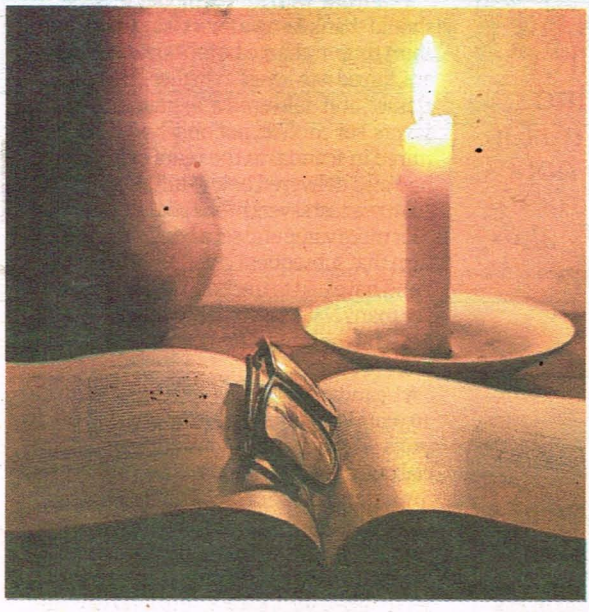
LETTERS

Energy equity is a key accelerator for the Competence-based curriculum



The launch of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in February 2020, in the Ugandan education system, planted the seed to move students from content memorisation toward critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical digital literacy. It is a curriculum designed for the 21st Century, aiming to equip learners with hands-on competencies and preparing them to become lifelong problem solvers. However, its progress in recent years has been slowed by limited electricity access in many rural parts of the country, creating educational apartheid and shutting down the educational dreams of thousands of students.

According to the World Bank, only about half of Uganda's population, including educational institutions, had access to electricity in 2023. This indicates that while the country had not achieved energy equity – ensuring all people have fair access to affordable, reliable, and safe electricity regardless of their income and location – the CBC had already been rolled out. A report by the *Daily Monitor* (2025) further highlights that some schools cannot conduct ICT lessons because they lack electricity, yet the curriculum is ICT-sensitive.

The CBC requires learners to interact with computers, projectors, tablets, e-libraries, and other digital learning tools. Surprisingly, even when some schools possess such equipment, lack of electricity renders it unusable.

Electricity is not just a supporting utility for CBC implementation; it is a central pillar of the curriculum's success.

Without electricity, computers sit idle, teacher retooling becomes inconsistent, and innovation in schools declines. Electricity shortages do not only inconvenience learning; they also digitally disable the educational progress in many rural schools, slowing the nation's aspirations for a modern education system.

For CBC to thrive, we must have powered classrooms. Before momentum is lost, the immediate action is to expand electricity to schools across the country. This would promote equity in competence development and strengthen modern learning environments.

Following Unesco's education frameworks, competence-based approaches require diversified instructional resources beyond textbooks. Yet these resources are difficult to utilise effectively in schools without reliable electricity. This is where the technical solution for education reform is hidden. But there is hope.

One practical pathway is the adoption of decentralised energy alternatives such as solar-powered systems for schools. Such solutions will provide stable electricity, support digital learning, and accelerate the implementation of CBC.

The time to embrace these energy alternatives is now. Communities, school leaders, and development partners should help unlock the full potential of education reform even before a nationwide grid is achieved.

Education stakeholders should take this message to heart. Learners cannot develop 21st-Century competencies without the infrastructure that supports them.

If Uganda's CBC is to fully deliver its intended practical and transferable skills, electricity access in schools must be prioritised as a cornerstone of education reform. Just as we see CBC as a pathway to the nation we aspire to build, reliable electricity in schools must become its strongest support.