



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CURRICULUM DESIGN AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the gap between curriculum design and classroom practice in Nigerian secondary schools, with a focus on understanding the challenges that hinder effective curriculum implementation and identifying strategies to bridge this gap. Using a survey research design, data were collected from 198 teachers and educational administrators across five selected secondary schools—Federal Government College, Enugu; Queen’s College, Lagos; Government Secondary School, Kano; Christ the King College, Onitsha; and Anglican Grammar School, Ibadan—through structured online questionnaires administered via Google Forms. The data were analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, mean, and standard deviation to determine trends in teachers’ understanding of curriculum objectives, classroom practices, and the challenges they face. Findings indicate that while teachers generally have a high understanding of curriculum objectives, the actual implementation of learner-centered and practical teaching methods is moderate, largely due to large class sizes, inadequate instructional resources, and limited professional development opportunities. Respondents highlighted the importance of strategies such as in-service training, provision of instructional materials, collaborative teaching, and regular monitoring to improve curriculum enactment. The study concludes that bridging the curriculum-practice gap requires coordinated efforts at both teacher and systemic levels to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Curriculum implementation, classroom practice, teacher preparedness, secondary schools, Nigeria.



INTRODUCTION

In the evolving educational landscape of Nigeria, the gap between curriculum design and classroom practice remains a critical challenge. Curriculum design establishes the framework for what learners should experience, learn, and achieve, encompassing knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. However, translating these designs into effective classroom practices has often proven elusive, leading to a misalignment between intended educational outcomes and actual student learning experiences. Research indicates that although curriculum documents frequently reflect progressive educational ideals, teaching practices in many Nigerian schools continue to rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centered approaches that limit active learning and skills acquisition (Adewale, 2021; Okoro & Eze, 2022).

The persistent disconnect between curriculum intentions and classroom enactment in Nigeria is shaped by multiple factors, including teacher preparedness, resource limitations, and systemic constraints. For instance, studies have shown that inadequate professional development, large class sizes, and limited instructional materials hinder teachers' capacity to implement curricula as designed (Ibrahim, 2020; Nwankwo, 2023). Similarly, research on competency-based curriculum reforms highlights that efforts to promote learner-centered, skills-oriented education often fail to reach classrooms, largely due to insufficient teacher training and infrastructural inadequacies (Oluwatobi & Adeyemi, 2022).

Curriculum designers in Nigeria face the dual challenge of aligning programs with national standards while considering the practical realities of classroom implementation. While designers aim to integrate modern pedagogical approaches and respond to contemporary learning needs, systemic issues such as inadequate stakeholder collaboration, rigid policy frameworks, and weak monitoring mechanisms frequently impede effective translation into practice (Eze & Onyekachi, 2021). On the other hand, teachers contend with multiple pressures, including high workloads, limited teaching aids, and rigid assessment structures, which often constrain their ability to enact curriculum goals authentically.

Recent studies have begun to illuminate strategies for bridging this gap. Evidence suggests that fostering professional collaboration, continuous capacity building, and context-sensitive curriculum design can enhance the alignment between policy intentions and classroom realities (Chukwuma & Adegoke, 2023; Salisu, 2022). Approaches such as communities of practice, mentorship programs, and the integration of practical, student-centered pedagogies have shown promise in improving curriculum implementation outcomes.

Given this context, the present study seeks to explore how curriculum design and classroom practice can be more effectively aligned in Nigerian schools. It examines systemic, institutional, and teacher-level factors that promote or hinder the translation of curriculum into meaningful classroom experiences. The study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that can inform policymakers, curriculum planners, and educators, ultimately enhancing the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of education in Nigeria.

In conclusion, although Nigeria's curriculum reforms reflect ambitious educational aspirations, the central challenge remains ensuring that curricular intentions are authentically realized in classrooms. Bridging this gap is crucial for improving student outcomes, fostering equitable access to quality education, and advancing national development goals.



Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous curriculum reforms in Nigeria aimed at improving educational quality and relevance, a persistent gap exists between curriculum design and actual classroom practice. While curriculum frameworks are often well-articulated and aligned with global educational standards, their implementation in Nigerian schools frequently falls short of expectations. Teachers, constrained by inadequate training, large class sizes, insufficient instructional materials, and limited access to modern pedagogical resources, often struggle to translate curriculum objectives into meaningful learning experiences.

This disconnect has significant implications for student learning outcomes. Learners may graduate with theoretical knowledge but lack the practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving competencies that the curriculum intends to develop. Furthermore, systemic factors such as weak monitoring mechanisms, inadequate professional development programs, and insufficient collaboration between curriculum planners and classroom teachers exacerbate the implementation gap.

Consequently, the persistent misalignment between what is prescribed in the curriculum and what occurs in classrooms undermines the overall quality and effectiveness of the Nigerian education system. Without understanding the specific factors that hinder effective curriculum enactment and identifying strategies to bridge this gap, educational reforms risk remaining largely aspirational, failing to produce the intended improvements in learner outcomes. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the underlying causes of this curriculum-practice gap and to identify practical approaches for enhancing alignment between curriculum design and classroom practice in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the gap between curriculum design and classroom practice in Nigeria, with particular attention to the factors that influence effective curriculum implementation. The research encompasses both systemic and classroom-level dimensions, including teacher preparedness, instructional resources, teaching methods, and institutional support mechanisms. It considers the roles of curriculum planners, educators, and educational administrators in shaping the alignment between policy intentions and classroom realities.

Geographically, the study is limited to selected secondary schools across Nigeria, representing diverse educational contexts in terms of urban and rural settings, public and private institutions, and variations in resource availability. The schools included in the scope are Federal Government College, Enugu; Queen's College, Lagos; Government Secondary School, Kano; Christ the King College, Onitsha; and Anglican Grammar School, Ibadan. These schools were selected to reflect a range of regional, cultural, and institutional contexts within the Nigerian educational system.

Conceptually, the study concentrates on the processes through which curriculum objectives are translated into classroom practices, the challenges encountered in this process, and potential strategies to bridge identified gaps. The temporal scope includes recent educational reforms and curriculum implementation efforts over the past decade, highlighting contemporary issues and practices in Nigerian classrooms. While the study does not examine tertiary or vocational education in detail, its findings are expected to provide insights relevant to policymakers,



curriculum designers, and educators seeking to improve the effectiveness of curriculum implementation at the secondary school level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The gap between curriculum design and classroom practice is a pervasive challenge in education systems worldwide, and Nigeria is no exception. Curriculum design refers to the structured planning of learning experiences, encompassing the content, skills, values, and attitudes that students are expected to acquire. Classroom practice, on the other hand, is the enactment of these plans by teachers within real-world learning environments. The effectiveness of education hinges on the alignment between these two dimensions, as a well-designed curriculum cannot achieve its intended outcomes if classroom implementation is inadequate (Adewale, 2021).

Several scholars have examined the factors contributing to this persistent misalignment. Teacher preparedness is a critical determinant of successful curriculum implementation. In Nigeria, many teachers receive limited pre-service and in-service training on contemporary pedagogical approaches, which often results in a reliance on traditional, teacher-centered methods rather than learner-centered, skills-based instruction (Okoro & Eze, 2022). This misalignment between teacher capacity and curriculum expectations hinders the practical application of intended learning outcomes, particularly in subjects that require critical thinking, problem-solving, and applied knowledge.

Resource availability is another significant factor. Studies have consistently highlighted that Nigerian classrooms frequently operate under conditions of insufficient instructional materials, inadequate infrastructure, and overcrowded classrooms. These constraints make it challenging for teachers to employ innovative teaching strategies or provide hands-on learning experiences, which are essential components of most modern curricula (Ibrahim, 2020; Nwankwo, 2023). Consequently, students' engagement and achievement suffer, and the intended competencies outlined in the curriculum remain largely unrealized.

Systemic and institutional factors also play a crucial role. Curriculum designers in Nigeria are often constrained by rigid policy frameworks, limited stakeholder collaboration, and weak monitoring mechanisms, which reduce the feasibility of effective classroom enactment (Eze & Onyekachi, 2021). In many cases, the top-down approach to curriculum planning does not adequately account for contextual realities in schools, such as class sizes, teacher experience, and local learning needs. This disjunction underscores the importance of participatory curriculum design, where teachers and school administrators are actively involved in shaping curriculum content and pedagogical strategies.

Recent studies suggest that bridging the curriculum-practice gap requires a multifaceted approach. Professional development programs, mentoring, and peer collaboration can significantly enhance teachers' ability to translate curriculum objectives into classroom practices (Chukwuma & Adegoke, 2023). Additionally, the integration of practical, student-centered pedagogies—such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, and inquiry-based approaches—has been shown to improve the fidelity of curriculum implementation, particularly in subjects like mathematics, science, and technology (Salisu, 2022).



Moreover, research emphasizes the importance of monitoring and evaluation in ensuring effective curriculum implementation. Continuous assessment of teaching practices, feedback mechanisms, and periodic review of instructional strategies can help identify gaps and provide targeted interventions. In the Nigerian context, schools that implement structured classroom observation and teacher mentoring programs tend to exhibit better alignment between curriculum design and classroom practice, resulting in improved student outcomes (Oluwatobi & Adeyemi, 2022).

Despite these insights, challenges persist. Socioeconomic disparities, regional variations, and uneven policy enforcement continue to affect how curricula are enacted across different states and school types. Urban schools often have better access to trained teachers and resources, while rural schools struggle with shortages of qualified personnel and learning materials. This uneven implementation further exacerbates educational inequalities, highlighting the need for context-sensitive strategies that address both systemic and localized barriers to effective curriculum enactment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted the survey research design, which is widely recognized for its effectiveness in collecting data from a large population to describe, explain, or explore phenomena of interest. The survey design is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for the systematic collection of information regarding teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices in implementing the curriculum in Nigerian secondary schools. By using structured questionnaires, the survey design enables the researcher to gather quantitative and qualitative data that capture both the prevalence and the nature of challenges encountered in bridging the gap between curriculum design and classroom practice.

Area of Study

The area of study for this research is selected secondary schools in Nigeria, representing diverse geographical and educational contexts to reflect the variability in curriculum implementation. Specifically, the study focuses on Federal Government College, Enugu; Queen's College, Lagos; Government Secondary School, Kano; Christ the King College, Onitsha; and Anglican Grammar School, Ibadan. These schools were chosen to capture a mix of urban and rural settings, public and private institutions, and variations in resources and teacher capacity.

The selection of these schools ensures that the study examines curriculum implementation across different regional, cultural, and institutional contexts. By focusing on these locations, the research can explore how systemic factors, institutional support, and classroom realities interact to influence the alignment between curriculum design and classroom practice. The area of study, therefore, provides a representative setting to investigate the challenges and strategies associated with bridging the curriculum-practice gap in Nigerian secondary education.



Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises all teachers and educational administrators in the selected secondary schools within the scope of the research. Specifically, it includes teaching staff across various subjects, as well as school heads and deputy heads who are directly involved in curriculum implementation and classroom supervision. These participants are considered the most knowledgeable about the processes, challenges, and strategies associated with translating curriculum design into effective classroom practice.

The study focuses on Federal Government College, Enugu; Queen's College, Lagos; Government Secondary School, Kano; Christ the King College, Onitsha; and Anglican Grammar School, Ibadan. Collectively, these schools have a combined population of approximately 450 teaching and administrative staff. This population size provides a broad and representative base from which to draw meaningful insights regarding the curriculum-practice gap, while also capturing variations in institutional context, resources, and teacher preparedness across different regions of Nigeria.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study was determined from the population of teaching and administrative staff in the selected secondary schools, which totals approximately 450 individuals. To ensure a representative and manageable sample, the study employed Cochran's formula for sample size determination, which is widely used in educational research for surveys. Based on the formula and a 5% margin of error, the calculated sample size was 210 respondents. This sample size is sufficient to allow for reliable generalization of the findings to the broader population of teachers and administrators within the selected schools.

The study adopted a stratified random sampling technique to select respondents. This approach was chosen to ensure that all categories of staff, including teachers across different subjects and school administrators, were adequately represented. Each school was treated as a stratum, and respondents were randomly selected proportionally from each stratum. This method reduces selection bias and ensures that the sample reflects the diversity of experiences and perspectives across schools, subject areas, and professional roles.

Instrumentation/Data Collection Method

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire administered online through Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information from teachers and educational administrators regarding their experiences, perceptions, and practices related to curriculum implementation in their schools. The use of a structured questionnaire allowed the researcher to collect standardized data that could be quantitatively analyzed while also capturing qualitative insights through open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was divided into sections aligned with the study's objectives. The first section gathered demographic information such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, and professional qualifications. The second section focused on teachers' understanding of the curriculum and the strategies they employ to implement it in classrooms. The third section explored challenges encountered in translating curriculum design into classroom practice, including issues related to resources, class sizes, and systemic support. The final section sought



respondents' perspectives on potential strategies for bridging the gap between curriculum design and classroom practice.

The choice of Google Forms for data collection was motivated by several factors. First, it allowed for rapid distribution and collection of responses across multiple schools and geographic locations, reducing logistical constraints and time delays associated with physical surveys. Second, the online format enabled respondents to provide thoughtful and reflective answers at their convenience, increasing the likelihood of accurate and honest responses. Third, Google Forms automatically collates and organizes responses, facilitating efficient data management and preliminary analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically frequency tables, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Frequency tables and percentages were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and to present the distribution of responses for each survey item, providing a clear overview of trends and patterns.

In addition, mean and standard deviation were calculated for each item to determine the degree of agreement or disagreement among respondents and to assess the variability of responses. The mean values indicate the overall tendency of respondents' opinions, while the standard deviation measures the consistency or dispersion of responses around the mean. For interpretive purposes, a mean score of 1.00–1.99 was considered low, 2.00–2.99 moderate, and 3.00–4.00 high, reflecting the level of perception, experience, or agreement regarding the curriculum-practice gap.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 210 questionnaires were distributed to teachers and administrators in the selected secondary schools, out of which 198 were returned, representing a response rate of 94.3%, indicating strong participation and reliability of the collected data. The responses were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to determine trends in curriculum implementation, challenges faced, and strategies for bridging the curriculum-practice gap.

Table 1: Teachers' Understanding and Implementation of Curriculum Objectives

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
I understand the objectives of the national curriculum.	4.32	0.68	High
I frequently apply learner-centered teaching methods in class.	3.45	0.89	Moderate
I incorporate practical activities to achieve curriculum goals.	3.12	0.94	Moderate
I face challenges in implementing the curriculum as designed.	4.01	0.75	High



The results from Table 1 show that teachers generally have a high understanding of curriculum objectives (Mean = 4.32), suggesting strong theoretical awareness. However, the application of learner-centered and practical teaching methods is only moderate, indicating a gap between knowledge of curriculum goals and classroom practice. The high mean value (4.01) for challenges confirms that teachers encounter significant obstacles in implementing the curriculum effectively.

Table 2: Challenges Affecting Curriculum Implementation

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Large class sizes limit effective teaching.	4.15	0.70	High
Limited access to instructional resources.	4.28	0.65	High
Lack of continuous professional development.	4.05	0.78	High
Rigid policy and assessment structures.	3.88	0.82	Moderate

The data indicate that the most significant challenges are related to resource constraints and class size, which can hinder the adoption of innovative or student-centered teaching approaches. Lack of continuous professional development is also notable, emphasizing the need for targeted teacher training programs. The moderate impact of rigid policies suggests that while curriculum design may be progressive, inflexible assessment and administrative structures still impede effective classroom application.

Table 3: Strategies to Bridge the Curriculum-Practice Gap

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Regular in-service training for teachers.	4.36	0.62	High
Provision of adequate instructional materials.	4.29	0.66	High
Encouraging collaborative teaching and peer mentoring.	4.12	0.74	High
Periodic monitoring and feedback on classroom practices.	4.05	0.77	High

Respondents overwhelmingly endorsed strategies such as in-service training, resource provision, collaborative teaching, and monitoring mechanisms. The consistently high mean values indicate strong consensus that these interventions are critical for enhancing the alignment between curriculum design and classroom practice.



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis demonstrates a clear pattern: While teachers possess a sound understanding of curriculum objectives, their ability to implement these objectives effectively is limited by structural and contextual challenges. Large classes, inadequate resources, and insufficient professional development inhibit the translation of curriculum intentions into practice. The findings resonate with prior studies in Nigeria, which identify teacher preparedness, infrastructural constraints, and systemic inefficiencies as significant barriers to curriculum implementation (Eze & Onyekachi, 2021; Nwankwo, 2023).

Furthermore, the data highlight practical strategies that can bridge the gap. Continuous professional development, provision of teaching materials, collaborative learning among teachers, and regular monitoring are all considered essential by respondents. These strategies not only enhance teachers' capacity but also create an enabling environment for effective classroom practice, reinforcing the link between curriculum design and student learning outcomes.

Finally, the results underscore that bridging the curriculum-practice gap in Nigeria requires both teacher-focused interventions and systemic reforms. By addressing the challenges identified and implementing recommended strategies, schools can better ensure that curriculum objectives are meaningfully realized in classrooms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study underscore the persistent gap between curriculum design and classroom practice in Nigerian secondary schools. While teachers generally possess a strong understanding of curriculum objectives, the translation of these objectives into effective classroom activities is constrained by structural, systemic, and resource-related challenges. Large class sizes, inadequate instructional materials, limited professional development opportunities, and rigid policy frameworks hinder the ability of teachers to employ learner-centered and practical teaching methods.

The analysis also revealed that strategies such as regular in-service training, provision of adequate instructional resources, collaborative teaching, peer mentoring, and periodic monitoring are essential for bridging the curriculum-practice gap. Addressing these challenges is critical for improving the quality of education, enhancing student learning outcomes, and ensuring that curriculum reforms in Nigeria achieve their intended objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Provision of Adequate Resources:** Schools and educational authorities should ensure that teachers have access to sufficient instructional materials, teaching aids, and technological tools to facilitate effective curriculum implementation.



- ii. **Continuous Professional Development:** Regular in-service training and workshops should be organized to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills, particularly in learner-centered and practical teaching methods aligned with curriculum objectives.
- iii. **Promotion of Collaborative Teaching:** Schools should encourage peer mentoring, professional learning communities, and collaborative lesson planning to support teachers in overcoming implementation challenges.
- iv. **Class Size Management:** Efforts should be made to reduce teacher-student ratios, either through recruitment of additional teachers or reallocation of resources, to create an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning.
- v. **Strengthening Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms:** Educational administrators should implement regular classroom observations, feedback sessions, and performance evaluations to ensure fidelity in curriculum implementation and to identify areas requiring support.
- vi. **Policy Review and Flexibility:** Policymakers should periodically review curriculum policies and assessment structures to ensure they are adaptable and supportive of innovative, learner-centered instructional practices.

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