

The Role of Teacher Qualification and Experience in Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

Curriculum implementation is a critical stage in the educational process, particularly in Nigeria. This paper examines the roles of teacher qualification and teaching experience in Nigeria, drawing on human capital theory, systems theory, and constructivist learning theory with emphasis on Nigerian contexts, the paper defines key concepts, reviews relevant concepts, identifies challenges, and proposes strategies for strengthening teacher preparation and curriculum delivery. Evidences from available relevant literature showed that professionally qualified and experienced teachers implement curricula more effectively than their less qualified or inexperienced counterparts. Challenges include inadequate teacher training, out-of-field teaching, insufficient professional development, and uneven distribution of experienced teachers. The ways forward include enhancing teacher education, expanding professional development, improving teacher deployment, and ensuring policy coherence.

Keywords: Teacher Qualification, Teaching Experience, Curriculum Implementation, Educational Reform

Introduction

Education remains a central instrument for national development in Nigeria, serving as a strategic means for achieving socio-economic transformation and global competitiveness. The effectiveness of the education system, however, depends largely on the quality of its curriculum and, more importantly, how such curriculum is implemented in practice. Curriculum implementation refers to the process of translating planned educational objectives into concrete teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. As noted by Shittu and Olorundare (2025), curriculum implementation is the stage where educational plans are operationalized, and teachers play a central role in determining whether the intended learning outcomes are achieved or not. This underscores the fact that the success or failure of any educational reform in Nigeria is largely dependent on the competence and preparedness of teachers.

Among the key determinants of effective curriculum implementation are teachers' qualifications and teaching experience. Teacher qualification encompasses the academic credentials and professional training required for effective teaching, while teaching experience refers to the practical knowledge and skills acquired over time in the classroom. Adelokun (2025) argues that concerns about poor academic performance in Nigerian schools are closely linked to issues of teacher quality, including inadequate training, weak professional preparation, and insufficient development opportunities. This suggests that both qualification and experience are indispensable for effective teaching and curriculum implementation

A study conducted by Aava, Iortyer, and Aava (2024) on the implementation of the English Language curriculum in Benue State revealed that variations in teachers' qualifications directly affect teaching methods, classroom effectiveness, and overall curriculum delivery. The study also highlighted that limited advanced qualifications among teachers and inadequate professional development opportunities hinder effective curriculum implementation. In a similar vein, Jega, Abdullahi, and Muhammad (2024) found that teacher qualification plays a crucial role in the utilization of instructional materials and the successful implementation of the Islamic Studies curriculum in primary schools in North-West Nigeria.

Teaching experience, on the other hand, contributes to improved classroom management, instructional strategies, and adaptability in curriculum delivery. However, contemporary research suggests that experience alone may not be sufficient in the face of rapidly evolving educational demands. In the context of ongoing curriculum reforms and digital transformation, teachers must continuously update their knowledge and skills. According to Nafiu and Olaitan (2025), teacher readiness for 21st-century classrooms particularly in terms of digital competence and innovative pedagogy is essential for effective curriculum implementation, yet many teachers lack the necessary preparation to meet these demands. Similarly, Olawunmi (2025) observes that outdated teaching practices and inconsistent teacher preparedness continue to hinder curriculum reform efforts in Nigeria, especially in the digital age

Despite the recognized importance of teacher qualification and experience, several issues and challenges persist within the Nigerian education system. These include the prevalence of under-qualified teachers, inadequate teacher training programmes, poor deployment policies, and limited access to continuous professional development. Additionally, systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient instructional materials, and inadequate funding further constrain teachers' ability to effectively implement the curriculum. The lack of alignment between teacher capacity and curriculum demands often results in a gap between intended and actual learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on competency-based education, digital literacy, and learner-centred pedagogy has intensified the need for highly qualified and adaptable teachers. Modern curriculum reforms require teachers not only to possess strong subject-matter knowledge but also to demonstrate proficiency in integrating technology and innovative teaching strategies. Without continuous professional development, even experienced teachers may rely on traditional instructional methods that are misaligned with contemporary curriculum expectations.

Given these realities, it becomes imperative to critically examine the role of teachers' qualification and experience in curriculum implementation in Nigeria. Understanding how these factors influence teaching effectiveness, identifying the challenges associated with them, and proposing practical strategies for improvement are essential for strengthening the education system.

Therefore, this study focuses on the role of teachers' qualification and experience in curriculum implementation in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the issues and challenges affecting their effectiveness and the development of viable strategies (way forward) for improving curriculum delivery and achieving national educational objectives in the 21st century.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was anchored on three theories namely: Human Capital Theory, Systems Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory.

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory was propounded by Gary Becker (1993). It posits that investments in education, training, and skills development enhance individual productivity and social outcomes. Education is considered a form of capital that increases human potential and economic value. The theory is related to this work as it highlights the importance of investing in teacher education and professional development to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective curriculum implementation. Qualified and well-trained teachers are more likely to deliver curriculum content accurately, apply innovative instructional strategies, and improve student learning outcomes (Adewumi & Aladejana, 2022).

Systems Theory

Systems theory was propounded by Ludwig Bertalanffy 1968. It viewed organizations, including schools, as interconnected systems of inputs, processes, and outputs. Inputs include teachers, learners, curriculum materials, and infrastructure; processes involve teaching and learning activities; outputs are learning outcomes and societal benefits. This theory is related to the present study due to the fact that Teacher qualification and experience may be considered as key inputs affecting the education system. Weaknesses in these inputs disrupt instructional processes and undermine curriculum implementation. In Nigeria, systemic challenges such as inadequate teacher preparation, uneven teacher deployment, and inconsistent policies negatively affect system performance (Umar & Hassan, 2020).

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning theory was propounded by Lev Vygotsky 1978. The theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through social interaction, experience, and engagement with their environment. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding learners to build understanding. This indicates that effective implementation of learner-centered curricula in Nigeria requires teachers who are qualified and experienced. Such teachers can design engaging learning activities, scaffold learning, and adapt curriculum content to diverse learner needs. Without sufficient training and experience, teachers may rely on teacher-centered methods, limiting curriculum effectiveness (Onyekachi & Eze, 2019).

Meaning and Concept of Teacher Qualification

Teacher qualification refers to the combination of academic degrees, professional certification, and pedagogical training required for effective classroom teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Akpan and Ita (2020) emphasized that formal credentials provides teachers with subject-matter knowledge and professional ethics which are necessary for effective curriculum implementation. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education specifies that the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) is the minimum qualification for basic education, while a bachelor's degree or postgraduate diploma is required for secondary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). However, Olatunji and Akinwale (2018) revealed that certificates alone do not guarantee teaching competence.

Teacher qualification entails formal education, professional training, certification and skill competencies required for effective teaching practice. It typically includes academic degrees in relevant subject areas, pedagogical preparation and credentials that permit practice in educational settings. It was emphasized in Sie and Chonga, (2025) that teacher qualification is more than holding a certificate; it includes content mastery and pedagogical competence to translate subject knowledge into effective learning experiences. According to Onuegbu (2024), a qualified teacher is expected to demonstrate academic knowledge aligned with the curriculum, pedagogical skills, classroom management strategies and reflective and adaptive practices for varied learners. The present situation in Nigeria indicates that some people have the qualification but may be found wanting when it comes

to practical demonstration of teaching skills in the classroom. This poses serious impediment to curriculum implementation.

Teaching Experience

Teaching experience encompasses both the number of years in the profession and the quality of professional practice (Berliner, 2018). Okeke and Mbah (2021) describe it as the cumulative professional knowledge and skills acquired through sustained classroom practice. In Nigeria, teachers are typically categorized by years of service: less than five years (novice), five to ten years (mid-career), and over ten years (experienced). Studies by Aremu and Lawal (2020), Henley (2023), Desautels (2021) and Campbell (2011) indicate that experienced teachers demonstrate superior classroom management and curriculum interpretation skills.

Teacher experience is a complex and multidimensional construct that extend beyond the simplistic measurement of years spent in the classroom. While early educational research often equated experience with longevity in service, contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes teacher experience as a dynamic process involving professional training, pedagogical adaption, conceptual understanding and reflective practice developed over time (Ingersoll et, 2021).

From a professional standpoint, teacher experience refers to the cumulative knowledge, skills and instructional competencies that teachers acquire through sustained engagement with teaching tasks, learner, curricula and school environments. Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron and Osher (2020) defined teacher experience as the gradual development of professional judgement that enables teachers to make informed instructional decisions, respond effectively to learners' needs and manage classroom complexities. This definition emphasizes experience as an evolving form of expertise rather than a static attribute.

Similarly, Okebukola (2020) conceptualized teacher experience as the practical refinement of pedagogical competence gained through repeated interaction with curriculum content and classroom realities. In other words, experience enhances teachers' ability to interpret curriculum objectives, select appropriate instructional strategies and align assessment practices with learning outcomes. This perspective is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context where teachers often operate in

challenging environments characterized by large class sizes, limited resources and diverse learners' populations. In a broader sense, teacher experience may be seen as exposure to diverse instructional contexts and professional challenges that shapes teachers' instructional adaptability. Ingersoll (2021) described teacher experience as a form of occupational learning influenced by working conditions, collegial support, mentoring opportunities and access to professional development. This definition highlights that the instructional value of experience is not uniform but varies according to the conditions under which it is acquired.

From a curriculum implementation perspective, teacher experience encompasses familiarity with curriculum demands, instructional sequencing and assessment standards. Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2020) viewed teacher experience as the capacity to translate curriculum prescriptions into meaningful classroom practice through effective classroom management, conceptualized examples and learner engagement strategies. This definition underscore the practical dimension of experience as it relates directly to instructional delivery. However, contemporary literature cautions against assuming a linear relationship between experience and effectiveness. Adebola et al (2024), Ravi (2023) and Amemasor (2025) submitted that teacher experience without continuous professional development may reinforce routine instructional practices that are misaligned with modern curriculum reforms, particularly those involving digital integration. This finding reinforces the notion that experience must be adaptive and continuously renewed to remain pedagogically valuable.

Taken together, these literatures suggest that teacher experience is best understood as an integrative construct comprising years of experience, quality of professional learning, contextual exposure, reflective engagement and adaptability to educational change. Discussions on the concepts of teacher qualification and experience provide a more robust framework for analyzing the relationship between teacher experience, instructional effectiveness and curriculum implementation, particularly in developing education systems such as Nigeria.

Meaning and Concept of Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is the process of translating curriculum ideas, policies, and intentions into classroom practices and learning experiences (Fullan, 2016; Oform, 2019). In Nigeria, this involves

interpreting national curriculum documents, selecting teaching strategies, using instructional materials, assessing learning outcomes, and providing feedback to learners. Effective curriculum implementation requires alignment between curriculum objectives, teacher competence, instructional resources, and learner needs. Nigeria, like most countries has adopted education as the instrument for achieving national objectives and the goal could only be realised through a well designed and implemented curriculum. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Chaudhary, (2015) defined curriculum implementation as a fulfillment of officially prepared course content and process, an application of ideas and innovations to teach knowledge, skills, concepts, and interpretations, daily classroom activities involving students and teacher, a way to reduce differences, an activity conducted to implement an idea or reform, a black box, a structure that aims to transform curriculum into classroom activities and to create an attitude towards students accepting and participating in these activities.

Similarly, Ogar and Opoh, (2015) maintained that curriculum implementation is referred to how teachers deliver instruction and assessment through the use of specified resources provided in a curriculum. Curriculum designs generally provide instructional suggestions, scripts, lesson plans, and assessment options related to a set of objectives. Such designs focus on consistency to help teachers successfully implement and maintain the curricular structure in order to meet various objectives.

Role of Teacher Qualification and Teaching Experience in Curriculum Implementation

Teacher qualification and professional experience constitute the backbone of effective curriculum implementation in Nigeria. Although curriculum documents articulate educational objectives, content, and standards, it is teachers who operationalize these intentions within classroom settings. The extent to which curriculum goals are achieved therefore depends largely on teachers' academic preparation, pedagogical competence, and accumulated professional experience (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Obanya, 2018). Teacher qualification provides the professional foundation upon which effective curriculum implementation is built. In the Nigerian education system, professionally qualified teachers are expected to possess subject-matter mastery, pedagogical skills, assessment literacy, and classroom management competence. These attributes enable teachers to

interpret curriculum objectives accurately, translate them into coherent lesson plans, and employ appropriate instructional strategies aligned with curriculum philosophy (Adeyemi & Adu, 2018).

Challenges

Key challenges affecting teacher qualification, experience, and curriculum implementation in Nigeria include inadequate funding for teacher education, out-of-field teaching, weak professional development structures, policy inconsistencies, rapid curriculum changes, socio-economic constraints, overcrowded classrooms, and limited instructional materials (Adewale & Akinyemi, 2021; Ogunyemi, Ajibade, & Adebayo, 2019; Adewumi & Aladejana, 2022; Umar & Hassan, 2020; Okeke & Mbah, 2021). Inadequate funding has been a major challenge affecting curriculum implementation in schools across Nigeria. Money is needed to pay teachers' salaries and allowances, building of structures and other school facilities, workshop and seminar attendance among others. Overcrowded classroom could also constitute an impediment to effective curriculum implementation. Teachers find it difficult to teach and manage large classes and this has a ripple effect on curriculum implementation in schools. Shortage of instructional materials is another challenge to effective curriculum implementation. Shortage and in some cases absence of instructional materials hampers lesson delivery making it difficult for students to comprehend what is taught. This has negative effects on curriculum implementation.

Out of field teaching is another critical issue that contributes to ineffective curriculum implementation. When teachers are asked to teach subjects or courses that they do not specialize on, it affects their capacity to adequately deliver the lesson efficiently which is an obstacle to curriculum implementation.

Conclusion

Teacher qualification and teaching experience are fundamental to effective curriculum implementation in Nigeria. Addressing existing challenges requires a holistic approach integrating policy reform, institutional support, and sustained investment in teacher development. Prioritizing teacher quality through pre-service education, continuous professional development, strategic

deployment, and mentorship programmes can enhance curriculum delivery and improve student learning outcomes.

The Way Forward

To enhance curriculum implementation, Nigeria must strengthen teacher education, enforce professional standards, expand continuous professional development, improve teacher deployment and retention, and ensure policy coherence. Mentorship programs, ICT training, stakeholder collaboration, robust monitoring, and sustainable funding are critical. Additionally, promoting research-informed teaching practices and encouraging experienced teachers to mentor novices can improve overall instructional quality.

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