness of Different Strategies for Improving Learner-Centred Teaching Styles in Private Secondary Schools in Gulu City (N = 96)

Strategies	Not helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful	Mean	SD
Engaging in continuous professional development programs	5 (6.1%)	20 (24.4%)	21 (25.6%)	24 (29.3%)	12 (14.6%)	3.220	1.155
Simplifying instructional methods	5 (6.1%)	4 (4.9%)	10 (12.2%)	59 (72.0%)	4 (4.9%)	3.646	0.894
Utilising ICT	4 (4.9%)	23 (28.0%)	19 (23.2%)	28 (34.1%)	8 (9.8%)	3.159	1.093
Grouping learners in smaller class sizes	2 (2.4%)	3 (3.7%)	15 (18.3%)	56 (68.3%)	6 (7.3%)	3.744	0.750

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Collaborating with peers and senior colleagues	1 (1.2%)	4 (4.9%)	7 (8.5%)	66 (80.5%)	4 (4.9%)	3.829	0.644
Engaging parents and communities	2 (2.4%)	5 (6.1%)	17 (20.7%)	51 (62.2%)	7 (8.5%)	3.683	0.815
Improving time management	2 (2.4%)	3 (3.7%)	14 (17.1%)	57 (69.5%)	6 (7.3%)	3.756	0.746
Adapting learning materials	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)	6 (7.3%)	67 (81.7%)	5 (6.1%)	3.866	0.662

The results in Table 4 indicate that teachers highly supported a series of interventions as very effective in promoting learner-centred pedagogic practices. The most highly endorsed intervention was changing learning materials (M = 3.866, SD = 0.662), on which 81.7% of respondents checked 'Very helpful'. Following closely behind was a collaboration with peers and experienced colleagues (M = 3.829, SD = 0.644), demonstrating the high regard in which peer support and mentoring are held for pedagogic change.

The second most highly supported strategies were improving time management (M = 3.756, SD = 0.746) and reducing class size (M = 3.744, SD = 0.750), both of which were highly supported, particularly in terms of their feasibility and present applicability to the classroom setting. Teachers' results show that they appreciate efficient, low-cost solutions that can be implemented within existing institutional settings.

Conversely, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, as well as local private school administrators in Gulu City, showed less support for continuous professional development (M = 3.220, SD = 1.155) and the application of ICT (M = 3.159, SD = 1.093). These lower ratings may be due to limitations such as the sporadic availability of high-quality continuing professional development (CPD) programs, infrastructural constraints, or the lack of sufficient digital literacy among teachers. Simplification of teaching strategies (M = 3.646, SD = 0.894) also obtained universal support, with 72% of teachers scoring it as 'Very helpful', which reflects the realisation that the mode of lesson presentation needs to be simplified and more interactive.

Qualitative data from teacher and school leader interviews corroborated the findings. Most interviewees emphasised context-specific strategies, i.e., peer work and adaptation of instruction materials. According to one teacher, "When we brainstorm with our senior colleagues, we gain new strategies for coping with the syllabus that is more engaging to students. It reduces the pressure of having to do it ourselves." This remark emphasises the significant, considerable quantitative support for collaborative approaches (M = 3.829, SD = 0.644). Another teacher added: "Occasionally, the books are not adequate or are too complex, so we must come up with simpler ways or create new materials that our students can learn better." This response corresponded with the ranking of material adaptation (M = 3.866, SD = 0.662), which emphasised the importance of adaptability in teaching to address student needs.

Interviewees, including those with concerns about class size and time constraints, also mentioned structural barriers. A school administrator said, "Smaller classes can offer more one-on-one attention, which is especially relevant for strategies like group work and project-based learning." This view aligns with the high rating for decreasing class size (M = 3.744, SD = 0.750). A second teacher explained: "We sometimes spread ourselves too thin with other duties, but when I get some control of my time, I can teach better and utilise strategies that promote learner engagement." This view agrees with the high value

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assigned to improved time management (M = 3.756, SD = 0.746). Although ICT and CPD utilisation were seen as applicable, their use was thought to be subject to institutional support and access to resources.

Generally, both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest that teachers favour strategies that are contextually feasible, resource-sensitive, and responsive to the current school conditions. Such methods, if provided with systematic support, can potentially facilitate the adoption of student-centred pedagogic practices among secondary schools.

Discussion

The findings of this research affirm that Uganda's Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC) is intentionally designed to facilitate learner-centred, constructivist-based pedagogy. Project-based learning (PBL), debates, research-based knowledge, and role-playing provide opportunities for participatory, experiential approaches to teaching that aim to develop core competencies, including creativity, collaboration, and analytical thinking. These results align with existing studies—O'Sullivan (2006) and Namukwaya and Mutekanga (2021)—that emphasise the value of contextualised and active learning in enhancing learner engagement. Therefore, SchoolNet Africa (2023) identifies the application of real-life scenarios in PBL as central to equipping learners to manage complex societal operations. These linkages confirm the theoretical position that active learning and learner agency promote cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Despite the visionary curriculum, its operationalisation in Gulu City's private secondary schools remains skewed. While pedagogies such as PBL, debates, and research-based learning are more common—perhaps because they require less infrastructure—less adoption is evident for more infrastructure-intensive methods, including ICT integration, flipped classrooms, and contextual learning. This result supports that of STiR Education (2022), which observed that low-tech, low-cost pedagogies are more readily adopted where fewer resources are available. The limited application of technology-enabled approaches resonates with general structural challenges. As documented by Uwezo (2018) and Tilya (2016), the prevalence of poor digital infrastructure and low digital literacy levels among teachers remains a hindrance to the adoption of technology-mediated pedagogies, particularly in less affluent and rural schools. Such asymmetries between curricular aspirations and system-level realities raise pressing questions about the feasibility of suggesting technologically advanced pedagogies before addressing infrastructural inequalities. The marginal application of role-play and co-operative learning—outside of their established utility for developing interpersonal and reflective skills—also creates other pragmatic implementation challenges. These findings align with Hardman's (2009) complaints that instructors do not utilise interactive pedagogies due to class size, teaching time constraints, and insufficient facilitation skills.

According to Akyeampong et al. (2011), the disparities in the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies, as reflected in the high deviation scores, were influenced by teachers' beliefs, professional background training, and school leadership. Whilst the theoretical rationale in favour of learner-centred approaches is strong, their success in practice is contingent upon enabling conditions, such as quality professional development, maintaining small class sizes, and fostering a supportive institutional culture.

Implementation barriers—also exposed by the third research question—are insufficient teacher training, inadequate instructional materials, and inadequate institutional support. These findings confirm UNESCO (2020) and Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES] (2019) concerns that ineffective professional development systems and inadequate infrastructure undermine the effective roll-out of curriculum reforms. The absence of emphasis on continuous in-service teacher training is particularly worrying as it contradicts global trends of championing lifelong professional learning as the foundation for pedagogical transformation. Interestingly, the findings suggest that teachers' constraints are more systemic than attitudinal, implying that educators are keen to innovate if they are given adequate support and resources.

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The theoretical and practical implications of this study are significant. Theoretically, the findings support constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning, demonstrating the effectiveness of active, inquiry-based, and collaborative pedagogies. Yet they also highlight the essential function of systemic readiness in translating pedagogical theory into effective classroom practice. Practically, decision-makers in education policy, school leadership, and teacher education must prioritise investments in capacity building, especially ICT integration and experiential learning design. Curriculum designers are urged to adopt innovative approaches to local contexts without compromising on globally relevant competencies. Last but not least, sustainable education reform is multi-dimensional in nature—one that goes beyond curriculum design to include institutional support, equitable resource distribution, and a culture of continuous pedagogical improvement.

Conclusion

This study examined the barriers affecting the adoption of innovative pedagogies in private secondary schools in Gulu City and assessed their implications for the effective implementation of Uganda's Lower Secondary School Curriculum (LSSC). The results suggest that, although theoretically grounded in student-centred pedagogies and constructivist approaches, such as project-based learning (PBL), debate, and research-based learning, the practical implementation of the LSSC in school settings is irregular and constrained.

Several interlinked problems were recognised. The most salient of them were inadequate capacity building among lecturers, inadequate quality teaching facilities, inadequate institutional support, and inadequately developed technological infrastructure. All of these constitute a constraint on the curriculum's ability to develop skills such as critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving—a capability essential for addressing the challenges of modern society.

Aside from structural concerns, contextual factors such as class size, time limitations on the curriculum, and firmly held teacher beliefs also serve as mediating variables for the enactment of pedagogical innovation. As much as the LSSC desires radical reform in teaching and learning, the absence of productive professional development, empowering classrooms, and institutionally enabling specific mechanisms restricts the fulfilment of its pedagogical ideals.

Of special note, however, is the fact that pedagogical resistance is more a matter of systems rather than attitudes in theory. Teachers are eager to implement new pedagogies, but they often lack the opportunity to do so due to a shortage of skills, equipment, and organisational support. This finding further highlights the paramount requirement for a programmatic and coordinated education reform effort, with people and physical resource development as its focal point.

Based on the above, the study recommends the following:

1. Improvement in teacher professional development through regular in-service training in new pedagogy, i.e., ICT integration and planning for experiential learning.
2. Improving the pedagogical quality of the delivery of teaching materials, including digital materials, pedagogical support, and appropriate classroom facilities that support learner-centred approaches.
3. Institutional support mechanisms are being put in place by encouraging school leadership to prioritise pedagogical innovation through policy endorsement, incentives for teacher development, and fostering cultures of reflective practice.
4. The elimination of structural limitations, such as class size and teaching hours, enables the pragmatic application of interactive approaches, including group work, role-playing, and collaborative inquiry.
5. Locating the implementation of the curriculum by re-attaching pedagogical practice to adapt to prevailing socio-economic and infrastructural realities in low-resource and rural schools, thus investing curricular reforms with sense and workability.

6. Starting system-level reform extending beyond curriculum re-design to incorporate equitable use of resources, inclusive policy enactment, and institutionalising on-going pedagogic development.

Generally, the research confirms that LSSC offers a good foundation for education reform, but only if more significant structural and contextual issues are addressed can it be realistically implemented. There is a requirement for a coordinated, multi-dimensional reform package involving curriculum strengthening and robust institutional support, as well as stable infrastructure, to translate policy intent into effective pedagogic practice. Such an orientation will not only be enriching as pedagogy but also help generate learners with the competencies necessary for national development and global competitiveness.

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