



Aligning University Pedagogy to Competency-based Curriculum Reforms: Evidence-Informed Strategies and Implications for Graduate Skills and Employability

Luben Elia Mugarura, Fredrick Ssempala, Denis Sekiwu, Florence Kirabo Nampijja & Athanansio Bashaija
Kabale University, P.O. Box 317, Kabale, Uganda

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9525-0366>

Email: lubenelia@gmail.com

Abstract: *Since 2010, competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have increasingly influenced education systems worldwide, prompting alignment of university pedagogy to competency-oriented learning to strengthen graduate skills and employability. However, evidence suggests persistent gaps between CBC intentions and university teaching practices. This study adopted a narrative literature review design, synthesising empirical, conceptual, and policy-oriented studies published between 2010 and 2025. Literature was drawn from major academic databases and analysed thematically using key pillars of competency-based education to examine pedagogical interpretation, alignment, and implementation gaps in higher education. The review shows that although CBC reforms have reshaped curriculum frameworks and policy discourse, university pedagogy remains largely lecture-centred and examination-oriented. Limited adoption of learner-centred approaches, weak facilitative teaching practices, and constrained interdisciplinary learning restrict the development of transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability. Pedagogical misalignment contributes to persistent gaps between graduate capabilities and employability expectations, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where institutional and contextual constraints are pronounced. The evidence demonstrates that aligning competency-based curriculum reforms with university pedagogy is central to improving graduate skills and employability outcomes. Effective alignment requires coordinated reforms that integrate curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and institutional support, which this review synthesises as evidence-informed pedagogical and institutional strategies. Without deliberate pedagogical transformation at the university level, the potential of CBC reforms to enhance graduate skills and employability remains limited.*

Keywords: *Competency-based curriculum, University pedagogy, Graduate skills, Employability, Higher education*

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1. Introduction

Since 2010, competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have increasingly shaped education systems globally as governments respond to rapid technological change, evolving labour-market demands, and persistent concerns

regarding graduate employability (OECD, 2019; United Nations Educational, 2021; Yorke, 2010). Unlike traditional content-driven curricula, CBC emphasises the integration and application of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required for effective participation in contemporary work and society. Within this framework, higher education institutions are positioned as critical

spaces where competencies initiated at lower levels of education should be consolidated, refined, and translated into professional capability (Abelha, Fernandes, Mesquita, Seabra, & Ferreira-Oliveira, 2020; Bridgstock, 2017).

Globally, universities are expected to align pedagogy, assessment, and learning environments with competency-based principles to ensure continuity across educational levels and enhance graduate readiness for employment. However, despite widespread adoption of competency language in policy and curriculum documents, evidence consistently shows that university teaching practices often remain dominated by lecture-based delivery, content transmission, and examination-oriented assessment (González & Yarosh, 2014)(Makunja, 2016; Giacomazzi, 2022). Such pedagogical inertia limits opportunities for experiential learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and authentic performance, which are central to competency development (Wiggins, 1990; Moore & Morton, 2017).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, CBC reforms are closely linked to national development agendas aimed at industrialisation, innovation, and workforce transformation. Universities are expected not only to transmit disciplinary knowledge but also to prepare graduates capable of adapting to complex and dynamic labour markets (Mohamedbhai et al., 2014; Altbach et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the literature indicates persistent misalignment between curriculum intent and pedagogical practice within universities. Structural constraints such as massification of higher education, large class sizes, limited infrastructure, weak university–industry linkages, and institutional reward systems that prioritise research over teaching innovation continue to undermine the effective implementation of competency-based pedagogy (Cotton et al., 2009; Du Plessis et al., 2025; Gkrimpizi et al., 2023).

Uganda’s adoption of a Competency-based Curriculum at the secondary education level further intensifies expectations for pedagogical alignment within higher education. CBC policy emphasises vertical coherence across education levels to ensure that competencies developed in secondary education are consolidated and advanced at university. However, emerging evidence suggests that this continuity remains weak, particularly within university teaching and assessment practices (Kachope et al., 2025; Simiyu, 2025). Universities frequently rely on internships and industrial attachments to compensate for limited pedagogical transformation, signaling partial rather than systematic alignment between curriculum goals and learning experiences (Ferns et al., 2022; Guardia, Mancini, Jacobetty, & Maina, 2021).

Across contexts, employers continue to report gaps in graduates’ practical skills, communication, problem-solving ability, adaptability, and professional attitudes.

Consequently, graduates often require additional workplace training or post-graduation upskilling, shifting responsibility for competency development from universities to employers and individuals (Jackson, 2015; Okolie et al., 2019; OECD, 2025). Despite the central role universities are expected to play in competency development, there remains a limited synthesis of evidence on how competency-based curriculum reforms are operationalised through university pedagogy and how pedagogical misalignment affects graduate skills and employability, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mihyo et al., 2013; Kidega et al., 2022). This study makes a conceptual contribution by foregrounding pedagogical misalignment as a central mechanism through which competence-based curriculum reforms fail to translate into improved graduate skills and employability. Contextually, it advances understanding of this misalignment within Sub-Saharan Africa, with particular reference to Uganda, where systemic and institutional constraints intensify the gap between curriculum intent and pedagogical practice. Methodologically, the study contributes a gap-oriented narrative synthesis that integrates empirical, conceptual, and policy literature to identify recurring implementation, contextual, and methodological gaps shaping competence-based pedagogy in higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this narrative literature review is to synthesise empirical, conceptual, and policy-oriented studies published between 2010 and 2025 to examine how university pedagogy can be aligned with CBC, and to synthesise evidence-informed strategies to strengthen pedagogical alignment and enhance graduate skills and employability.

1.1 Problem Statement

Competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms since 2010 have increasingly shaped education systems as a response to changing labour-market demands and persistent concerns about graduate employability (Yorke, 2010; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). These reforms emphasise the integration and application of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, requiring universities to align pedagogy and assessment with learner-centred and competency-focused principles so that graduates can demonstrate professional capability (Bridgstock, 2017; Abelha et al., 2020). However, despite the widespread adoption of CBC language in higher education policy and curriculum frameworks, university teaching practices remain largely lecture-centred, content-driven, and examination-oriented, limiting opportunities for experiential learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and authentic performance (Makunja, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2014; Giacomazzi, 2022; Wiggins, 1990; Moore & Morton, 2017).

This misalignment between CBC intentions and university pedagogy is evident globally but is particularly pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda, where massification of higher education, large class sizes, limited infrastructure, weak university–industry linkages, and institutional reward systems that prioritise research over teaching innovation constrain pedagogical transformation (Mohamedbhai et al., 2014; Altbach et al., 2015). Uganda’s adoption of a competency-based curriculum at the secondary education level has further heightened expectations for vertical coherence across education levels; however, emerging evidence suggests that continuity between secondary CBC and university pedagogy remains weak, with universities often relying on internships and industrial attachments to compensate for limited pedagogical change rather than embedding competency-based teaching and assessment within programmes (Kachope et al., 2025; Ferns et al., 2022; Guardia et al., 2021).

As a result, employers continue to report gaps in graduates’ practical skills, communication, adaptability, and professional attitudes, shifting responsibility for competency development to employers and graduates themselves (Jackson, 2015; Okolie et al., 2019; OECD, 2025). If this misalignment persists, universities risk continuing to produce graduates whose capabilities do not meet labour-market expectations, undermining national development goals linked to skills and innovation. Despite the central role universities are expected to play in CBC implementation, there remains a limited synthesis of how competency-based reforms are operationalised through university pedagogy and how pedagogical misalignment shapes graduate skills and employability, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where contextual constraints are pronounced (Mihyo et al., 2013; Kidega et al., 2022).

1.2 Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives, which informed the analysis, synthesis, conclusions, and evidence-based recommendations presented.

1. To examine how university pedagogy has been aligned or misaligned with competency-based curriculum reforms.
2. To analyse literature on how university pedagogy has been aligned or misaligned with competency-based curriculum reforms, and the reported implications of this alignment for graduate skills development and employability.
3. To identify key methodological, contextual, and implementation gaps in the literature, and synthesise evidence-informed pedagogical and institutional strategies for aligning university

pedagogy with competency-based curriculum reforms.

2. Literature Review

This literature review critically synthesises empirical, conceptual, and policy-oriented studies on competency-based curriculum reforms and their alignment with university pedagogy, with a focus on implications for graduate skills and employability. Organised around key pillars of competency-based education, the review examines how learner-centred pedagogy, skills development, assessment, contextualisation, and institutional practices are operationalised within higher education. In doing so, it identifies persistent methodological, contextual, and implementation gaps that help explain why graduate skills mismatches continue despite widespread curriculum reform efforts, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2.1 Translating Competency-based Curriculum Reforms into University Pedagogical Practice

This subsection of the literature review examines how competency-based curriculum reforms have been interpreted and operationalised within university pedagogy, in line with Objective 1 of the study. The reviewed literature is deliberately organised around key pedagogical dimensions of CBC, including learner-centred and competency-focused learning, the reconceptualisation of the lecturer as a facilitator of learning, and the adoption of integrated and interdisciplinary teaching approaches. These pillars are central to CBC’s departure from traditional content-driven instruction and reflect expectations that university pedagogy should prioritise active learning, application of knowledge, and holistic competency development. By analysing how these principles are enacted or constrained within university teaching practices, the literature provides insight into the extent to which CBC reforms have translated into meaningful pedagogical change beyond policy rhetoric, thereby directly addressing how curriculum intentions are realised in higher education contexts.

2.1.1 Learner-Centred and Competency-Focused Learning

Competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have increasingly positioned universities as critical spaces for translating curricular intentions into employable graduate outcomes (Yorke, 2010; Bridgstock, 2017; Abelha et al., 2020). The literature consistently emphasises that higher education institutions are expected to consolidate

competencies developed at the secondary education level and refine them into professional capabilities aligned with labour-market demands. Despite this expectation, empirical studies repeatedly demonstrate that university pedagogy remains largely lecturer-centred, content-driven, and examination-oriented, with limited emphasis on experiential learning, problem-solving, and authentic performance (Makunja, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2014; Giacomazzi, 2022). This misalignment between curriculum intent and pedagogical practice constrains competency development and contributes to graduates possessing strong theoretical knowledge but limited practical capability, ultimately undermining employability (Okolie, Nwosu, & Mlana, 2019)(Jackson, 2015). The literature, therefore, reveals a straightforward implementation and a practical knowledge gap, in which CBC principles are articulated at the policy level but insufficiently operationalised in university classrooms.

2.1.2 Lecturer as Facilitator of Learning

Lecturers play a central role in implementing competency-based pedagogy, as CBC reconceptualises teaching from content transmission to facilitation of active and experiential learning. However, empirical evidence shows uneven adoption of this role among university lecturers, mainly due to limited pedagogical training, heavy workloads, disciplinary traditions, and institutional reward systems that prioritise research output over teaching quality (Cao & Tran, 2024; ChaaCha, 2024). Traditional examinations continue to dominate assessment practices, further undermining competency development (Al Bashir & Fatonah, 2025; Medard & Mwila, 2022). These findings point to population and implementation gaps, particularly the limited focus on lecturers' professional learning needs and institutional support mechanisms required for sustained pedagogical transformation.

2.1.3 Integrated and Interdisciplinary Learning

CBC promotes integration across learning areas to enhance systems thinking and interdisciplinary problem-solving. Despite this, university pedagogy remains primarily organised around disciplinary silos, limiting opportunities for integrated learning experiences and cross-faculty collaboration (Ion et al., 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2014). This fragmentation restricts graduates' ability to synthesise knowledge across domains and respond to complex, multi-sectoral challenges encountered in professional environments. The literature highlights a conceptual and implementation gap, reflecting the absence of coherent models and institutional structures to support interdisciplinary competency-based pedagogy.

2.2 Alignment of Graduate Skills and Employability

This section explores how alignment between competency-based curriculum reforms and university pedagogy influences graduate skills development and employability outcomes. To unpack this relationship, the literature is examined through key dimensions that reflect how skills are formed in higher education, beginning with the development of transferable 21st-century skills that are central to contemporary labour-market demands.

2.2.1 Development of 21st-Century Skills

A central objective of CBC reforms is the development of transferable 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, which are increasingly demanded by contemporary labour markets (Yorke, 2010; Bridgstock, 2017). However, the literature indicates that many universities adopt competency language at the policy level without substantively transforming teaching and assessment practices. Studies describe this phenomenon as a ceremonial or symbolic adoption of competency-based systems, where institutional rhetoric fails to translate into pedagogical change (Gonzalez et al., 2014; Holmes, 2023). Assessment practices remain predominantly focused on recall-oriented written examinations rather than authentic tasks that foster higher-order thinking and teamwork (Medard & Mwila, 2022; Bashir et al., 2025). Consequently, graduates often exhibit deficiencies in problem-solving, communication, and adaptability, skills that employers consistently identify as essential for effective workplace performance (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2025). This body of literature highlights methodological and evidence gaps, particularly the limited use of longitudinal and performance-based studies to evaluate the impact of CBC pedagogy on measurable skill acquisition.

2.2.2 Holistic Development of Knowledge, Skills, Values, and Attitudes

CBC seeks to promote holistic learning by integrating cognitive knowledge with skills, values, and attitudes necessary for professional and social participation. However, at the university level, pedagogical emphasis remains disproportionately placed on disciplinary knowledge and academic credentials, with limited attention to professional ethics, work attitudes, and reflective learning (Holmes, 2023). The literature further identifies systemic institutional constraints, including large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure, rigid curricula, and reward systems that prioritise research productivity over

teaching innovation, as major barriers to pedagogical transformation (Cotton et al., 2009; Du Plessis et al., 2025; Gkrimpizi et al., 2023). These constraints are shown to be interconnected and self-reinforcing, limiting universities' capacity to operationalise holistic competency-based pedagogy. As a result, CBC implementation remains aspirational rather than operational, revealing contextual and theoretical gaps related to how institutional environments shape pedagogical practice.

2.2.3 Flexible and Contextualised Learning

Flexibility and contextualisation are fundamental principles of CBC, enabling learners to connect academic knowledge to real-life and labour-market contexts. Nevertheless, the literature demonstrates that universities face significant challenges in operationalising this principle due to rigid curricular structures, massification of higher education, and limited pedagogical autonomy (Altbach et al., 2015). In Sub-Saharan Africa, weak university–industry linkages further exacerbate the disconnect between teaching and labour-market realities, limiting opportunities for contextualised learning and the development of applied competency (Mihyo et al., 2013; Kidega et al., 2022). Graduates consequently struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into professional practice, contributing to persistent skills mismatches. This evidence points to a contextual and practical knowledge gap, where insufficient engagement with local industry and societal needs undermines the relevance of university pedagogy.

2.3 Strategies for Strengthening Alignment of University Pedagogy to CBC Reforms

Beyond identifying patterns of misalignment, the literature also articulates a set of evidence-informed strategies for strengthening alignment between competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms and university pedagogy. These strategies focus on translating CBC principles into sustained pedagogical practice rather than leaving them at the level of curriculum rhetoric. Across contexts, scholars converge on five interrelated strategic areas: pedagogical transformation within universities, reform of assessment practices, strengthening academic staff capacity and institutional support, institutionalising contextualised learning through school and industry partnerships, and enhancing vertical coherence between CBC-oriented schooling and university pedagogy. Collectively, these strategies address the systemic and pedagogical conditions that constrain effective CBC implementation in higher education.

2.3.1 Pedagogical transformation towards learner-centred and competency-focused teaching

A foundational strategy identified in the literature is the deliberate transformation of university pedagogy from lecture-centred, content-driven instruction to learner-centred, competency-focused teaching approaches. CBC alignment is consistently associated with pedagogies that emphasise active learning, problem-based learning, collaboration, reflection, and the application of knowledge in authentic contexts (Bridgstock, 2017; Moore & Morton, 2017; Wiggins, 1990). These approaches reposition lecturers as facilitators of learning and enable students to engage meaningfully with complex tasks that mirror professional practice.

The literature suggests that without this pedagogical shift, CBC reforms remain largely symbolic, with competencies articulated in curriculum documents but weakly enacted in classrooms. Learner-centred pedagogy is therefore presented not as an optional innovation but as a core strategy for operationalising CBC principles and supporting the development of transferable skills central to graduate employability (Bridgstock, 2017; Yorke, 2010).

2.3.2 Reforming assessment practices to support competency development

Assessment reform emerges as a second critical strategy for strengthening alignment between CBC reforms and university pedagogy. Scholars consistently argue that assessment systems must move beyond recall-oriented, summative examinations towards continuous, formative, and competency-aligned approaches that capture higher-order cognitive, interpersonal, and practical skills (Wiggins, 1990; Moore & Morton, 2017; Medard & Mwila, 2022). Recommended strategies include portfolios, project-based assessment, performance tasks, and reflective assignments that allow students to demonstrate integrated competencies over time.

The literature indicates that misaligned assessment practices undermine pedagogical transformation, as both lecturers and students remain incentivised to prioritise examination performance over skill development (Al Bashir & Fatonah, 2025; Medard & Mwila, 2022). Consequently, assessment reform is framed as a central mechanism for embedding CBC within university pedagogy and ensuring that competency development is meaningfully evaluated prior to graduation.

2.3.3 Strengthening academic staff capacity and institutional support

A further strategy highlighted in the literature concerns strengthening academic staff capacity and institutional support structures for CBC-aligned pedagogy. Evidence shows that many university lecturers have limited training in learner-centred and competency-based teaching approaches, while heavy workloads, large class sizes, and institutional reward systems that prioritise research output over teaching innovation constrain pedagogical change (Cotton et al., 2009; Du Plessis et al., 2025; Gkrimpizi et al., 2023). These conditions result in uneven and often unsustainable adoption of CBC-aligned practices.

To address these challenges, the literature advocates for sustained professional development focused on competency-based pedagogy, alongside institutional policies that recognise and reward teaching innovation (Cao & Tran, 2024; ChaaCha, 2024). Such support is presented as essential for moving CBC implementation from isolated individual efforts to systemic and sustainable pedagogical transformation within universities.

2.3.4 Institutionalising contextualised learning through school and industry partnerships

The literature further emphasises the institutionalisation of contextualised learning through partnerships with both schools and industry as a strategic pathway for strengthening alignment between CBC reforms and university pedagogy. While university–industry linkages are frequently promoted as mechanisms for enhancing employability, CBC reforms also require continuity with pedagogical practices at the school level, where competency-based approaches are first introduced. Universities increasingly receive students socialised into learner-centred CBC environments at the secondary level, yet limited coordination between schools and universities often results in pedagogical discontinuity (Kachope et al., 2025; Simiyu, 2025).

At the same time, evidence indicates that internships and industrial attachments are most effective when intentionally integrated into curricula and aligned with competency-based learning outcomes, rather than treated as remedial add-ons (Ferns et al., 2022; Guardia et al., 2021). The literature, therefore, frames structured partnerships with both schools and industry as a strategic means of contextualising learning, consolidating competencies across educational transitions, and extending them into professional settings (Kidega, Song, & Khaing, 2022; Mihyo, 2013).

2.3.5 Strengthening vertical coherence between CBC-oriented schooling and university pedagogy

A final strategy emerging from the literature is the deliberate strengthening of vertical coherence between CBC implementation at the school level and pedagogical practices within universities. CBC reforms emphasise progressive competency development across education levels rather than discrete curricular resets at transition points. However, studies suggest that universities often treat CBC-trained entrants as pedagogically equivalent to cohorts educated under content-based systems, thereby disrupting learners' competency development trajectories (Kachope et al., 2025; Simiyu, 2025).

The literature advocates for structured university–school collaboration, including curriculum dialogue, shared understanding of assessment practices, and joint professional development initiatives, as a means of aligning pedagogical expectations and consolidating competencies initiated in secondary education. Strengthening vertical coherence is thus presented as a strategic mechanism to ensure that university pedagogy builds on, rather than undermines, CBC learning foundations, thereby enhancing graduate capability development and subsequent employability outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study adopted a narrative review design to synthesise empirical, conceptual, and policy-oriented literature on competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms and their alignment with university pedagogy. A narrative approach was considered appropriate given the conceptual diversity of CBC scholarship, the variation in study designs, and the study's aim of critically interpreting patterns, gaps, and implications for graduate skills and employability rather than aggregating effect sizes or producing meta-analytic estimates.

3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Literature was identified through systematic searches of Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and selected institutional repositories. The search focused on studies published between 2010 and 2025, reflecting the period during which CBC reforms gained prominence globally and within Sub-Saharan Africa. Search terms included combinations of competency-based curriculum, competency-based education, university pedagogy, higher education, graduate skills, employability, assessment, and work-integrated

learning. Reference lists of key articles were also reviewed to identify additional relevant sources.

3.3 Study Selection

Study selection followed a transparent and iterative process to identify literature relevant to competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms and their alignment with university pedagogy. After conducting database searches, all retrieved records were initially screened based on titles and abstracts to assess relevance to higher education, pedagogy, competency-based education, graduate skills, and employability. Studies that clearly did not address CBC, university pedagogy, or higher education contexts were excluded at this stage.

Full-text screening was subsequently conducted for potentially eligible studies to determine alignment with the review objectives and inclusion criteria. Selection decisions were guided by the extent to which studies examined pedagogical enactment, assessment practices, institutional conditions, or implications for graduate skills and employability within competency-based frameworks. Both empirical and non-empirical sources were retained where they contributed conceptual, theoretical, or policy-relevant insights.

The study selection process prioritised analytical depth, relevance to competency-based pedagogy, and contribution to understanding pedagogical alignment or misalignment in higher education. Disagreements regarding relevance were resolved by re-examining the study objectives and conceptual focus, ensuring consistency and transparency in the final body of literature synthesised.

3.4 Eligibility Criteria

3.4.1 Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

- i. Published between 2010 and 2025, reflecting the period during which competence-based curriculum reforms became prominent in higher education.
- ii. Examined competence-based curriculum or competence-based education in relation to university or higher education pedagogy.
- iii. Addressed teaching, learning, assessment, or curriculum implementation practices relevant to CBC.
- iv. Provided insights into graduate skills development, competence formation, or employability implications.
- v. Adopted empirical, conceptual, theoretical, policy-oriented, or review-based approaches

vi. Were available in full-text form and provided sufficient detail to support thematic synthesis.

3.4.2 Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded from the review if they met any of the following conditions:

- i. Focused on curriculum reform debates without substantive discussion of pedagogical enactment or teaching practice.
- ii. Addressed skills or employability solely from an employer, labour-market, or macroeconomic perspective without linking outcomes to university pedagogy.
- iii. Reported isolated instructional innovations (e.g., single-course teaching techniques) without engagement with broader CBC principles or curriculum frameworks.
- iv. Lacked analytical depth, including descriptive reports that did not engage theory, evidence, or policy implications.
- v. Were methodologically opaque, preventing assessment of relevance or contribution to the review objectives.
- vi. Were duplicate publications or secondary summaries that did not add new conceptual or empirical insight.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

As this study was based exclusively on secondary analysis of publicly available literature, it did not involve human participants, primary data collection, or access to confidential information. Formal ethical approval was therefore not required. Nevertheless, ethical standards were upheld through accurate citations, faithful representation of the original authors' arguments, and adherence to the principles of academic integrity.

3.5 Data Analysis and Synthesis

Relevant information was extracted from each source with attention to pedagogical interpretations of CBC, modes of implementation, institutional conditions, assessment practices, and reported implications for graduate skills and employability. The literature was synthesised thematically, guided by the study objectives and key pillars of competency-based education, including the explicit identification of evidence-informed alignment strategies emerging across studies. Rather than treating themes as isolated categories, the synthesis emphasised the relationships among curriculum intentions, pedagogical practice, and graduate outcomes, enabling the identification of patterns of alignment, misalignment, and recurring gaps.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the synthesised results in line with the study objectives. It integrates empirical, conceptual, and policy evidence to interpret pedagogical processes and graduate employability outcomes.

4.1 Translation of Competency-based Curriculum Reforms into University Pedagogical Practice

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals a consistent pattern in the translation of competency-based curriculum reforms into university pedagogical practice. Across diverse higher education contexts, studies converge in showing that while competency-based principles are prominently articulated in curriculum frameworks and policy documents, their enactment within university classrooms remains uneven and largely superficial. The reviewed evidence indicates that learner-centred and competency-focused intentions are frequently constrained in pedagogical practice, with teaching continuing to be dominated by lecture-based instruction, content transmission, and examination-oriented assessment (Giacomazzi, 2022) (Makunja, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2014; Giacomazzi, 2022). This pattern suggests a persistent gap between curriculum design and classroom enactment, highlighting limited pedagogical transformation despite formal adoption of competency-based reforms. These findings align with broader critiques of symbolic or ceremonial curriculum reform, where policy adoption outpaces pedagogical change.

The reviewed literature further indicates that the reconceptualisation of lecturers as facilitators of learning, a core pillar of competency-based curriculum reforms, has not been consistently operationalised within university pedagogy. While some professional and practice-oriented programmes demonstrate greater adoption of interactive and experiential teaching approaches, most university disciplines continue to rely on traditional pedagogies shaped by disciplinary norms, workload pressures, and institutional incentive structures (ChaaCha, 2024; Cao & Tran, 2024).

Taken together, these results confirm that CBC principles related to learner-centred pedagogy, facilitative teaching roles, and interdisciplinary learning are inconsistently enacted within universities. This finding aligns with earlier scholarship characterising CBC implementation in higher education as symbolic or ceremonial, where reforms are adopted at the policy level without commensurate transformation of pedagogical practice (Holmes, 2023). The persistence of these patterns underscores an

implementation gap between curriculum intent and classroom enactment.

4.2 Pedagogical Alignment, Graduate Skills Development, and Employability Outcomes

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that alignment between competency-based curriculum intentions and university pedagogy is critical for the development of graduate skills and employability. Where pedagogical practices emphasise active learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and authentic assessment, graduates are more likely to demonstrate transferable 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability (Bridgstock, 2016)(Yorke, 2010; Bridgstock, 2017). However, the results of this synthesis reveal that such alignment remains limited across most university contexts.

Assessment practices emerge as a key point of misalignment. Despite CBC's emphasis on continuous and competency-based assessment, universities continue to rely heavily on recall-oriented written examinations, which inadequately capture higher-order cognitive and interpersonal competencies (Wiggins, 1990; Moore & Morton, 2017; Medard & Mwila, 2022). Consequently, graduates often exit university with strong theoretical knowledge but limited applied competency, a pattern repeatedly reported by employers (Jackson, 2015; Okolie et al., 2019; OECD, 2025).

The literature further shows that universities increasingly depend on internships and industrial attachments to compensate for pedagogical shortcomings. While work-integrated learning can enhance competency development when well designed, evidence suggests that, in many contexts, internships function as remedial mechanisms rather than integrated pedagogical strategies (Ferns, Rowe, & Zegwaard, 2022); Guardia et al., 2021). This reliance effectively shifts responsibility for skills development from universities to employers and graduates themselves, weakening the intended employability outcomes of CBC reforms.

These findings reinforce existing research documenting persistent skills mismatches between university training and labour-market expectations, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where massification, limited resources, and weak university–industry linkages intensify pedagogical constraints (Mohamedbhai et al., 2014; Mihyo et al., 2013; Kidega et al., 2022). Overall, the results confirm that pedagogical misalignment is a central mechanism through which CBC reforms fail to deliver the anticipated gains in graduate employability.

4.3 Gaps and Strategies for Strengthening Alignment Between CBC Reforms and University Pedagogy

Beyond documenting misalignment, the synthesis reveals persistent methodological, contextual, and implementation gaps that constrain effective translation of CBC reforms into university pedagogy. Methodologically, much of the existing literature relies on cross-sectional and perception-based studies, with limited use of longitudinal or performance-based designs capable of assessing sustained competency development and post-graduation outcomes (Medard & Mwila, 2022; Bashir et al., 2025). This limits the strength of evidence linking CBC pedagogy to employability impacts.

Contextually, institutional conditions play a decisive role. Large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure, rigid curricula, and academic reward systems that privilege research over teaching innovation consistently undermine pedagogical transformation (Du Plessis, Matthews, Mainsbridge, Razmjoe, & Gorry, 2025; Gkrimpizi, Peristeras, & Magnisalis, 2023)(Cotton et al., 2009). These constraints are shown to be interconnected and self-reinforcing, producing systemic inertia that renders CBC implementation aspirational rather than operational. In Sub-Saharan Africa, these challenges are compounded by weak university–industry linkages and limited labour market absorptive capacity, further restricting opportunities for contextualised learning (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019; Kachope, Nyakato, & Mwesigye, 2025).

The literature nonetheless points to evidence-informed strategies for strengthening alignment. These include sustained academic staff development focused on competency-based pedagogy, reform of assessment systems to prioritise authentic and formative evaluation, and institutionalisation of work-integrated learning as a core pedagogical approach rather than an add-on (Wiggins, 1990; Moore & Morton, 2017; Bridgstock, 2017). Importantly, the findings suggest that meaningful alignment requires system-level reform that integrates curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and institutional incentives.

By identifying these gaps and synthesising proposed strategies, this study provides a coherent explanation for why CBC reforms have yielded uneven outcomes in higher education. The results underscore that without deliberate institutional support and pedagogical realignment, competency-based curriculum reforms are unlikely to achieve their intended impact on graduate skills and employability.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This narrative literature review examined the interpretation and operationalisation of competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms within university pedagogy, the relationship between pedagogical alignment and graduate skills development, and the gaps limiting effective implementation in higher education.

The evidence shows that CBC reforms have reshaped curricular frameworks and policy discourse within universities, yet pedagogical practice remains largely lecture-centred and assessment-driven. Core CBC pillars learner-centred learning, facilitative teaching roles, and interdisciplinary approaches are inconsistently embedded in everyday teaching, indicating a persistent disconnect between curriculum intentions and classroom enactment.

The findings demonstrate that misalignment between CBC intentions and university pedagogy is closely associated with limited development of transferable skills and weakened graduate employability. Where teaching and assessment remain content-focused, graduates display strong theoretical knowledge but insufficient applied competency, resulting in increased reliance on internships and post-graduation training to compensate for pedagogical shortcomings.

The review identifies methodological, contextual, and institutional constraints that continue to hinder pedagogical alignment with CBC reforms. These include limited pedagogical capacity among academic staff, rigid assessment systems, weak university–industry linkages, and institutional incentive structures that deprioritise teaching innovation. Addressing these constraints requires coordinated system-level action rather than isolated curricular adjustments. By synthesising these strategies, the review moves beyond diagnosis to provide actionable direction for aligning university pedagogy with competency-based curriculum demands.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are grounded in synthesised evidence and address systemic pedagogical misalignment affecting graduate skills and employability.

1. To strengthen the operationalisation of competency-based curriculum reforms in university pedagogy, universities should institutionalise continuous professional development that equips academic staff to implement learner-centred, facilitative, and interdisciplinary teaching approaches aligned with competency-based principles.

2. To enhance graduate skills development and employability outcomes, higher education institutions should reform assessment and teaching practices to prioritise authentic, competency-based learning and systematically integrate work-integrated learning as a core pedagogical strategy rather than a remedial add-on.
3. To address systemic gaps constraining effective alignment between CBC reforms and university pedagogy, policymakers and university leaders should implement coordinated system-level reforms that align institutional policies, resources, incentive structures, and university–industry partnerships with the requirements of competency-based education.

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