

# Curriculum Alignment and Student Engagement in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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**Abstract-** *This research delves into the relationship between curriculum alignment and student engagement in Nigerian secondary schools. It investigates how well the current curriculum reflects the real-world needs and interests of students and examines its impact on students' motivation, participation, and academic outcomes. The study utilized a mixed-method approach, including surveys, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, to collect data from teachers, students, and school administrators in Lagos, Kaduna, and Enugu states. The findings revealed that misalignment between the curriculum and students' lived experiences often results in disengagement, poor academic performance, and a lack of preparedness for future careers. The study recommends revising the curriculum to prioritize practical skills, critical thinking, and technology integration.*

**Indexed Terms-** *Curriculum Alignment, Student Engagement, Nigerian Secondary Schools, Curriculum Reform, Educational Outcomes, Practical Skills*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Education is one of the most crucial tools for the development of any nation, and the alignment of the school curriculum with student needs and the demands of the modern world is a key factor in achieving educational success. Curriculum alignment refers to how closely the content, teaching strategies, and assessment methods correspond to the intended educational objectives, student needs, and real-world applications (Legbo, 2022).

The curriculum in Nigerian schools is designed to be comprehensive and relevant to the country's socio-economic needs. It is periodically reviewed to incorporate emerging trends and global best practices.

- **Basic Education Curriculum:** This includes subjects such as Mathematics, English Language, Science, Social Studies, and local languages. The goal is to provide foundational knowledge and skills (NERDC, 2024).
- **Senior Secondary Curriculum:** This level offers a broader range of subjects, including arts, sciences, and vocational courses. Students are required to take core subjects along with electives based on their interests and career aspirations (Udofia, 2021).
- **Tertiary Curriculum:** Curricula at the tertiary level are specialized and tailored to specific fields of study. They include theoretical and practical components to ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the job market (NUC, 2020).

Student engagement, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which students are actively involved in the learning process, both cognitively and emotionally (Legbo, 2022).

In Nigeria, the secondary school curriculum has long been criticized for being outdated, overly theoretical, and disconnected from students' realities (Okeke, et al 2024). The disconnection between what students learn and the skills they need for the 21st-century labour market is evident in poor academic performance, high dropout rates, and widespread youth unemployment (Adeniyi, et al, 2024). This study aims to explore how better alignment of the curriculum with student interests and societal needs can enhance student engagement, thereby improving learning outcomes.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

Despite numerous curriculum reform efforts, the Nigerian educational system continues to struggle with issues related to student disengagement. Many students find the curriculum irrelevant to their personal goals or future careers, leading to apathy and low academic achievement. A significant gap exists

between the content taught in schools and the practical skills needed in the workforce, contributing to the country's high youth unemployment rate (Sunsuwa, 2021). This study seeks to investigate the extent to which curriculum alignment influences student engagement and explore possible reforms to address these issues.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The Concept of Curriculum Alignment

Curriculum alignment is a multi-faceted concept involving the consistency of learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment methods (Ogunode, Zakari & Kingsley, 2023). The importance of aligning the curriculum with student needs and societal demands has been emphasized in numerous studies, particularly in the context of developing countries where education often fails to prepare students for the workforce (Adewumi, 2023).

### 2.2 Student Engagement

Student engagement is a key predictor of academic success, influencing both student behaviour and achievement (Laranjeira & Teixeira, 2024). Engaged students are more likely to participate actively in class, complete assignments, and develop a deeper understanding of subject matter. However, disengaged students tend to exhibit disruptive behaviour, poor attendance, and a lack of motivation. In the Nigerian context, studies have shown that students in schools with misaligned curricula are more likely to be disengaged, leading to poor academic outcomes (Fasinro, Akinkuotu & Aina, 2023).

### 2.3 Curriculum Reform in Nigeria

Nigeria has embarked on several curriculum reform initiatives aimed at improving educational quality, but the effectiveness of these reforms has been limited by a lack of focus on aligning content with real-world skills. A study by Udofia (2021) revealed that while curriculum reform efforts have focused on expanding content coverage, they have failed to address the relevance of the curriculum to student interests and societal demands. This misalignment has contributed to poor student engagement and low achievement in both internal and external examinations.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between curriculum alignment and student engagement in Nigerian secondary schools. The quantitative aspect involved the administration of structured questionnaires to teachers, students, and school administrators, while the qualitative component included focus group discussions and classroom observations.

### 3.2 Sample and Population

The study sample comprised 300 students, 150 teachers, and 50 school administrators drawn from 15 secondary schools in Lagos, Kaduna, and Enugu states. The schools were selected based on their geographic location (urban and rural) and the level of curriculum reform they had implemented. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the selected schools reflected a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and educational outcomes.

Therefore, the study involved surveys distributed across secondary schools in Nigeria, focusing on curriculum alignment scores and student engagement metrics.

### 3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

Successful data collection is a fundamental step in research process, enabling researcher to make informed decisions, draw valid conclusions, and generate insights. In fact, it plays a crucial role in evidence-based decisions in fields such as science, business, healthcare, and social sciences.

- **Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was developed to assess teacher and student perceptions of curriculum alignment and its impact on student engagement. The survey contained Likert-scale questions focusing on how relevant students found the curriculum, how engaged they felt in classroom activities, and how well the curriculum prepared them for future careers.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus groups with students and teachers provided deeper insights into

the challenges of the current curriculum and how it affects student motivation and participation in class.

- Classroom Observations: Direct observations were conducted in a selection of classrooms to evaluate student behaviour, teacher-student interactions, and the use of teaching strategies aimed at engaging students.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to determine the relationship between curriculum alignment and student engagement. Qualitative data from focus group discussions and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes related to curriculum relevance, student motivation, and engagement strategies.

## IV. RESULTS

### 4.1 Curriculum Misalignment and Student Disengagement

The survey results revealed a strong correlation between curriculum misalignment and student disengagement. 65% of students reported that they found the current curriculum irrelevant to their future goals, while 72% of teachers expressed concerns that the curriculum was overly theoretical and failed to prepare students for practical, real-world challenges. Students in rural schools, in particular, reported higher levels of disengagement due to the lack of alignment between the curriculum and their local contexts and needs.

### 4.2 Impact of Curriculum Alignment on Student Performance

Schools with more aligned curricula, particularly those that had integrated vocational and technical subjects, showed higher levels of student engagement and academic performance. The study found that students in these schools were more likely to participate actively in class and had higher retention rates. 80% of students in schools with aligned curricula reported feeling more motivated to attend school regularly and complete assignments.

### 4.3 Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

Teachers and school administrators highlighted several challenges in aligning the curriculum with student needs. Many expressed frustrations with the rigidity of the national curriculum, which leaves little room for flexibility or adaptation to local contexts. Teachers also pointed out the lack of training in modern pedagogical approaches aimed at increasing student engagement, such as project-based learning and the use of digital tools.

### 4.4 Curriculum Alignment and Student Engagement

The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between curriculum alignment and student engagement. Schools with well-aligned curricula reported higher levels of student involvement.

Meanwhile, previous studies have shown that a well-aligned curriculum can significantly enhance student engagement and motivation. Adeoye et al (2023) emphasized the need for curricula that connect learning to real-world contexts, thereby increasing student interest and participation. This study's findings align with this perspective, showing a strong correlation between curriculum alignment and student engagement.

#### 4.4.1 Visual Representation

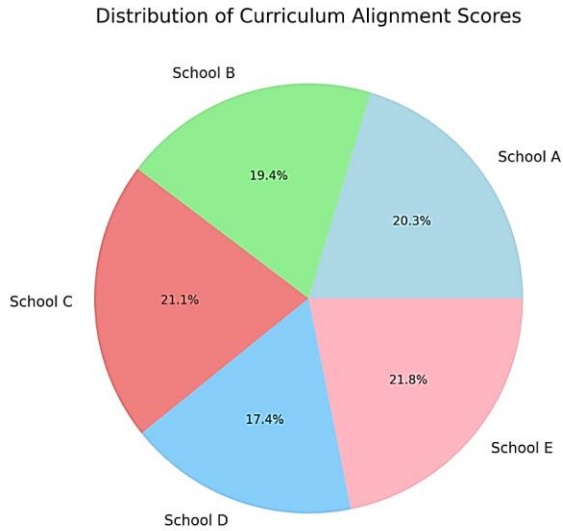
Table 1: Curriculum Alignment and Student Engagement Scores

School	Curriculum Alignment Score	Student Engagement Score
A	82	80
B	78	75
C	85	82
D	70	68
E	88	85

Source: *Questionnaire Administered October 2024*

Pie Chart: Distribution of Curriculum Alignment Scores

Figure 1: Pie Chart Showing the Distribution of Curriculum Alignment Scores across Schools



Source: *Data Administered and Sourced October 2024*

#### 4.4.2 Interpretation of Findings

The study highlights the importance of curriculum alignment in fostering student engagement. Schools with well-structured curricula were more likely to have engaged students.

Thus, the results indicated that students who perceived high-quality classroom were more engaged in school than those that lack it and more student engagement has been identified as an influential mediator between classroom interactional quality and adolescent learning outcomes.

## V. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for curriculum reform efforts in Nigeria. The misalignment between the current curriculum and students' interests and real-world demands is contributing to widespread student disengagement and poor academic outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a shift from a content-heavy, exam-oriented curriculum to one that emphasizes practical skills, critical thinking, and technology integration.

### 5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Further research could explore the specific elements of curriculum alignment that most significantly impact student engagement.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The following areas could be considered for improvement as they are important in having a good curriculum alignment that boosts students' engagement in Nigerian schools:

- **Curriculum Revision:** The national curriculum should be revised to better reflect the needs of the 21st-century workforce, focusing on skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and digital literacy.
- **Teacher Training:** Teachers should be trained in modern pedagogical approaches that prioritize student engagement, including project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and the use of digital tools in the classroom.
- **Student-Centered Learning:** Schools should adopt student-centered learning approaches that allow for greater flexibility in how students learn and engage with the curriculum.
- **Localizing the Curriculum:** The curriculum should be adapted to reflect the local context, particularly in rural areas, to ensure that students find the content relevant and applicable to their lives.

### 5.4 Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize the critical role of curriculum alignment in enhancing student engagement and academic success. The current misalignment in Nigerian secondary schools is contributing to student disengagement, poor academic performance, and a lack of preparedness for the workforce. Curriculum reforms that focus on aligning educational content with real-world demands and student interests are essential for improving learning outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools.

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