Students Adaptive Help-Seeking Skills and Contribution to their mastery of Key Competencies in Competence-Based Learning Environment in Ugandan Secondary Schools: Evidence from Mukono and Kayunga Districts

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Abstract: The shift to competency-based learning (CBL) in Uganda's secondary education system has placed new demands on learners, requiring them to develop not only academic proficiency but also self-regulatory and adaptive skills to succeed in a learner-centered environment. Among these, adaptive help-seeking, defined as the proactive solicitation of academic support when needed, has been recognized as a vital behavioral strategy for fostering academic resilience and engagement. This study examined the relationship between students' adaptive help-seeking skills and their ability to acquire competencies under the CBL framework in selected secondary schools in Mukono and Kayunga districts. Employing a mixed methods approach, the study collected data from 384 students through structured questionnaires and conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 48 key informants, including teachers, school heads, and education officers. Quantitative analysis using Pearson's correlation and linear regression revealed a strong, positive relationship between help-seeking and CBL engagement (r = 0.5736, p < 0.01), with help-seeking accounting for 32.9% of the variance in students' competency acquisition. Thematic analysis of qualitative data confirmed that help-seeking is facilitated by supportive teacher-student relationships and hindered by infrastructural constraints and limited teacher capacity. The findings underscore the importance of embedding help-seeking in pedagogical practices, investing in teacher development, and enhancing institutional support mechanisms. The study concludes that adaptive help-seeking is a significant determinant of learner success in CBL environments and recommends its integration into instructional design, teacher training, mentorship structures, and school-community engagement initiatives.

Keywords: adaptive help-seeking, competency-based learning, academic resilience, learner engagement, secondary education, Uganda, self-regulated learning.

1. Introduction

In Uganda's educational reform agenda, the shift to competency-based learning (CBL) has marked a significant departure from traditional, exam-oriented models toward learner-centered pedagogies that emphasize demonstrable knowledge, skills, and values (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). CBL focuses on ensuring that learners not only understand content but can apply it meaningfully in real-world contexts (Guskey, 2010; Kennedy & Powell, 2017). This model prioritizes mastery,

flexibility, and personalized learning, thereby demanding high levels of learner autonomy, self-regulation, and engagement. Within this demanding learning paradigm, students are increasingly required to adopt adaptive academic behaviors, such as the ability to seek help appropriately and strategically. Adaptive help-seeking, defined as a student's capacity to recognize knowledge limitations and actively solicit support from peers, teachers, or learning resources, is central to success in competency-based systems (Karabenick & Newman, 2006). It empowers learners to overcome obstacles and engage deeply with learning tasks, especially when curriculum expectations are rigorous and support mechanisms are inconsistent. Students who exhibit strong help-seeking behaviors are better positioned to manage workload, persist through challenges, and acquire competencies effectively (Ryan et al., 2022; Almulla, 2024).

Despite its relevance, help-seeking is often undervalued or misconstrued in many Ugandan secondary schools, where cultural and systemic factors may discourage students from expressing academic vulnerability. In the districts of Mukono and Kayunga, educational reforms have emphasized the implementation of CBL, yet uptake has been inconsistent, and learner outcomes have varied. A report by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2020) revealed that over 60% of students in these districts struggle to meet the demands of CBL, citing limited support and unclear expectations as major challenges. Meanwhile, 45% of teachers reportedly lack sufficient training in student-centered pedagogies (UBOS, 2021), thus further complicating the learning environment. Anecdotal and empirical evidence from the field underscores the need to examine internal learner behaviors, such as help-seeking, as critical determinants of academic resilience and CBL success. Although the literature on student engagement and resilience has expanded in recent years (Masten, 2019; Opul, Itaaga & Wafula, 2022), few studies have focused on how adaptive help-seeking behavior directly shapes students' ability to thrive in a CBL environment, particularly within the Ugandan context.

The government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, introduced the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2020 with the intent of transforming secondary education through a holistic and skills-oriented approach. The curriculum emphasizes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains and demands learner engagement, critical thinking, and real-world application of knowledge (MoES, 2020). However, implementation in districts like Mukono and Kayunga has revealed significant gaps in student readiness and teacher preparedness. Reports indicate that many students find it difficult to adapt to the new model, with 50% lacking adequate academic

support and 70% of schools experiencing shortages in learning materials (UNEB, 2019; UBOS, 2021). While past research has emphasized external support mechanisms, little attention has been paid to intrinsic learner strategies, especially adaptive help-seeking, as essential enablers of success in CBL. The lack of such internal mechanisms may partly explain why many learners continue to underperform despite access to structural interventions. This study therefore seeks to investigate the extent to which adaptive help-seeking behaviors influence student performance and competency acquisition under the CBL framework in Ugandan secondary schools.

1.1 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The study was carried out to answer the question: "What is the relationship between students' adaptive help-seeking skills and their ability to acquire competencies in a competency-based learning environment in secondary schools in Mukono and Kayunga districts?"

Hypothesis

The following Hypothesis were tested

Null Hypothesis (H_0):
There is no statistically significant relationship between students' adaptive help-seeking skills and competency-based learning in secondary schools in Mukono and Kayunga districts.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):
There is a statistically significant positive relationship between students' adaptive help-seeking skills and competency-based learning in secondary schools in Mukono and Kayunga districts.

2. Literature Review

Adaptive help-seeking is increasingly recognized as a critical component of learner autonomy and academic resilience, especially within competency-based learning (CBL) frameworks (Karabenick & Newman, 2006). It refers to the strategic behavior of students recognizing their need for support and actively seeking assistance to overcome learning difficulties without abandoning responsibility for their learning (Karabenick, 2004). In a CBL environment, where students are expected to demonstrate mastery of skills and knowledge through self-paced, independent learning, help-seeking becomes a vital self-regulatory mechanism (Zimmerman, 2002). Research shows that students who frequently engage in adaptive

help-seeking tend to demonstrate stronger academic performance and competency development (Ryan et al., 2022; Almulla, 2024). For instance, Almulla (2024) found that Saudi high school students who actively sought academic help from teachers and peers performed better in problem-solving and collaborative tasks, core competencies in CBL. Similarly, Rudd et al. (2021) found that in high-performing Finnish schools, structured peer-help systems boosted learners' confidence and mastery across competencies such as teamwork, self-management, and inquiry.

In African contexts, adaptive help-seeking is increasingly discussed within resilience discourses. Mampane and Bouwer (2024) emphasize that resilient learners in under-resourced South African schools often leverage help-seeking behaviors to bridge instructional gaps, thereby achieving educational success despite socio-economic adversity. In Uganda, however, studies on help-seeking behaviors remain limited. Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. (2024) observed that learners in rural schools struggle to ask for help due to cultural beliefs equating help-seeking with academic weakness or shame, even when they experience learning setbacks. Consequently, these students are less likely to utilize available support, leading to disengagement and poor performance under the demands of CBL. While several empirical studies affirm the importance of help-seeking, some findings suggest that its effectiveness may depend on context, instructional design, and teacher responsiveness. For instance, Marchand and Skinner (2007) caution that if teacher-student relationships are weak or punitive, students may become reluctant to seek assistance, regardless of their awareness of academic difficulties. This is particularly relevant in many Ugandan schools where large class sizes and overburdened teachers reduce opportunities for individualized student support (MoES, 2021).

In contradiction to the optimistic framing of adaptive help-seeking, Wigfield et al. (2015) argue that help-seeking may sometimes foster dependence, especially when it becomes habitual or when students fail to internalize feedback. They advocate for scaffolding help-seeking with metacognitive training to ensure students learn not only to seek help but to utilize it effectively for independent problem-solving. This distinction is particularly critical in CBL settings, where learners are assessed on their ability to apply competencies autonomously rather than replicate instructor guidance.

A critical review of the literature reveals that while adaptive help-seeking is widely endorsed as a resilience-building behavior that enhances learning, its role in the context of Uganda's emerging CBL system is still underexplored. Few empirical studies have assessed how help-seeking skills directly contribute to mastery-based progression among Ugandan secondary school students. Moreover, prior studies tend to emphasize institutional support, like teacher capacity and infrastructural readiness, while downplaying learner agency as an essential variable in successful CBL implementation (Kitasse & Ssembatya, 2023; Serunjogi, 2022). This study, therefore, aims to fill the conceptual and contextual gap by specifically evaluating the relationship between adaptive help-seeking and CBL in Uganda. It acknowledges the interplay between personal initiative and systemic support and emphasizes the need to cultivate internal academic strategies among learners to complement structural reforms. Investigating this relationship within Mukono and Kayunga districts, also provides localized insights that can inform broader national education strategies under the CBL framework.

3.Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods research approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative strategies to examine the relationship between adaptive help-seeking skills and competency-based learning (CBL) among secondary school students. A mixed methods design was ideal for this investigation because it provided both statistical evidence of the relationship and rich, contextualized explanations of learner behaviors and institutional practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The use of both approaches enhanced the study's validity by allowing triangulation and a deeper interpretation of emerging patterns (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The research employed a cross-sectional survey design for the quantitative strand. Cross-sectional designs are well-suited for capturing a snapshot of variables and their associations within a specific time frame (Bryman, 2016). In contrast, a phenomenological design was employed for the qualitative strand to explore lived experiences of learners, teachers, and education officers regarding help-seeking and CBL implementation. Phenomenological approaches are particularly effective in uncovering subjective meanings and shared experiences in social contexts (Van Manen, 2014).

The study was conducted in Mukono and Kayunga districts in central Uganda, where the Ministry of Education and Sports had introduced the lower secondary Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2020 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). These districts were selected due to reported inconsistencies in CBL adoption and the diverse educational settings, both urban and rural, that could yield varied insights (UNEB, 2023). The target population comprised 9,472 students from 15 selected secondary

schools, as well as teachers, headteachers, and district education officers (Nakacwa, 2025).

Data for this study were collected through fieldwork between June 2024 and November 2024, a period that allowed for optimal access to schools and educational authorities. This primary data collection was necessary due to the absence of reliable secondary datasets on learner resilience and help-seeking behaviors in the Ugandan CBL context.

The quantitative sample size of 384 students was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for finite populations, ensuring that the findings would be generalizable within a 95% confidence interval. The sampling process followed stratified random sampling, where schools were stratified by type (public or private) and location (urban or rural), and respondents within each stratum were selected using simple random sampling. Stratification helped ensure representativeness across different school contexts (Amin, 2005). For the qualitative sample, 48 participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is appropriate when selecting individuals with specific knowledge or experiences related to the research question (Patton, 2002). Participants included teachers trained in CBL delivery, headteachers managing CBC implementation, and district education officials responsible for monitoring curriculum reforms. Snowball sampling was also used to reach additional key informants in education management roles who were not immediately accessible.

Data collection methods included structured surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The structured questionnaire used for quantitative data collection was adapted from the academic help-seeking scale developed by Karabenick and Newman (2006) and refined by Rudd et al. (2021) for competency-based settings. Items measured students' willingness to seek help, types of help sought (teacher, peer, digital), and perceived effects of help-seeking on competency acquisition. For the qualitative strand, semi-structured interview guides and FGD protocols were designed to explore institutional support, cultural beliefs around help-seeking, and experiences with CBL pedagogy.

To ensure content validity, the instruments were reviewed by three academic experts in education and psychology from Nkumba University, and adjustments were made based on their feedback. The resulting Content Validity Index (CVI) for the questionnaire was 0.86, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Polit & Beck, 2006). Reliability was assessed through a pilot study in two non-sampled schools, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.873,

indicating high internal consistency and suitability for statistical inference (Field, 2013).

Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to profile help-seeking behaviors and competency levels, while inferential analyses—including Pearson correlation and simple linear regression—were conducted to test the relationship between adaptive help-seeking and CBL outcomes (Nakacwa, 2025). Qualitative data were transcribed and coded using NVivo 12, following an inductive thematic analysis process. Coding involved three steps: open coding for initial ideas, axial coding to organize themes, and selective coding to identify core concepts and patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The study faced logistical challenges, including restricted access to remote schools during the rainy season and inconsistent availability of teachers for interviews. Additionally, some students, particularly in rural schools, needed more guidance to understand Likert-type questionnaire items, which may have influenced responses. Nevertheless, triangulation and iterative analysis reduced the impact of these limitations.

The research adhered to strict ethical guidelines as approved by the Nkumba University Research Ethics Committee. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and assent was sought from students below 18 years with prior consent from guardians. Participants were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. All personal identifiers were removed from data records, and results were presented in aggregated form to maintain privacy in line with ethical research standards (Babbie, 2015).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The findings of the study are presented in line with the stated objective. The results reflect both quantitative and qualitative data collected from students, teachers, and district education officials across selected schools in Mukono and Kayunga districts. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyses, and qualitative narratives are presented to provide a comprehensive understanding of how adaptive help-seeking skills relate to student engagement in competency-based learning (CBL).

The descriptive results (Table 1) illustrate learners' perceptions of their adaptive help-seeking behaviors. Across all statements, students reported a strong

disposition toward seeking help, monitoring progress, and engaging in reflection. For instance, the item *"I seek help from teachers or classmates when I need it"* recorded a mean score of 4.564 (SD = 0.563), with over 98% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, indicating a pervasive culture of help-seeking among students.

Similarly, high mean values were observed for statements such as *"I use past successes to motivate myself"* (M = 4.419), *"I monitor and evaluate my achievements and plans"* (M = 4.381), and *"I ask for clarification on concepts I do not understand"* (M = 4.331).

Table 1: Learners' Perceptions of Adaptive Helping Skills (N = 399)

Statement	Mean	SD
I seek help from teachers or classmates when I need it	4.56	0.56
I would use my past successes to help motivate myself	4.42	0.65
I would monitor and evaluate my achievements and plans	4.38	0.65
I ask for clarification on concepts I don't understand	4.33	0.69
I would try to think more about my strengths and weaknesses	4.44	0.65
I would set my own goals for achievement	4.57	0.58
I am comfortable seeking help from multiple sources	4.30	0.85
I am willing to ask for help even if it means admitting I don't know something	4.35	0.72
I would start to self-impose rewards and punishments depending on my performance	3.88	1.04

Note. SD = Standard Deviation. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The findings suggest that learners were not only open to help-seeking but also engaged in deeper forms of academic reflection, goal-setting, and self-regulation—all of which are essential features of competency-based learning. This is consistent with the theoretical assumptions of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011) and the constructivist orientation of CBL, where learners actively manage their progression through personalized and mastery-oriented curricula. To explore the strength and direction of the relationship between adaptive helping skills and CBL, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The correlation coefficient was 0.5736, with a p-value of 0.0000, indicating a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship between adaptive help-seeking and competency-based learning.

Table 2: Correlation between Adaptive Helping Skills and Competency-Based Learning

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Adaptive Helping Skills and CBL	0.5736	0.0000

This result implies that students who exhibit higher levels of adaptive help-seeking are more likely to engage meaningfully with CBL. Help-seeking supports learners in navigating personalized learning pathways, accessing feedback, and overcoming instructional difficulties, features inherent in a CBL framework (Rudd et al., 2021; Almulla, 2024). To assess the predictive power of adaptive help-seeking on CBL engagement, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The findings (Table 3) reveal a statistically significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.595$, $p < 0.01$), with an R-squared value of 0.329. This means that adaptive helping skills explain approximately 33% of the variance in CBL engagement, while the remaining 67% can be attributed to other variables such as emotional intelligence, motivation, and instructional quality.

Table 3: Regression Results for Adaptive Helping Skills and Competency-Based Learning

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Sig.	R²
Adaptive Helping Skills	0.595	<0.01	0.329

The regression results affirm that adaptive help-seeking is a significant predictor of student success in CBL contexts, aligning with theoretical assertions by Weisstein (2012) that CBL depends on learner autonomy, initiative, and resilience. However, the moderate R^2 value suggests that while adaptive help-seeking is important, it must be considered alongside other psychological and environmental factors for a full understanding of CBL effectiveness.

Qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions further illuminate these findings. For instance, one teacher remarked:

"We think deeply about cognitive load without sacrificing rigor. Feeling overwhelmed or confused creates stress, which hinders learning. We aim to create learning opportunities that are both smooth and intuitive, allowing the learner to focus on what matters: learning." (KII, 2024)

Another participant described how CBL and help-seeking coexisted in their school system:

"Teaching begins in the morning to 2pm and the rest of the time is given to attending co-curricular activities like goat rearing, mechanics, and knitting, which adds skills to the students." (KII, 2024)

These insights reveal that adaptive help-seeking is intertwined with broader institutional strategies such as flexible learning schedules and holistic skill development. However, constraints such as cost and teacher readiness remain significant barriers:

"It is expensive in terms of carrying out research due to inadequate equipment... going out for tours... carrying out projects." (FGD, 2024)

"There is a need for more teacher training and parent engagement to fully implement the new curriculum." (KII, 2024)

These qualitative accounts suggest that while students are generally inclined to seek help and engage with CBL, structural issues related to funding, parental involvement, and teacher training impede optimal implementation. Thus, the results establish a significant and meaningful connection between adaptive help-seeking skills and student engagement in competency-based learning. High mean scores on adaptive behaviors, statistically significant correlation and regression coefficients, and consistent qualitative narratives all affirm that adaptive help-seeking is both prevalent and impactful in CBL environments in Mukono and Kayunga districts. These findings validate the theoretical framing of help-seeking as a resilience factor and point to the need for deliberate policy and instructional interventions aimed at nurturing this competence.

Testing the null hypothesis (H_0: no relationship between adaptive help-seeking and CBL) against the alternative (H_1: a positive relationship), the highly significant regression coefficient ($p < 0.01$) and moderate R^2 allow rejection of H_0. Thus, adaptive help-seeking skills are confirmed as a key predictor of CBL engagement, though further research should explore the remaining 67 % of unexplained variance (e.g., intrinsic motivation, resources, teaching quality).

4.2 Discussion

The results of this study affirm the significant role that adaptive help-seeking skills play in enhancing students' engagement in competency-based learning (CBL) within Ugandan secondary schools. The findings reveal a strong, statistically significant relationship between adaptive help-seeking and CBL engagement ($r = 0.5736$, $p < 0.01$), with regression analysis indicating that help-seeking accounts for 32.9% of the variance in students' involvement in competency-based tasks. This supports the assertion by Karabenick and Newman (2006) that adaptive help-seeking is not only a self-regulatory skill but also a metacognitive strategy that enhances academic resilience and fosters deeper learning, especially in learner-centered educational models. The consistently high mean scores (all above 3.8) across survey items demonstrate that students generally possess and apply help-seeking behaviors. These findings resonate with Ryan et al. (2022), who found that proactive help-seeking contributes to enhanced academic engagement and competency acquisition. Students who reported seeking clarification, using peer or teacher support, and evaluating their progress also indicated stronger alignment with the demands of the CBL

framework. These results suggest that CBL is most effective when learners are not passive recipients but active agents who utilize support systems strategically to navigate learning challenges.

The thematic analysis of qualitative data complements the quantitative findings by illustrating how school environments and relationships shape help-seeking behaviors. Narratives from teachers and students highlighted the importance of mutual trust, supportive teacher-student relationships, and practical engagement through co-curricular activities as key facilitators of adaptive help-seeking. For instance, a key informant emphasized the role of teacher mentorship and safe learning spaces in promoting help-seeking without fear or shame. These accounts reflect Mampane and Bouwer's (2024) observations that learners in African contexts develop resilience when embedded in relational and culturally sensitive support systems. The study's findings thus align with the social-cognitive theory of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002), which posits that adaptive strategies like help-seeking are both socially constructed and contextually practiced.

However, challenges persist. Focus group discussions revealed that financial constraints, lack of instructional materials, and limited teacher training inhibit the full integration of help-seeking and CBL strategies. This echo concerns raised by MoES (2021) and UNEB (2023) regarding inequities in the implementation of the competency-based curriculum across Uganda. Some learners, especially in rural schools, may possess the willingness to seek help but lack access to knowledgeable peers, responsive teachers, or academic resources. Such contextual limitations can mute the benefits of even the most adaptive strategies, highlighting the need for institutional investments in teacher capacity building and infrastructural support.

It is also important to recognize that while help-seeking explains a substantial proportion of student success in CBL ($R^2 = 0.329$), nearly 67% of the variation in competency acquisition remains unexplained. This suggests that other learner traits, such as motivation, self-efficacy, time management, and systemic variables like curriculum alignment, classroom size, and community support may also be influential. In fact, scholars like Wigfield et al. (2015) caution against overreliance on help-seeking, warning that without proper scaffolding, it may foster dependency or surface-level engagement. This perspective offers a cautionary lens for interpreting the current study's findings, underscoring the need for a balanced approach that fosters both independent learning and guided support.

Thus, the findings of this study reinforce the critical role of adaptive help-seeking in supporting learner engagement in CBL. However, help-seeking should not be viewed in isolation. It must be cultivated within a supportive institutional culture that values inquiry, provides sufficient resources, and recognizes learners' diverse contexts and needs. As Uganda continues to operationalize its competency-based curriculum, attention must be paid not only to curriculum content and teacher training but also to the psychosocial and behavioral competencies that enable learners to thrive in a self-directed and skills-oriented learning environment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to evaluate the relationship between students' adaptive help-seeking skills and their ability to acquire competencies in a competency-based learning (CBL) environment, using secondary schools in Mukono and Kayunga districts as case studies. The findings provide compelling evidence that adaptive help-seeking is a significant predictor of CBL engagement, accounting for over 32% of the variation in student success within the competency framework. Students who actively seek clarification, assistance, and feedback from teachers and peers are more likely to develop critical competencies such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This underscores adaptive help-seeking not merely as a coping mechanism but as a core academic skill necessary for thriving in modern learner-centered pedagogies. Moreover, qualitative evidence confirms that help-seeking behaviors are fostered within supportive learning environments characterized by trust, mentorship, and relational engagement. However, contextual limitations such as inadequate learning materials, undertrained teachers, and rigid school cultures remain key obstacles to fully leveraging these skills in practice. Although help-seeking is essential, it does not operate in a vacuum. Its effectiveness is mediated by broader institutional and pedagogical factors, suggesting that holistic reform efforts are needed to optimize its impact. Therefore, the development and support of adaptive help-seeking skills should be prioritized as part of Uganda's broader competency-based education reforms.

5.2 Recommendation

To strengthen students' ability to thrive in a competency-based learning (CBL) environment, there is an urgent need to intentionally cultivate adaptive help-seeking skills within the school system. One of the primary strategies is to integrate help-seeking into pedagogical practice.

Teachers should be equipped to explicitly teach and model these skills during instruction. This involves establishing psychologically safe classrooms where students feel confident to ask questions, admit confusion, and seek clarification without fear of ridicule or punishment. Using peer-assisted learning strategies, group tasks, and formative feedback sessions can encourage learners to normalize help-seeking as a productive and valued academic behavior. Teachers should adopt dialogic teaching and inquiry-based methods that position students as active participants in their learning process, thereby reinforcing the value of seeking academic support.

Additionally, teacher education and professional development programs should be revised to include training on psychosocial and learner support competencies. Most current programs focus heavily on content delivery and curriculum coverage, often neglecting the social-emotional dimensions of learning. Including training on fostering learner resilience, self-regulated learning, and adaptive help-seeking will prepare teachers to identify and nurture such behaviors among students. In-service training workshops should emphasize how teachers can become approachable academic mentors who encourage autonomy while providing structured support.

A crucial recommendation is the provision of adequate learning resources and supportive infrastructure. Help-seeking can only be effective if students have access to individuals or tools that can offer meaningful support. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack basic instructional materials, reference books, and ICT facilities necessary for learners to access alternative support beyond classroom instruction. The Ministry of Education and Sports, along with development partners, should prioritize the equitable distribution of learning materials, digital devices, and internet access to ensure that help-seeking behaviors are supported by a responsive learning environment.

In addition to material resources, schools should institutionalize structured mentorship programs. Assigning each student an academic mentor, either a teacher or senior student, can offer a personalized space for learners to express academic concerns and receive guided support. Mentorship fosters positive relationships and trust, making it easier for students to seek help without stigma. These programs can also serve as platforms for reinforcing self-regulatory behaviors, goal setting, and performance tracking, all of which are aligned with the principles of CBL.

Engaging parents and the wider community is equally vital. Parents need to be sensitized on the value of academic support-seeking and encouraged to foster these behaviors at home. When learners receive consistent messaging on the importance of seeking help, from school and home alike, they are more likely to internalize it as a valid and effective strategy. Community involvement can also bolster resource mobilization and reduce the cultural stigmas often attached to help-seeking in Ugandan settings, where academic independence is sometimes misunderstood as isolationist self-reliance.

Lastly, further research is recommended to explore additional factors influencing success in CBL environments. While adaptive help-seeking is a significant predictor, the study found that it accounts for only 32.9% of the variance in competency-based learning engagement. Other potential predictors, such as intrinsic motivation, teacher feedback quality, classroom climate, and school leadership, should be explored to provide a more holistic understanding. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs to investigate how help-seeking behaviors evolve over time and how they interact with other variables in supporting or impeding learner success.

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