

Assessment of the Current Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria and Its Adaptability for Learners with Disabilities: Implications for Inclusive Education Reform

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the adaptability of the current Nigerian secondary school curriculum for learners with disabilities in Enugu State and tested a mediated-moderation model linking curriculum design features to inclusive learning participation. Universal Design for Learning, the social model of disability, and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory framed the inquiry. A cross-sectional survey distributed 440 questionnaires to secondary-school teachers across the six education zones of Enugu State; 382 usable responses were retained (86.8%). Confirmatory factor analysis supported a seven-factor model, $\chi^2(644) = 1236.48$, CFI = .938, RMSEA = .049, with α from .83 to .91. One-sample *t* tests against the 3.00 scale criterion showed that every adaptability dimension fell below the criterion, with the largest deficits in resource and assistive-technology availability ($M = 2.05$, $d = -1.13$) and policy–practice alignment ($M = 2.31$, $d = -0.86$). Hierarchical regression showed that the curriculum-design block explained incremental variance in inclusive learning participation, $\Delta R^2 = .296$, $F(4, 372) = 46.03$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 0.50$. Content flexibility ($\beta = .29$), instructional adaptability ($\beta = .21$), and assessment accommodation ($\beta = .16$) were significant; policy–practice alignment was not. Teacher differentiation competence partially mediated the content-flexibility pathway (indirect effect = 0.24, 42.9% mediated), and resource availability strengthened the instructional-adaptability pathway. Reform should target curriculum design and classroom resources rather than policy text alone.

Keywords: *inclusive education, curriculum adaptability, learners with disabilities, Universal Design for Learning, Enugu State*

INTRODUCTION

Universal Design for Learning relocates the problem of access from the learner to the designed environment: multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement are specified in advance rather than granted as after-the-fact exceptions (Meyer

et al., 2014; Rose & Meyer, 2002). The social model of disability makes the same move in political terms. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory adds the reminder that a lesson sits inside a school, an examination board, a state ministry, and a family economy; a flexible lesson plan that collides with an inflexible WAEC format will not produce participation.

Empirical work in Nigeria has documented teacher goodwill toward inclusion alongside chronic shortfalls in training, devices, and authorised assessment alternatives. What it has not often done is treat curriculum design features as a measured block of predictors and test the teacher-competence and resource mechanisms through which those features are expected to work. That is the contribution of the present model.

Three hypotheses were tested. H1: Curriculum content flexibility, instructional adaptability, and assessment accommodation predict inclusive learning participation after demographic controls; policy–practice alignment does not once the design features are in the model. H2: Teacher differentiation competence mediates the content-flexibility pathway. H3: Resource and assistive-technology availability moderates the instructional-adaptability pathway.

Inclusive education is a legal obligation in Nigeria, expressed through ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) commits the system to equalising opportunity for learners with special needs. Obligation at the level of statute does not, however, produce access at the level of the lesson. The instrument that actually admits or excludes is the curriculum: its content route, its pace, its modes of representation, and its examination format (Meyer et al., 2014).

NERDC secondary curricula remain organised around subject-content mastery and terminal external examination. Teachers in Enugu State report that those documents leave little authorised room for differentiation, alternative representation, or accommodated assessment. This study asked how adaptable the current curriculum is perceived to be, whether design features predict inclusive learning participation, and whether teacher competence and resource availability condition those relationships.

Assessment accommodation deserves particular emphasis. In a system that treats the terminal external examination as the definition of achievement, a curriculum that cannot license an alternative format cannot include. Deficits on that construct are therefore not one finding among seven; they are the point at which policy text is most likely to be emptied of classroom meaning.

Nigerian empirical work has repeatedly found teacher support for inclusion alongside shortfalls in training, devices, and authorised assessment alternatives. Those studies rarely treat curriculum design features as a measured predictor block, and they rarely test the teacher-competence and resource mechanisms through which design is supposed to work. Hierarchical regression, mediation, and moderation are the methods that turn a familiar complaint into a ranked set of reform targets. That is the gap the present instrument and model were written to fill in Enugu State secondary schools.

Universal Design for Learning specifies those tools as multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement (Meyer et al., 2014; Rose & Meyer, 2002). A curriculum written for an imagined average candidate systematically disables everyone who cannot use that single route. The social model makes the same claim in a different vocabulary: the barrier is the designed environment, not the body of the learner. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) then places the lesson inside nested systems. A flexible scheme of work that collides with an inflexible external examination will not produce participation, however well the teacher is disposed.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) relocated inclusive education from charity to right. Nigeria's domestic translations, the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019), complete the legal sentence. Ainscow (2020) and Ainscow and Sandill (2010) warn that legal sentences do not build inclusive cultures; leadership, teacher learning, and redesigned tools do.

Literature Review

Method

The six education zones of Enugu State were the strata. Within each zone, public and private secondary schools were drawn, and teachers who currently teach junior or senior secondary

classes were the respondents. The Krejcie and Morgan requirement for the estimated teacher population was 368; GPower for a medium f^2 at 80% power with nine predictors was 242. Both thresholds were cleared. Little's MCAR test was nonsignificant; available-case analysis was used for the inferential models.

Items were written against UDL checkpoints and against provisions of the National Policy on Education and the 2018 disability statute. Two inclusive-education lecturers and one measurement specialist reviewed the pool. A pilot of 40 teachers outside the main sample produced alphas between .81 and .90. For the CFA, maximum likelihood with robust standard errors was used. Discriminant validity held: each construct's square root of AVE exceeded its inter-construct correlations.

A cross-sectional survey was administered to teachers in public and private secondary schools across Enugu's six education zones. Multistage sampling yielded 382 usable questionnaires from 440 distributed. The 38-item instrument measured seven constructs: curriculum content flexibility, instructional adaptability provisions, assessment accommodation provisions, policy–practice alignment, teacher differentiation competence, resource and assistive-technology availability, and inclusive learning participation. CFA supported the seven-factor structure ($\chi^2/df = 1.92$, CFI = .938, TLI = .932, RMSEA = .049, SRMR = .051). Composite reliabilities ranged from .89 to .93. One-sample t tests, hierarchical OLS, PROCESS Model 4 mediation, and moderated regression were used. The scale criterion was 3.00 on a five-point Likert metric.

RESULTS

The measurement model was acceptable by conventional Hu and Bentler thresholds. Reliability was strong: the full 38-item instrument had $\alpha = .94$, and no construct fell below $\alpha = .83$ or CR = .89. Mean deficits were therefore not an artefact of noisy scales.

Special-education training ($\beta = .19$) and school location ($\beta = .12$) remained significant in the full regression, which is consistent with a system in which trained teachers and urban schools still convert design features into participation more readily. Variance inflation factors were all below 1.60, so the curriculum-design block is not a collinear restatement of a single halo rating.

Simple-slopes analysis of the resource interaction showed that instructional adaptability predicted participation when resource availability was one standard deviation above the mean

and was attenuated when resources were one standard deviation below. In plain terms, a flexible lesson method needs something to be flexible with.

Every curriculum-adaptability dimension sat below the 3.00 criterion (Table 1). Resource and assistive-technology availability recorded the largest deficit ($M = 2.05$, $d = -1.13$), followed by policy–practice alignment ($M = 2.31$, $d = -0.86$) and assessment accommodation ($M = 2.43$, $d = -0.75$). Instructional adaptability was closest to the criterion ($M = 2.91$) but still significantly below it.

Table 1

One-Sample t Tests Against the 3.00 Criterion ($N = 382$)

Construct	M	SD	t	p	d
Instructional adaptability	2.91	0.68	–2.59	.010	–0.13
Teacher differentiation competence	2.87	0.73	–3.48	<.001	–0.18
Curriculum content flexibility	2.68	0.71	–8.81	<.001	–0.45
Inclusive learning participation	2.59	0.78	–10.27	<.001	–0.53
Assessment accommodation	2.43	0.76	–14.66	<.001	–0.75
Policy–practice alignment	2.31	0.80	–16.86	<.001	–0.86
Resource and assistive technology	2.05	0.84	–22.10	<.001	–1.13

Demographics explained 10.6% of the variance in inclusive learning participation. Adding the four curriculum-design predictors raised R^2 by .296 ($f^2 = 0.50$). In the full model, content flexibility ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$), instructional adaptability ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$), and assessment accommodation ($\beta = .16$, $p = .002$) were significant; policy–practice alignment was not ($\beta = .09$, $p = .069$). Teacher differentiation competence partially mediated the content-flexibility pathway ($ab = 0.24$, 95% BCa CI [0.170, 0.319]; 42.9% mediated). Resource availability moderated instructional adaptability ($\beta = .16$, $\Delta R^2 = .021$): the instructional pathway was stronger where assistive resources were more available.

DISCUSSION

The null result for policy–practice alignment should not be read as an argument against inclusive law. It says that, among teachers working under the current statutes, further variation in how aligned they judge policy and practice to be does not uniquely predict participation once the designed curriculum is measured. Drafting another policy paragraph will not substitute for rewriting schemes of work and examination rubrics.

Recommendations follow the two supported mechanisms. NERDC and state ministries should authorise alternative representation and accommodated assessment in the published curriculum, not only in guidance notes. Colleges of education should treat differentiation as a core methods competence, because that competence carries 43% of the content-flexibility effect. State universal basic and secondary boards should procure assistive devices and accessible texts as a paired investment with instructional training. Examination bodies should publish an accommodations protocol that teachers can cite without fear of malpractice accusations.

The sample is teacher-reported and cross-sectional. Learner-level participation and achievement, classroom observation, and a lagged design would test whether the pathways persist when the rater is not the same person on both sides of the equation. Those extensions refine the model; they do not cancel the present deficits, which are large and consistent across constructs.

Teachers in Enugu State do not experience the official secondary curriculum as adaptable. The largest gaps sit in things the classroom cannot invent for itself, assistive devices, accessible materials, and an assessment regime that licenses accommodation. Policy text is already comparatively complete; it is the weakest unique predictor of inclusive participation once design features are in the model. That pattern fits Universal Design for Learning and the social model of disability: exclusion is produced by inflexible design, not by the mere absence of a policy sentence (Ainscow, 2020; Meyer et al., 2014).

Two mechanisms specify where reform energy should go. First, content flexibility works partly through teacher competence, so curriculum revision without differentiation training will under-deliver. Second, instructional adaptability pays off more where resources exist, so device and materials funding is not a parallel courtesy, it is a condition of the pedagogical pathway. Examination bodies that continue to privilege a single timed, print-based format will cap both pathways.

CONCLUSION

The Enugu evidence is that inclusive participation tracks curriculum design and classroom resources, not the existence of inclusive policy. NERDC revisions should authorise multiple means of representation and accommodated assessment; states should fund assistive technology and teacher development together. Further research should pair teacher ratings with classroom observation and learner-level outcome data.

School principals should inventory assistive materials termly and report gaps to the zonal office. Resource availability was the largest observed deficit ($M = 2.05$, $d = -1.13$) and the moderator of the instructional pathway. It is the variable that school-level action can move first.

The West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Council should publish a standing accommodations protocol that a school can invoke without a malpractice inquiry. Until the terminal examination licenses alternative formats, classroom flexibility will remain ornamental.

Colleges of education should make lesson differentiation a credit-bearing methods competence with observed practice, because teacher differentiation competence carries 42.9% of the content-flexibility effect on inclusive participation.

State ministries of education and the Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board should pair every differentiation workshop with a device-and-materials grant. The moderation result says that instructional adaptability predicts participation only where resources exist. Training without devices will reproduce the present means.

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council should write multiple means of representation and authorised assessment accommodations into the published junior and senior secondary curricula, not into accompanying guidance notes that teachers can ignore under examination pressure.

Recommendations

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