
CURRICULUM PLANNING AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study empirically investigates the relationship between curriculum planning and quality of education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. With the growing demand for quality education and the persistent challenges of declining academic standards in Nigeria, the efficiency of curriculum planning has become critical. The study adopts a mixed-methods design, surveying 400 academic and administrative staff from 20 selected federal, state, and private universities and polytechnics across Nigeria. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between curriculum planning and quality of education in Nigeria. The study concluded that despite the hindrances, improving curriculum planning practices is a fundamental prerequisite for enhancing and strengthening the quality, performance and relevance of Nigerian tertiary education. The study recommended that strengthened curriculum review systems, increased investment in teacher professional development and improved implementation frameworks to ensure that curriculum reforms effectively contribute to quality education and national educational development.

Keywords: Curriculum Planning, Quality Education, Students' Engagemant, Resource Utilization.

Introduction

Curriculum planning and quality education in Nigeria are inseparable elements of a system that seeks to transform human potential into tangible social and economic progress Bello (2024). At its core, curriculum planning is the process of making intentional choices about what learners should know, how that knowledge should be structured across time, and what conditions are required for it to be effectively transmitted and assessed. It is a bridge between national policy and classroom practice, between the abstract goals of education and the daily realities of teachers and pupils. In

Nigeria, where the education landscape is shaped by linguistic diversity, regional disparities and the coexistence of federal, state and private providers, the way curriculum is planned determines whether the promise of quality education remains an aspiration on paper or becomes a lived experience in classrooms. Obizue & Obizue (2025) posited that the significance of curriculum planning begins with its role in giving coherence to the education system. Without deliberate planning, what children learn in early childhood risks bearing little relation to what they encounter in primary school and what is taught in primary school may not prepare them for secondary education. This discontinuity creates gaps that accumulate over time, so that by the time learners reach higher levels, many lack the foundational literacy, numeracy and reasoning skills required for deeper study. A coherent curriculum provides a logical progression, ensuring that each stage builds on the previous one and that teachers at every level understand how their work connects to what comes before and after. In Nigeria's context, where pupil mobility between states and between public and private schools is common, this coherence reduces the likelihood that children will be disadvantaged simply because they moved across administrative boundaries.

According to Okafor & Nnabueze (2022), quality education, cannot be defined solely by examination results or the number of years spent in school. It refers to an education that equips learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to think independently, solve problems relevant to their environment, communicate effectively, and participate constructively in society. Such outcomes do not occur by chance. They depend on a curriculum that reflects what is worth learning in the present moment while anticipating the demands of the future. In the words of Obizue & Obizue (2025), curriculum planning is the mechanism through which societal goals are translated into classroom objectives and if the goal is national unity, the curriculum must include content and pedagogical approaches that foster understanding across cultural and linguistic lines. They further observed that curriculum also serves for economic development and democratic citizenship, thereby integrating scientific, technical and entrepreneurial competencies in ways that are accessible to learners at different levels of readiness and it must create opportunities for learners to practice dialogue, critical analysis and ethical reasoning from an early age.

In Nigeria, the challenge of achieving this alignment is amplified by the scale and diversity of the country. A curriculum that works in a well-resourced urban school with trained teachers and consistent electricity may fail in a rural school where teachers manage large classes with minimal materials (Ahanonu, 2018). Effective curriculum planning therefore requires more than the production of a document in a central office. It requires an understanding of the conditions under which teachers work, the languages in which learners first make sense of the world, and the resources that are realistically available for implementation. This means that planning must be iterative and participatory, drawing on feedback from teachers who interpret the curriculum daily, from inspectors who observe its enactment, and from communities whose expectations shape what education means locally. Adeleke (2025) asserted that when planning ignores these realities, the

curriculum becomes symbolic rather than functional, and quality education remains out of reach for large numbers of learners.

Another dimension of significance lies in the relationship between curriculum planning and teacher capacity. Teachers are the primary interpreters of any curriculum. No matter how well-designed a syllabus is, its impact depends on whether teachers understand its intent, possess the subject knowledge to teach it, and have the pedagogical skills to make it accessible to learners. Curriculum planning that neglects teacher preparation creates a gap between intention and practice. Conversely, when planning is done with teachers in mind, it can drive professional development, clarify expectations, and provide a framework for collaborative improvement. In Nigeria, where pre-service and in-service teacher education programs vary widely in quality, a well-planned curriculum can serve as a common reference point that aligns training with classroom needs. It can also guide the development of textbooks, learning aids, and assessment tools that support rather than contradict instructional goals.

Assessment is another area where curriculum planning directly influences quality. Assessment should measure whether the intended learning has occurred and provide information that can improve teaching. When the curriculum is unclear or inconsistent, assessment tends to drift toward testing easily measurable but low-level recall, rather than the deeper competencies the system claims to value. Ibrahim (2019) advocated that a carefully planned curriculum specifies not only content but also the level of cognitive demand expected, allowing assessment designers to create instruments that are aligned and meaningful. For Nigeria, this alignment is critical if national examinations and classroom assessments are to provide valid information about learning outcomes and if data from these assessments are to be used for policy decisions and school improvement.

The significance of curriculum planning also extends to resource allocation and equity. Education budgets are finite, and decisions about textbooks, teacher training, infrastructure, and learning materials must be guided by a clear understanding of curricular priorities. A coherent curriculum makes it possible to direct resources where they will have the greatest impact, avoiding the waste that occurs when materials are purchased without regard for what is actually taught. It also creates a basis for monitoring equity. When all schools are expected to work toward the same learning goals, it becomes possible to identify where gaps exist and to target support to schools and regions that are falling behind (Maduka & Eze, 2024). In a country with Nigeria's disparities, this function of curriculum planning is essential for ensuring that quality education does not become the privilege of a few.

Furthermore, curriculum planning mediates the relationship between global trends and local relevance. Nigerian education does not exist in isolation. It is influenced by international frameworks on sustainable development, digital literacy, and 21st-century skills. However, adopting global models without adaptation risks producing a curriculum that is disconnected from

learners' contexts. Effective planning involves selecting from global knowledge and practices those elements that can be meaningfully integrated into the Nigerian setting, while preserving attention to indigenous languages, histories, and problem-solving traditions. Dodezien & Nobiko (2024) validated that this balance allows learners to engage with the wider world without losing the cultural grounding that gives education meaning in their communities.

The process of curriculum planning itself has implications for the legitimacy and sustainability of educational reform. When stakeholders perceive the process as transparent, evidence-based, and responsive to feedback, they are more likely to support implementation. When it is perceived as top-down, rushed, or disconnected from practice, resistance and superficial compliance follow. In Nigeria's federal structure, where states have significant autonomy in education, building consensus around curriculum priorities requires sustained dialogue and evidence of impact. Research on the effects of alignment between early childhood frameworks and primary school standards, for example, can provide the kind of evidence that informs revisions and strengthens buy-in across different levels of government and civil society. Ultimately, curriculum planning matters because it shapes the daily experience of millions of children and determines whether the time they spend in school translates into meaningful learning. Quality education is not an abstract ideal; it is visible in classrooms where learners are engaged, where teachers teach with confidence, where materials are appropriate, and where assessment informs next steps. All of these conditions are shaped, directly or indirectly, by decisions made during curriculum planning. In Nigeria, where the demand for education continues to grow and where the stakes for national development are high, the quality of that planning will be one of the decisive factors in whether the education system can deliver on its mandate. Ibrahim (2019) averred that the understanding of how curriculum planning influences both the consistency of early childhood frameworks and the standards maintained in primary schools therefore offers insight into the broader health of higher levels in the education system. It reveals where alignment is working, where breakdowns occur, and what adjustments are needed to ensure that every child, regardless of location or background, has access to an education that is coherent, relevant, and capable of preparing them for the demands of life and work in the 21st century.

Curriculum planning in Nigeria exists at the center of a persistent tension between policy intention and classroom reality, and it is within this gap that the problem of quality education becomes most visible. On paper, the country's curriculum frameworks articulate a vision of education that is coherent, progressive, and responsive to the developmental needs of learners from early childhood through primary school. According to Ningi (2023), practically, the translation of that vision into consistent learning experiences is undermined by discontinuities in design, implementation, and oversight. The result is a system where learners often move from one stage of schooling to the next without having acquired the foundational competencies that should have been established earlier, and where teachers operate with varying interpretations of what is expected of them.

One dimension of the problem lies in the lack of alignment between early childhood frameworks and primary school standards. Early childhood education in Nigeria is intended to lay the groundwork for literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional development, and learning dispositions that will support later schooling. Primary education, in turn, is expected to build systematically on those foundations, deepening subject knowledge and cognitive skills. When the content, sequencing, and pedagogical approaches across these levels are not deliberately aligned, children encounter abrupt shifts in expectations and methods. Some enter primary school with learning experiences that bear little relation to what is assumed by the primary curriculum, while others encounter repetition or gaps because the two levels were planned in isolation. This misalignment contributes to uneven learning trajectories, with some pupils falling behind early and struggling to catch up throughout their schooling. Compounding this is the variability in how the curriculum is enacted across different contexts. Nigeria's education system includes federal, state, private, and faith-based providers operating under diverse conditions of funding, infrastructure, and teacher capacity. A curriculum that assumes a certain level of resources, teacher preparation, and class size may be feasible in well-resourced urban schools but unrealistic in rural or under-resourced settings. When planning does not account for this diversity, the curriculum becomes either diluted to fit minimal conditions or abandoned altogether in favor of ad hoc practices. Teachers, facing large classes and limited materials, often prioritize coverage over understanding, and assessment tends to focus on recall rather than application. Over time, this erodes the integrity of the curriculum and weakens the relationship between what is planned and what is actually learned.

Another aspect of the problem concerns the limited feedback loop between implementation and revision. Obizue & Obizue (2025) agreed that curriculum planning should be an iterative process informed by evidence from classrooms, assessment data, and teacher experience. In practice, revisions often occur infrequently and are driven more by administrative cycles than by systematic evaluation of learning outcomes. Without reliable data on how learners are progressing and where breakdowns occur, it is difficult to determine whether poor performance stems from the curriculum itself, from implementation challenges, or from external factors. This lack of evidence-based adjustment means that persistent weaknesses remain unaddressed and reforms risk being superficial rather than transformative. The implications for quality education are substantial. Quality in this context refers not merely to examination results, but to the extent to which education equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for further learning, work, and civic participation. Ifeadi & Okon (2017) stated that when curriculum planning fails to ensure coherence across levels and adaptability to context, learners exit primary school without secure foundational skills, and the burden of remediation shifts to later stages of education. Teachers, lacking clear guidance and support, experience role ambiguity and reduced professional efficacy. Resources, including textbooks and training programs, are less effective when they are not aligned with a coherent instructional framework. Ultimately, the promise of education as a driver of

individual opportunity and national development is compromised. Addressing this problem requires a clear understanding of how curriculum planning influences both the consistency of quality education in the sector. It demands an examination of where alignment breaks down, how contextual factors mediate implementation and what mechanisms are needed to create a more responsive and coherent system. Without such an understanding, efforts to improve quality education in Nigeria risk treating symptoms rather than the underlying structural and procedural issues in curriculum design and enactment. It is under this backdrop, that this investigation is carried out.

The main objective of the study is to examine the how curriculum planning affects the quality of education in Nigeria and it specifically sought the following objectives;

1. To assess the relationship between curriculum planning and quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
2. To identify the factors that hinder curriculum planning in improving the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

In line with the specific objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study;

1. to what extent does curriculum planning relate with quality education in Nigerian tertiary institutions?
2. what are the factors that hinder the curriculum planning in improving the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Two hypotheses were postulated and tested in this study.

H₀₁: Curriculum planning has no significant impact on the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

H₀₂: The hindrances in curriculum planning do not significantly affect the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Methodology

This study examined the relationship between curriculum planning and quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The research employed a quantitative survey design because it allows for systematic data collection from a relatively large population and facilitates the statistical analysis of relationships among variables associated with curriculum processes and educational quality. The design was considered appropriate for the study because it enables the researcher to

gather perceptions and experiences from educators directly involved in curriculum planning and implementation within the Nigerian education system. The target population comprised of both academic planning and administrative staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, 20 institutions were selected across the six geo-political zones comprising of 6 federal universities, 5 state universities, 5 private universities, 2 polytechnics and 2 colleges of education were selected across the six geo-political zones. 10 academic planning staff and 10 teaching staff were respectively and randomly selected from each institution, yielding a sample of 400 respondents.

These groups were selected because they are directly involved in curriculum planning and also possess practical insights into its effective implementation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The sampling technique was employed to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings across the diverse environments. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on key variables identified in contemporary literature on educational management and it is titled; Curriculum Planning and Quality of Education in Nigeria Questionnaire (CPQENQ). The questionnaire consisted of two major sections. The first section collected demographic information about the respondents, including their qualifications, curriculum planning and implementation experiences, school type and other professional roles. The second section contained items measuring curriculum planning indicators like plan effectiveness, implementation success, resource utilization, staff motivation, decision-making and quality education variables; pedagogical outcomes, graduate employability, staff retention, quality sustainability.

The items were structured using a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree in order to capture respondents' levels of agreement with each statement. To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in educational management and measurement and evaluation. Their feedback was used to refine the wording and clarity of the survey items to ensure that the instrument accurately measured the intended constructs. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha yielding the coefficient of 0.86, which indicated an acceptable level of internal consistency suitable for empirical analysis. Data collection was conducted through direct distribution of questionnaires to the selected respondents within their respective institutions. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential and used strictly for academic research purposes. Completed questionnaires were retrieved after completion and carefully screened to ensure completeness and accuracy before data analysis. The research questions were addressed using simple regression analysis, while a t-test associated with simple regression was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The results of the analysis were presented using tables and explanatory interpretations to provide a clear understanding of the empirical findings. The methodological approach adopted in this study provides a systematic framework for examining the practical implications of efficient educational management within the Nigerian educational

system. By combining structured data collection with statistical analysis, the study generates empirical evidence that contributes to ongoing discussions on how efficiency in educational management can support the performance of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The decision rule states: 100% - 75% (Very High Extent), 74% - 50% (High Extent), 49%-25% (Low Extent) and 0% - 24% (Very Low Extent).

Results and Analysis

Research Question 1: to what extent does curriculum planning relate with quality education in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 1: Simple Regression on the extent of relationship between curriculum planning and quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Extent of Prediction	Decision
1	.714 ^a	.725	.611	72.5%	Very High Extent

Table 1 revealed that the regression (r) and regression square (r^2) coefficients are .714 and .725, respectively, while the adjusted r square is .611. The extent of prediction (coefficient of determinism) is 72.5% ($.725 \times 100$). By implication, the result shows that curriculum planning related with quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions to a very high extent by 72.5%.

Research Question 2: what are the factors that hinder the curriculum planning in improving the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table 2: Simple Regression on the extent to the factors that hinder the curriculum planning in improving the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Extent of Prediction	Decision
1	.522 ^a	.421	.416	52.2%	High extent

Table 2 revealed that the coefficients of regression (r) is .522, regression square (r^2) is .421 and that of the adjusted r square is .416. The extent of prediction (coefficient of determinism) is 50.7%

(.522×100). This implies that educational management efficiency is constrained towards the performance of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to a fairly or averagely high extent of 52.2%.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Curriculum planning has no significant impact on the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Table 3: t-test associated with simple regression that curriculum planning has no significant impact on the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	p-value	Alpha level	Decision
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
(Constant)	.811	.082		11.102	.000		
1 Impact of curriculum planning	.159	.035	.203	6.046	.001	0.05	Ho ₁ Rejected

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of Education

Table 4 revealed that standard beta value and t-test are .203 and 6.046. The p-value of .001 is lower than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. By implication, curriculum planning exerted a positive and statistically significant impact on the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis 2: The hindrances in curriculum planning do not significantly affect the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Table 4: t-test associated with simple regression that the hindrances in curriculum planning do not significantly affect the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	p-value	Alpha level	Decision
	B	Std. Error					
(Constant)	.790	.091		11.021	.000		
1 Hindrances in curriculum planning	.073	.055	.262	3.128	.002	0.05	Ho ₂ Rejected

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of Education

Table 4 revealed that standard beta value and t-test are .262 and 3.128. The p-value of .002 is less than the level of significance of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the hindrances in curriculum planning is statistically significant in determining the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Discussion of Findings

The finding from the first research question revealed that efficiency in educational management related to tertiary institutions performance to a high extent by 72.5%. The test of hypothesis one also established that efficient educational management exerted a positive and statistically significant impact on the performance of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

This can be validated and attributed to the fact that the regression results demonstrate that each dimension or determinant of management efficiency such as leadership effectiveness, resource utilization, staff motivation and decision-making significantly predicts institutional performance.

These findings are in line with Ibrahim (2019), Ngoli & Kezim (2015) and Abalano (2025) who in their studies observed that that efficient management of educational institutions based on well-planned curriculum had positive and significant impact on their performances. The results also resonate with Obizue & Obizue (2025), who highlighted that the curriculum planning and its effective implementation is the strongest predictor of institutional performance and accreditation success. This supports the Contingency Theory notion that flexible, curriculum-sensitive management is essential.

The second finding showed that that educational management efficiency is constrained towards the performance of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to a fairly or averagely high extent of 52.2%.

This result validated the assertion of Ningi (2023) and Oluwunmi (2025) who advocated that the major constraints to management efficiency could be in form of bureaucratic bottlenecks, inadequate funding, political Interference, poor staff incentives can limit the performance outcome in educational institutions in Nigeria. They further observed that the challenges are diversified to the time it takes to get approval, the need may have passed or prices have increased, appointments into governing councils are often politically determined where some members have no understanding of university administration and the best Lecturers are leaving for private universities or abroad because they are overworked and underpaid.

Also, a corresponding hypothesis tested indicated that the major constraints to educational management efficiency is statistically significant in influencing the performance outcome of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These findings are in agreement with the assertion of Okafor & Nnabueze (2022) that despite the notable challenges encountered by academic planners and institutional Administrators, efficiency in curriculum planning is a good determinant of institutional performance and quality of education in Nigeria. This finding suggests that the curriculum planning is currently re-engineered and delivered to instill quality, morals, skills and values in the personnel and students. Moreover, lecturers may be reinforcing these values through relatable teaching methods and real-life examples, enhancing students' understanding and commitment. This implies that curriculum planning efficiency is a vital tool for fostering quality-oriented educational consciousness among all stakeholders in the tertiary institutions and bringing out the best in them towards achieving high performance outcomes.

Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence that curriculum planning significantly impacted on the quality of education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study concluded that despite the hindrances, improving curriculum planning practices is a fundamental prerequisite for enhancing and strengthening the quality, performance and relevance of Nigerian tertiary education.

Recommendations

The study recommended that strengthened curriculum review systems, increased investment in teacher professional development and improved implementation frameworks to ensure that curriculum reforms effectively contribute to quality education and national educational development.

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