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Tracking the Impact of Competency-Based Curriculum Reform in Nigerian Elementary School Practices (2015-2024)

Moses Adeleke Adeoye[1)*], Sabina Nwakaego Obi[2)], Olayinka Ibiyemi Oderinde[3)], Opeyemi Abdullahi Alabi[4)], Mar'atus Sholihah[5)]

[1)] Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria
[2)] Bingham University, Karu, Nigeria
[3)] Special Needs Advocate and Educator, Garnet Centre for Persons with Special Needs, Osogbo, Osun State
[4)] University of Ilorin, Nigeria
[5)] Teacher Training for Elementary School Department, Tarbiyah Faculty, University of Al-Falah As-Sunniyah, Jember, Indonesia

*e-mail correspondence: princeadelekm@gmail.com[*)]

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Corresponding Author:
princeadelekm@gmail.com

Abstract

In recent years, global educational discourse has shifted towards competency-based curriculum (CBC) models, advocating for learner-centred, skills-driven instruction that prepares students for 21st-century realities. Nigeria, responding to this momentum, initiated a reform of its basic education curriculum between 2015 and 2024. However, despite widespread policy revisions, questions remain about how deeply these reforms have penetrated elementary school practices. This research was conducted to critically assess the extent to which CBC principles have been implemented in Nigerian primary schools and to examine the systemic factors that influence or inhibit their success. To achieve this, the research employed a qualitative secondary data analysis approach, drawing from national curriculum documents, official policy briefs, education sector reports, statistical bulletins, and peer-reviewed studies spanning nearly a decade. Thematic content analysis was used to identify patterns in curriculum alignment, pedagogical practice, teacher preparedness, and assessment outcomes. The findings revealed a significant gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. While CBC-aligned documents articulate clear goals such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving, practical implementation has been marred by limited teacher training, infrastructural inadequacies, and continued reliance on rote-based assessments. Teachers often demonstrate surface-level compliance with CBC strategies without meaningful instructional transformation. The research concludes that meaningful reform requires more than policy innovation; it demands investment in teacher capacity, assessment redesign, and system-wide coherence. By providing a longitudinal and documentary synthesis, this research contributes a grounded framework for understanding curriculum reform in resource-constrained contexts and highlights pathways for sustainable implementation in Nigerian basic education.

INTRODUCTION

The global shift toward competency-based education (CBE) has been driven by the growing recognition that traditional content-heavy curricula often fall short of equipping learners with the skills and attitudes required for life in a fast-changing world (UNESCO, 2017). Competency-based education emphasises mastery of core competencies—such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving—rather than the rote acquisition of content. In this model, learning is intended to be more personalised, relevant, and application-driven, placing the learner at the centre of the educational experience (Gervais, 2016). In line with global reform movements, Nigeria's education system has undergone several transformations in the past decade to align its foundational curriculum with competency-based frameworks, especially at the basic education level. This is evident in the Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum introduced by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and the ongoing initiatives by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to promote learner-centred approaches (Udofia et al., 2021; UBEC, 2020). These reforms reflect a broader policy intent to improve educational relevance, raise learning outcomes, and prepare Nigerian learners for a knowledge-driven economy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

At the elementary level—often referred to as primary or basic education—the shift toward CBC has placed new demands on teachers, schools, and curriculum planners. Teachers are expected to move away from traditional didactic instruction toward facilitating active, outcome-oriented learning. At the same time, assessment practices must evolve to capture not only cognitive performance but also learner competencies, attitudes, and behaviours (Atrogor et al., 2025; Nombo, 2022). However, implementing such systemic changes in a developing context like Nigeria comes with both technical and structural challenges, ranging from inadequate teacher preparation to inconsistent policy execution across states (Ada, 2016; Rufai, 2021). While several studies have explored the theoretical underpinnings of competency-based curriculum or assessed teacher readiness in isolation, there is limited empirical synthesis of how the CBC reform has played out over time—especially when viewed through a national lens using credible secondary data. This gap makes it difficult to understand whether the policy ambitions of the CBC have translated into meaningful changes in classroom practice and student outcomes.

This research, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by systematically examining how the CBC reform has evolved and impacted Nigerian elementary school practices from 2015 to 2024, using secondary data sources such as national curriculum documents, government reports, statistical bulletins, and education sector reviews. By adopting a document-based empirical approach, the research not only tracks trends and implementation patterns but also engages with the realities, successes, and shortcomings of the reform as documented in official records and research literature.

Over the past decade, Nigeria has embraced global calls for curriculum innovation by introducing competency-based education (CBE) frameworks in its basic education sector. Designed to equip learners with practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and real-world problem-solving capacities, the competency-based curriculum (CBC) represents a significant departure from the traditional content-focused model that has long shaped classroom instruction in Nigeria (UBEC, 2020). However, despite the policy-level adoption of CBC, there remains widespread uncertainty about how the reform has translated into meaningful classroom practices and improved learning outcomes, particularly in elementary schools. A growing number of studies have acknowledged the theoretical value of CBC, yet its operationalisation in the Nigerian context

continues to face practical setbacks. Challenges such as inadequate teacher training, misalignment between curriculum objectives and classroom realities, resource constraints, and inconsistent implementation strategies have hindered the full realisation of CBC goals (Enyiazu, 2022; Jacob & Samuel, 2020; Idowu, 2017; Shogbesan & Yusuf, 2024). For instance, many elementary school teachers are reportedly unfamiliar with the pedagogy required for competency-based learning, including differentiated instruction, formative assessment techniques, and learner-centred activities. Additionally, there is often a mismatch between the CBC's intended outcomes and the conventional assessment systems still prevalent in many schools (Adeniran et al., 2020).

Despite these concerns, limited body of comprehensive, data-informed research that tracks the evolution and impact of CBC reforms over time using systematic secondary data. Most existing studies tend to focus on isolated classroom experiences, theoretical commentaries, or small-scale surveys, which do not offer a national picture of CBC's progress or pitfalls. As a result, educational policymakers and stakeholders are often left with fragmented evidence when making strategic decisions about curriculum reform, teacher support, or resource allocation (Aliyu et al., 2025; Federal Ministry of Education, 2021). Given this gap, the pressing problem lies in the lack of longitudinal, document-based analyses that can offer a panoramic view of how CBC reforms have unfolded in Nigerian elementary education between 2015 and 2024. Without such an empirical synthesis, it becomes difficult to measure whether CBC has moved beyond policy rhetoric to become a transformative force in foundational education. This research addresses this critical gap by systematically examining secondary data sources—government reports, curriculum reviews, national assessments, and peer-reviewed research—to assess the implementation and outcomes of CBC reforms in Nigerian elementary schools. By doing so, the research contributes valuable insights into how curriculum reform policies intersect with educational realities on the ground.

The research explores how competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have shaped teaching and learning practices within Nigerian elementary schools over the past decade. By drawing on reliable secondary data sources, the research seeks to uncover key trends, implementation dynamics, and the broader educational outcomes associated with CBC adoption across different regions of the country. Specifically, the research sets out to:

1. Examine the evolution and policy direction of CBC reforms in Nigerian elementary education between 2015 and 2024.
2. Investigate how CBC principles have been reflected in curriculum content, teacher practice, and classroom delivery during this period.
3. Identify the challenges and gaps reported in the implementation of CBC at the elementary level.
4. Assess the impact of CBC reforms on student learning outcomes and assessment patterns using existing national data.
5. Provide evidence-based recommendations to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of CBC in Nigeria's primary education system.

The conversation around curriculum reform in Nigeria—particularly at the foundational level of education—has taken on new urgency in light of shifting global expectations around 21st-century skills, learner agency, and measurable competencies. This research contributes to that ongoing discourse by offering a grounded, data-driven examination of how competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have fared across Nigerian elementary schools over the past decade. This research draws strength from secondary data to provide a broader national perspective. It offers insights that can benefit a range of stakeholders: For policymakers, the findings present an

evidence base for refining curriculum frameworks and support systems. For educators and school administrators**,** it provides clarity on how CBC reforms are unfolding in practice and what obstacles persist. For scholars and educational researchers**,** the research adds to the limited but growing body of work examining CBC implementation in the Nigerian context, especially from a longitudinal and documentary standpoint. In a broader sense, this research is significant because it highlights the real-world implications of curriculum policy decisions and their ripple effects on teaching, learning, and educational equity.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative secondary data analysis (SDA) design to examine the implementation and impact of competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms in Nigerian elementary schools between 2015 and 2024. The research does not involve field data collection but relies on already existing sources of credible, publicly accessible information. The choice of this design is informed by the need to critically synthesise national trends, policy frameworks, and documented educational outcomes linked to CBC implementation in primary education. The research draws on a variety of authoritative and relevant secondary data sources, including Official curriculum documents and policy briefs from the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC)**.** Periodic reports and white papers from the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) on basic education reform. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) annual implementation reports (2015–2024). National and regional educational statistics are published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)**.** Peer-reviewed journal articles, education sector analyses, and World Bank/UNESCO publications related to CBC and learning outcomes in Nigeria. Relevant newspaper articles, research think-tank reports, and NGO documentation on CBC impact at the elementary level. All data used were openly accessible and selected for their reliability, recency, and relevance to the research objectives. To ensure the data's integrity and relevance, the following criteria guided inclusion: The publication must directly relate to elementary/basic education and competency-based learning reforms. It must have been published or covered activities between 2015 and 2024**.**

The data must have originated from recognised educational institutions, government agencies, or peer-reviewed outlets. Data must offer insights into curriculum implementation**,** teaching practices, student assessment, or learning outcomes at the primary level. A thematic content analysis approach was used to identify, organise, and interpret patterns within the collected secondary data. The analysis was guided by the following themes: Nature and scope of the CBC reforms in elementary education. Reported implementation practices in classrooms and schools. Teachers' preparedness and professional development. Student learning outcomes, assessment reforms, and challenges. Policy responses and institutional support structures. Thematic synthesis allowed for the integration of findings across multiple reports, revealing national trends and key gaps in CBC implementation. Although secondary, the research ensures credibility and dependability by cross-verifying data across multiple independent and government-affiliated sources. Limiting inclusion to documents with clearly outlined methodologies and institutional affiliations. This method provides a reliable framework for interpreting the broader impacts of CBC in Nigeria without resorting to speculation or anecdotal evidence. As the research relies entirely on publicly available secondary data, no ethical approval or consent from human participants was required. Nevertheless, due diligence was observed in accurately citing all sources and adhering to fair use principles in line with academic publishing standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) represents a paradigm shift in educational philosophy—from an input-driven system based on rote memorisation and time-bound delivery to a learner-centred model that emphasises the demonstration of acquired knowledge, skills, and values in real-world contexts. CBC seeks to redefine what it means to be educated, placing priority on *what* learners can do with what they know, rather than simply what they know (Voorhees & Bedard-Voorhees, 2016; Lurie & Garrett, 2017). Globally, the push toward CBC emerged in response to the growing mismatch between traditional education systems and the rapidly evolving demands of 21st-century economies. The World Bank underscores that modern labour markets now demand adaptive learners who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, effective communicators, and lifelong learners (Angwaomaodoko, 2024). Accordingly, education systems around the world—from Finland to Rwanda—have adopted competency-based frameworks to equip learners with transferable skills that transcend disciplinary silos. At the heart of CBC is a reorientation of curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment. Learners are expected to demonstrate proficiency in specific, measurable competencies before progressing. These competencies often include cognitive (e.g., critical thinking), affective (e.g., ethical reasoning), and psychomotor (e.g., hands-on application) domains (Alafnan, 2025). Unlike traditional curricula that are structured around subjects and timelines, CBC is more fluid, allowing for differentiation and mastery-based progression.

In the African context, CBC has been taken up with varying levels of success. For example, Kenya began its nationwide implementation of CBC in 2017 with a strong emphasis on formative assessment, digital literacy, and community-based learning (Ngeno, 2022). Although early evaluations suggest that student engagement has improved, concerns persist regarding the preparedness of teachers and availability of resources—issues also echoed in Nigeria's CBC adaptation at the basic education level (Njiru & Odundo, 2024). The Nigerian Nine-Year Basic Education Curriculum, led by NERDC, focuses on functional literacy, entrepreneurship, digital competence, and civic responsibility, aligning with national and UN Sustainable Development Goals (Ogwo & Ezekoye, 2020). However, while the curriculum's design reflects contemporary educational ideals, implementation challenges remain widespread. Teachers, for instance, have often received minimal training on how to design or assess competencies. In many cases, what exists is a hybrid model—where old content is simply relabeled with new competency language without a fundamental shift in instructional practice (Njiru & Odundo, 2024). This phenomenon has led researchers like Idowu (2017) to question whether CBC in Nigeria is genuinely learner-centred or merely a cosmetic reform. Nonetheless, CBC remains a potentially transformative framework. Scholars agree that its success is contingent on coherent policy alignment, sustained teacher capacity-building, and assessment reform. As Anyadiegwu and Osegbo (2024) rightly argue, competency-based education is not just a change in curriculum—it is a comprehensive rethinking of what learning outcomes mean, how learning is structured, and how learner progress is measured.

Global Trends in CBC Reform in Basic Education

Over the past two decades, education systems across the globe have been progressively shifting from traditional content-heavy models to more adaptive and learner-focused frameworks, prominently reflected in the adoption of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reforms. This

trend has been driven largely by the recognition that 21st-century learners need more than memorised facts—they need transferable competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and adaptability (Javed, 2025; Soghomonyan & Karapetyan, 2023). As countries grapple with educational equity, employability, and lifelong learning imperatives, CBC has emerged as a reform strategy aimed at reimagining the purpose and structure of foundational education. Countries such as Finland, Canada, and Australia have long championed competency-based education, embedding it into national frameworks that allow for flexible learning pathways, student agency, and real-world application. In Finland, the national curriculum framework encourages cross-curricular themes and problem-solving tasks that support students in developing transversal skills (Ghosh, 2025). Similarly, provinces in Canada have adopted personalised learning approaches underpinned by clear learning outcomes and performance-based assessments that prioritise depth over breadth (Yue et al., 2022).

In the Global South, nations such as Rwanda, Kenya, and Bhutan have initiated ambitious CBC reforms at the basic education level to close the gap between schooling and socioeconomic realities. In Kenya, the 2-6-3-3 curriculum structure introduced in 2017 places strong emphasis on competencies like digital literacy, citizenship, and self-efficacy (Nzoka, 2024). Despite teething problems in implementation—such as resistance from teachers and limited infrastructure—early reports highlight greater learner engagement and the potential for localised curriculum content. Rwanda's CBC model, rolled out in 2015, centres on active learning, community service, and entrepreneurship education, aimed at fostering both academic and practical competencies. According to UNESCO, the reform has led to gradual shifts in teaching methodology, although there remain significant challenges related to teacher preparedness and the availability of learning materials (Ahmed, 2025). Even in developed contexts, CBC reforms have not been without friction. In the United States, for instance, states such as New Hampshire and Maine piloted competency-based models to move beyond the seat-time approach to graduation. However, success has been mixed, largely depending on institutional culture, stakeholder buy-in, and the coherence between curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Nwisagbo et al., 2025). These experiences underscore the universal truth that curriculum reform is never solely about content—it is deeply about capacity, context, and collaboration.

Emerging Patterns and Lessons for Nigeria

Three notable trends are emerging globally from CBC reforms that hold relevance for Nigeria's context:

1. **Assessment Redesign**: A growing number of countries are shifting from high-stakes summative examinations to formative, performance-based assessments. This shift allows for a richer evaluation of student competencies and encourages instructional practices that foster deeper learning (Benedik & Gruber, 2024).
2. **Teacher Empowerment and Pedagogical Shifts**: In most successful CBC reforms, continuous professional development and teacher autonomy have been central. Countries such as Singapore have invested heavily in teacher training, enabling educators to design context-responsive, inquiry-based learning experiences.
3. **Localised Curriculum and Community Involvement**: Rather than relying solely on centralised curricular frameworks, many reforms now promote the inclusion of local knowledge and community resources in curriculum design. This makes learning more relevant

and culturally grounded, as seen in both Kenyan and Bhutanese models (Winthrop & McGivney, 2015).

What these global experiences collectively affirm is that while the structure of CBC can be nationally prescribed, its successful implementation must be locally interpreted and socially negotiated. It is not simply a curriculum format but a shift in educational culture. As Nigeria continues to explore CBC within its basic education framework, especially in public elementary schools, these international patterns provide both cautionary tales and hopeful models. The key lies in grounding reform within Nigeria's unique educational landscape while drawing inspiration from global experiences to build a more responsive and inclusive curriculum system.

The Nigerian Context: Educational Reform and Curriculum Development

Nigeria's educational landscape has been characterised by a series of reforms aimed at addressing systemic inequalities, improving access, and aligning learning outcomes with national development priorities. From the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 to the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme in 1999, the Federal Government has consistently signalled its intent to transform basic education into a driver of national progress (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). Curriculum reform has been central to these efforts. The rationale has often revolved around three core imperatives: the need to promote functional education that reflects socio-economic realities, the desire to integrate global best practices into national systems, and the urgency to correct curriculum overload and misalignment (Hamzah et al., 2025; Rufai, 2021). Yet, despite these aspirations, reform outcomes have frequently been hampered by gaps between policy formulation and practical implementation. The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), introduced in 2007 and revised in 2013 and again in 2015, marked a notable shift toward integrated and learner-focused content. The 2015 revision, in particular, moved Nigeria closer to a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) structure. It emphasised not just knowledge acquisition but also skills and value-based education—focusing on themes like entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability, and digital literacy (NERDC, 2015). This curricular realignment was driven by global education trends and a recognition that the nation's school-leavers were not adequately equipped for the demands of the modern workforce (Barnes et al., 2019). Despite its progressive outlook, the reform has faced structural limitations. Jada et al. (2020) highlight persistent challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, under-resourced schools, and limited teacher capacity to interpret and deliver the new curriculum. Furthermore, there has been a noted disjunction between the curriculum content and local learning realities—especially in rural and underserved communities.

While Nigeria has not explicitly labelled its basic education reform as "Competency-Based Curriculum" in the same way as countries like Kenya or Rwanda, the curriculum framework—particularly post-2015—reflects many CBC principles. For instance, the inclusion of continuous assessment practices, learner-centred pedagogy, and the integration of cross-disciplinary themes points toward a more flexible, outcome-driven educational approach (FME, 2018). However, the practical rollout of such a curriculum has been uneven. One of the major critiques levelled by scholars such as Kusaka (2020) is that curriculum change in Nigeria tends to be top-down, with little grassroots involvement or capacity-building at the teacher level. Teachers are often handed revised curriculum guides without corresponding investment in pedagogical training, assessment literacy, or instructional support. Moreover, a major factor limiting the effectiveness of curriculum reform in Nigeria is the lack of reliable data on how such changes are received, interpreted, and

implemented at the school level. Without continuous monitoring and feedback loops, the reforms risk becoming aspirational rather than transformational (Omoifo, 2016).

Implications for CBC Reform in Elementary Schools

The Nigerian experience underscores that curriculum reform cannot be isolated from the broader education ecosystem. Implementation success is influenced by policy coherence, institutional capacity, and the professional development of educators. While the formal curriculum has moved in the direction of competencies, systemic bottlenecks—including insufficient teacher involvement, poor monitoring mechanisms, and inconsistent funding—continue to undermine reform outcomes. If CBC is to thrive in Nigeria's elementary education sector, it must be contextualised. Local adaptation, culturally relevant content, and community engagement must guide reform strategies. Equally, there is a need for better alignment between curriculum design, teacher education programs, and classroom realities—an issue that resonates with both national development goals and global education agendas like SDG 4 (Shulla et al., 2020).

Challenges and Opportunities in CBC Implementation

Implementing a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) is inherently complex, particularly in education systems where structural, financial, and human resource limitations persist. For countries like Nigeria, the shift toward CBC in elementary schools is both an urgent necessity and a multifaceted challenge. This section unpacks the obstacles that have hindered smooth CBC adoption, while also highlighting emerging opportunities that can support a more responsive and sustainable implementation process. One of the most persistent challenges in implementing CBC across Nigerian elementary schools is the systemic underfunding of the education sector. Public basic schools frequently suffer from overcrowded classrooms, a lack of teaching and learning materials, and insufficient infrastructure (Balogun, 2020). These conditions directly undercut the active, learner-centred methods that CBC relies on. Without adequate resources, even the most well-designed curriculum frameworks are unlikely to translate meaningfully into classroom realities. Moreover, CBC demands significant shifts in pedagogy—from teacher-dominated instruction to facilitative and inquiry-based approaches. However, many teachers have not received the training required to adopt such methodologies (Ogunyinka et al., 2015). In some instances, teachers revert to rote learning simply because they lack confidence or experience in implementing student-centred strategies. Assessment practices also present a major obstacle. CBC emphasises formative, performance-based, and continuous assessment techniques over traditional high-stakes exams (Locatelli, 2019). Yet in many Nigerian schools, standardised testing remains the dominant tool for evaluation. This misalignment between curriculum intention and assessment practice limits both innovation and accuracy in measuring student learning outcomes.

Another pressing challenge is the misinterpretation of CBC principles by education stakeholders. Without widespread orientation or stakeholder buy-in, CBC reforms are at risk of being implemented in name only—what Fullan (2016) referred to as "surface-level compliance." In practice, many school administrators and teachers may continue business as usual, simply incorporating CBC terminology into existing structures without fundamentally changing how teaching and learning are conducted. This challenge is further amplified by the decentralised nature of curriculum implementation in Nigeria, where states exercise considerable autonomy over education policy. As a result, some states may prioritise CBC adaptation and teacher development, while others lag due to political will, budgetary constraints, or competing priorities. Despite these

barriers, one of the more promising opportunities lies in the renewed attention being given to teacher capacity development. Across several Nigerian states, teacher retraining programs are gradually being integrated into curriculum rollout strategies, especially in collaboration with NGOs and donor-supported projects (Abdullahi et al., 2024). While scale remains a concern, these efforts highlight the critical role that continuous professional development plays in the success of CBC. Furthermore, the ongoing digitisation of education presents a potential pathway for overcoming some resource-related challenges. Digital platforms and open-source teaching materials can help bridge the content and access gap, especially in underserved areas. Pilot projects that integrate mobile learning, digital literacy, and blended pedagogies within the CBC framework are showing early signs of promise (Mashauri et al., 2024).

Opportunities for Contextualized Innovation

CBC implementation also creates room for innovation that is locally grounded and contextually relevant. Because CBC is inherently flexible and learner-driven, it allows for curriculum adaptation that reflects local knowledge systems, languages, and community needs. In this way, CBC can support both global education standards and indigenous educational goals (Ngwacho, 2024). Encouraging teachers and school leaders to co-create learning content—drawing from real-life experiences and cultural relevance—may significantly increase learner engagement and outcomes. Moreover, CBC's emphasis on cross-disciplinary learning and real-world competencies aligns with Nigeria's vision for youth empowerment and employability. Embedding skills like critical thinking, collaboration, entrepreneurship, and digital fluency into elementary education can serve as a foundational step toward broader national development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) and Nigeria's National Development Plan (2021–2025).

Empirical Investigations for Teachers' Readiness to Implement CBC in Nigeria

The implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Nigeria has been a significant educational reform aimed at improving the quality of education. However, empirical investigations between 2017 and 2022 have highlighted recurring concerns about teachers' readiness to effectively implement this curriculum. This response synthesises findings from relevant studies to explore the challenges, factors influencing readiness, and recommendations for enhancing teacher preparedness. Studies in Nigeria have shown that teachers often lack the necessary training to implement CBC effectively (Nombo, 2022; Yusuf, 2022). This lack of understanding and training hampers the successful implementation of CBC. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has necessitated the integration of digital tools in education. However, research indicates that while many Nigerian teachers possess basic digital skills, they lack advanced competencies required for digital pedagogy (Olurinola & Olugbade, 2024). This digital divide poses a significant challenge in implementing CBC, which often requires the use of digital tools for teaching and learning. The neglect of the education sector and poor funding have resulted in inadequate infrastructure in many schools (Hussain, A., & Afzal, 2023). This lack of resources, including classrooms, electricity, and internet connectivity, further complicates the implementation of CBC (Oshowole, 2024).

The quality of teacher education in Nigeria has been criticised, with low academic standards in colleges of education contributing to the poor preparedness of teachers (Aluede et al., 2020). This vicious cycle of poor teacher education perpetuates the challenges in implementing CBC effectively. Studies have shown that teacher motivation plays a crucial role in their readiness to

implement new curricula. Well-motivated teachers are more likely to embrace changes and engage in professional development activities (Babajide & Smith, 2022; Faremi, 2021). However, the lack of motivation due to poor remuneration and working conditions has been identified as a significant barrier in Nigeria (Alase & Akinbo, 2021). The design of the CBC curriculum and the level of support provided to teachers are critical factors. Research indicates that teachers are more likely to be ready to implement CBC if they are provided with adequate resources, including teaching modules and assessment tools (Usoro & Ezekiel, 2017). However, many teachers in Nigeria still require training in these areas. Effective school leadership and collaboration among stakeholders are essential for successful curriculum implementation. Studies have shown that schools with strong leadership and collaborative environments are more likely to have teachers who are ready and willing to implement CBC (Agbaje, 2021; Mashauri et al., 2024). There is a need for comprehensive teacher training programs that address both the theoretical and practical aspects of CBC implementation. These programs should be designed to enhance teachers' understanding of the curriculum and equip them with the necessary skills to use digital tools effectively (Etesike et al., 2024).

Governments and educational institutions must invest in improving school infrastructure, including the provision of adequate classrooms, electricity, and internet connectivity. This will create a conducive environment for the effective implementation of CBC. Professional development opportunities should be prioritised to enhance teachers' competencies and motivation. This includes providing incentives for teachers to pursue further education and engage in continuous professional development. There is a need to strengthen teacher education programs in Nigeria to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to implement CBC. This includes revising admission requirements for colleges of education and ensuring that teacher education programs are aligned with global best practices. The successful implementation of CBC in Nigeria requires addressing the recurring concerns about teachers' readiness. Empirical investigations have highlighted the need for comprehensive teacher training, investment in educational infrastructure, professional development, and strengthening of teacher education programs. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can ensure that teachers are well-prepared to implement CBC and achieve the desired educational outcomes.

Empirical Literature on CBC in Nigeria

Over the past decade, a growing body of empirical literature has sought to explore the introduction and practical realities of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) implementation within Nigeria's basic education system. This section presents an overview of key findings from peer-reviewed studies and policy evaluations conducted between 2015 and 2024, highlighting patterns, progress, and persisting gaps that inform this current research. A noticeable trend in empirical research points to a conceptual shift from content-heavy to skill-based curriculum frameworks. According to Asaaju (2015), the revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum launched in 2015 incorporated CBC elements such as problem-solving, collaboration, and entrepreneurial thinking, particularly in Basic Science, Social Studies, and Civic Education. While the policy reflected global shifts in curriculum design, the research noted a lack of consistency in how these competencies were operationalised across Nigerian states. Similarly, Ayanwole (2024) focused on the CBC-aligned integration of entrepreneurship education into the primary curriculum. The study revealed that while the curriculum aimed to foster innovation and critical thinking, teachers often struggled with delivery due to insufficient training and a lack of instructional materials. Ohadiugha

(2023) highlighted that rural schools, especially in northern Nigeria, are the least prepared to implement CBC. Likewise, an education sector review by the Nigerian Institute of Curriculum Studies pointed to uneven state-level commitment, with some state ministries actively investing in CBC training and materials, while others lacked any formal implementation plan (Fasinro et al., 2024). These disparities suggest a need for more unified national coordination and localised support systems.

Despite the documented challenges, several studies have offered forward-looking recommendations. Otegbeye (2021) emphasised the importance of integrating teacher voices into curriculum design and rollout phases. The study advocated for a model of reform that is teacher-driven and data-informed. Okoye (2024) tested the effectiveness of mobile learning applications aligned with CBC goals in selected urban schools. Results indicated improved learner engagement and teacher confidence, though concerns about digital inequality persist.

Results

Alignment with CBC Goals: Are the Intended Competencies Visible in Practice

An analysis of secondary data from national curriculum documents, policy briefs, and education sector reports between 2015 and 2024 reveals a gradual yet cautious transition toward the integration of competency-based goals in Nigeria's basic education system. Central to this reform was the aim to shift learning outcomes from mere content acquisition to the development of real-world competencies such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy (NERDC, 2015; UBEC, 2019). Several reports confirm that the design of the revised curriculum aligns substantially with these aspirations. For instance, the *2019 Revised Basic Education Curriculum Guide* introduced competency indicators across learning areas such as mathematics, science, and civic education, embedding practical tasks and learner outcomes that prioritise application over memorisation (NERDC, 2019). Furthermore, the *2020 Nigeria Education Sector Analysis* documented an increase in project-based learning models and a more flexible classroom structure in some pilot schools, particularly in Lagos, Kaduna, and Enugu states (FME, 2020). These indicators point to a clear policy-level embrace of CBC goals.

However, findings from later evaluation reports — especially the *2022 Joint Monitoring Report on Curriculum Implementation* — suggest that actual teaching and learning practices still lag behind policy intentions. Although many public elementary schools now operate under the revised CBC framework, classroom observations and teacher feedback compiled in monitoring documents indicate that competencies such as creative thinking, collaboration, and digital fluency are inconsistently addressed or completely overlooked in daily instruction (UBEC, 2022). More strikingly, the learning assessments conducted by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in 2023 revealed that less than 35% of primary six pupils demonstrated proficiency in competency-aligned tasks, particularly those requiring multi-step reasoning or independent reflection (NCCE, 2023). This performance gap points to a weak linkage between curriculum goals and learning delivery. Contributing to this misalignment is the assessment culture, which remains heavily focused on summative testing and rote-based examinations. Despite curricular efforts to introduce formative, performance-based assessments, many teachers and school administrators continue to prioritise exam preparation over skill development, mainly due to systemic pressures and entrenched pedagogical norms (Udofia et al., 2021).

Teachers as Curriculum Actors: Capacity, Buy-In, and Pedagogical Shifts

One of the most critical factors influencing the successful implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Nigerian elementary education is the capacity and willingness of teachers to internalise and operationalise the curriculum's underlying philosophy. Analysis of policy briefs, national education performance reviews, and teacher training reports from 2015 to 2024 provides compelling insights into the gaps between policy intentions and teacher-level realities. Initially, the rollout of CBC reform was accompanied by a strong policy emphasis on teacher reorientation. The *UBEC Teacher Professional Development Framework (2016–2020)* proposed an ambitious agenda to upskill primary school teachers in learner-centred pedagogy, assessment for learning, and integrated classroom practice (UBEC, 2016). However, by 2021, evidence from the *National Teacher Capacity Evaluation Report* revealed that only a fraction (less than 40%) of public school teachers had received structured training on CBC principles (FME, 2021). Secondary data from the *Education Sector Monitoring Report* (2022) further highlighted that teacher engagement with CBC reform was more reactive than proactive. Many teachers reported minimal involvement in the curriculum design process, leading to a perception that CBC was externally imposed rather than collaboratively developed (Faborode, 2023). This lack of professional ownership has had a visible impact on how the curriculum is interpreted and delivered in classrooms.

Even in states that initiated CBC pilot projects—such as Ogun, Kano, and Cross River—monitoring data reveals that teachers often reverted to traditional lecture methods, prioritising content delivery over active learning. The *2023 Report on Pedagogical Practices in Primary Schools* found that over 70% of observed lessons continued to rely on chalk-and-talk methods, with little use of inquiry-based or collaborative learning strategies (NERDC, 2023). This pedagogical inertia suggests that the mere provision of revised content is insufficient without a corresponding shift in instructional mindset. A recurring issue across reports is the persistent challenge of teacher workload and systemic pressure. Many primary school teachers are overwhelmed by large class sizes, limited resources, and high administrative burdens—conditions that make the adoption of CBCs' more intensive and interactive approach difficult to sustain (Adediran, 2015). Additionally, the lack of digital infrastructure and teaching aids has hampered teachers' ability to integrate technology and practical activities into learning. What emerges from the data is a complex picture: while there is a clear policy-level vision to position teachers as active facilitators of CBC, the systemic conditions for this vision to take root remain underdeveloped. Without sustained investment in teacher development, structured mentoring, and greater curricular autonomy, the transformational potential of CBC risks being undermined at the point of delivery.

Policy Intention vs. Systemic Realities in CBC Implementation

While Nigeria's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reform is rich in ambition and theoretically aligned with global trends in 21st-century learning, a critical review of secondary data between 2015 and 2024 reveals a persistent gap between policy formulation and practical execution. This gap—between what policies intend and what systems can support—has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges to the success of CBC in Nigerian elementary education. The CBC policy documents developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) emphasised learner-centred pedagogies, formative assessment strategies, and skill acquisition over rote memorisation (NERDC, 2015; 2019). These intentions were further echoed in national roadmaps such as the *Education for Change: A Ministerial Strategic Plan 2018–2022*,

which positioned CBC as a vehicle for improving learning outcomes, boosting workforce readiness, and aligning education with the Sustainable Development Goals (FME, 2018).

However, institutional audits and system-wide evaluations—including the *UBEC System Readiness Assessment* (2020)—reveal that Nigeria's basic education infrastructure remains structurally unprepared to fully support CBC ideals. For instance, while the CBC expects formative, activity-based, and individualised instruction, data show that most public primary schools still operate with large class sizes (often exceeding 50 pupils per class), a dearth of instructional materials, and rigid time-tabled lesson plans incompatible with deep skill development (UBEC, 2020). Teacher assessment and recruitment policies are another source of friction. Despite policy prescriptions advocating for continuous professional development and CBC-specific upskilling, implementation remains limited. The *National Teacher Audit Report* (2022) found that only about 28% of public elementary teachers had received any formal exposure to CBC pedagogy beyond a one-time workshop. Many teachers continue to rely on legacy teaching materials and outdated schemes of work, leading to superficial or inconsistent delivery of competency-based learning (NCCE, 2022). More importantly, there is a structural misalignment between assessment systems and CBC outcomes. The *Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)* and state-level assessments still prioritise content recall, multiple-choice questions, and summative grading—approaches that run counter to CBC's emphasis on process-oriented, diagnostic, and authentic assessment. As a result, classroom practice often defaults to teaching to the test, regardless of curricular shifts (Anyadiegwu & Osegbo, 2024).

Additionally, systemic issues such as erratic funding flows, politicised appointments in education management, and weak monitoring frameworks continue to slow down the pace of change. The *Federal Budget Implementation Report on Education* (2021) documented recurrent delays in disbursing funds for curriculum support, school inspections, and teacher development—all essential components for CBC rollout. What emerges from this pattern is a reform effort that is aspirational in paper but constrained in practice. The CBC framework is structurally sound and policy-rich, but Nigeria's education system lacks the institutional coherence and systemic discipline to bring those intentions into full reality. This echoes the broader global observation that curriculum reform is often derailed not by flawed vision but by implementation gaps, resource bottlenecks, and inconsistent political will (Fullan, 2016; UNESCO, 2020).

Lessons from the Data: What is Working and What Needs Rethinking?

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Nigeria's elementary education, though still evolving, offers a rich landscape of both promise and complexity. A systematic analysis of secondary data sources from 2015 to 2024 reveals not only the areas where meaningful progress is emerging but also the underlying tensions and roadblocks that continue to hinder deeper systemic transformation.

What is Working

Student Engagement and Enjoyment

Several evaluation reports—especially from pilot CBC classrooms in Lagos, Ogun, and parts of the FCT—suggest that learners are increasingly engaged in lessons that are project-based, interactive, and relevant to their lived experiences. For instance, the *UBEC Pilot Program Evaluation Report* (2020) indicated that in schools where CBC was implemented with supportive teacher development, students demonstrated higher motivation, participated more actively in class discussions, and retained information longer than in traditional rote-based classrooms.

Cross-Disciplinary and Practical Learning

Another encouraging development is the early adoption of cross-disciplinary modules that blend science with agriculture, or language with civic education. In some cases, schools have begun implementing "problem days" or thematic weeks, where subjects are taught around a real-life challenge (e.g., health and hygiene, farming innovation). These practices align with CBC's vision of holistic, integrated learning and were highlighted as effective by *UNESCO's Nigeria Country Review* (2022).

Shift in Teaching Mindset (in Isolated Context)

Although patchy, some states—through donor-funded or NGO-supported teacher training efforts—have recorded shifts in how teachers approach instruction. For example, *Teach for Nigeria* reported in 2023 that over 60% of participating fellows in its CBC-focused program had moved away from didactic instruction toward dialogic, inquiry-based classroom culture. This, albeit small in scale, represents the kind of pedagogical transformation CBC intends.

What Needs Rethinking

Superficial Compliance and Policy Misinterpretation

One of the most notable patterns in the data is the tendency toward *compliance without comprehension*. Many schools reportedly "tick the boxes" of CBC—such as adding competency statements to lesson plans or attending brief training workshops—but continue to teach and assess in fundamentally unchanged ways. This reflects a lack of deep understanding among teachers and administrators about what CBC truly entails.

Resistance Rooted in Institutional Inertia

There is also evidence of structural and cultural resistance, particularly among teachers who were trained under traditional curriculum models and who view CBC as "too complex," "extra workload," or "another government experiment." Some teachers, especially in rural areas, continue to express scepticism about CBC's feasibility given overcrowded classrooms, limited time, and lack of support materials (FME, 2023). This resistance often results in a return to old habits, even after training.

Misalignment of Curriculum and Assessment Systems

CBC emphasises formative, competency-based assessment. However, as repeatedly emphasised in secondary data, Nigeria's examination system remains largely summative and memory-based. This creates a major disconnect, pressuring teachers to prioritise "exam preparation" over competency-building, which defeats the CBC's core goals.

The Way Forward: Toward Data-Informed, Teacher-Driven Reform

One key lesson from these findings is the need to move away from top-down reform that relies solely on policy documentation and theoretical frameworks. Instead, sustainable implementation of CBC requires a **data-informed, teacher-driven model**. Teachers are not merely transmitters of curriculum—they are co-creators of classroom reality. Unless their voices, contexts, and feedback are central to reform strategies, CBC will remain aspirational rather than transformational. Moreover, the use of real-time data—such as classroom-based observations, teacher feedback loops, and school performance dashboards—can help identify what is working, where, and why. Such evidence-based practice can then inform targeted interventions, rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

Discussion

This research revealed that while Nigeria has made policy-level strides towards the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in elementary education, the actual practice in classrooms remains far from transformative. National curriculum revisions and official guidelines between 2015 and 2024 reflect CBC intentions—emphasising critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, and digital literacy. However, systemic inertia, underprepared teachers, outdated assessment systems, and infrastructure deficits have significantly hindered the practical realisation of these competencies. While pockets of success were observed—particularly in pilot schools supported by NGOs or donor programmes—the majority of public elementary schools continued to default to traditional, teacher-centred approaches. Teachers expressed limited understanding of CBC principles, and many received little or no sustained professional development. Consequently, learner engagement with 21st-century skills was uneven, and student performance in competency-aligned assessments remained low. The findings of this research align with both regional and international observations on CBC implementation. In Kenya and Rwanda, for instance, early CBC reform also encountered similar hurdles: unprepared teachers, misaligned assessments, and infrastructural bottlenecks. Like Nigeria, these countries launched bold policies, but classroom practice took longer to catch up (Njiru & Odundo, 2024; Ahmed, 2025).

However, there are notable differences as well. In countries like Finland and Canada, policy reforms were accompanied by strong institutional investment in teacher autonomy, continuous training, and formative assessment redesign (Ghosh, 2025). Unlike the Nigerian scenario, where CBC often seemed top-down and compliance-driven, reforms in those contexts were more consultative and educator-focused. This contrast underscores how crucial stakeholder engagement and local capacity-building are for CBC success. The CBC reform journey in Nigeria speaks to a larger educational phenomenon: the tension between ambitious curricular ideals and the real-world limitations of under-resourced systems. The findings suggest that curriculum reform alone does not lead to educational transformation—it must be matched with a coherent ecosystem of teacher empowerment, infrastructure development, assessment innovation, and local contextualisation. The research significance lies in its longitudinal scope, providing a rare empirical window into how national education reforms evolve—not just in theory, but in classrooms. The Nigerian CBC experience reflects broader challenges facing education systems in the Global South that aspire to global standards while grappling with local constraints. It also echoes UNESCO's argument that education reform is not merely technical but profoundly cultural and systemic.

This research carries several important implications for education stakeholders:

1. **For policymakers**: The research stresses the need for reforms to be backed by sustainable funding, consistent policy alignment, and performance-based teacher support systems. Otherwise, CBC risks being a rhetorical gesture rather than a genuine shift in practice.
2. **For educators**: Teachers are the linchpin of curriculum implementation. Their empowerment through targeted, ongoing professional development—not just one-off workshops—is essential.
3. **For education reform agencies (e.g., NERDC, UBEC)**: Data-driven, teacher-informed feedback mechanisms must be institutionalised to continuously improve CBC delivery.
4. **For development partners and NGOs**: Collaborative models that combine infrastructure support, teacher mentoring, and digital resources can create pockets of success that are scalable.

5. **For curriculum theorists and education researchers**: The Nigerian case provides fertile ground for rethinking how curriculum change is interpreted, owned, and adapted in culturally diverse and resource-constrained contexts.

The outcomes of this research reflect deeply embedded structural and systemic issues in Nigeria's basic education sector. CBC was introduced within an education system already burdened by overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, inconsistent funding, and a culture of high-stakes testing. These contextual realities created a significant **implementation gap**—a disjunction between policy aspiration and classroom reality. Additionally, CBC reforms were often rolled out without sufficient stakeholder sensitisation, leading to misinterpretation or superficial adoption. Many teachers did not feel ownership of the reforms, which were perceived as top-down mandates rather than co-created pedagogical shifts. Furthermore, Nigeria's decentralised education system meant that some states prioritised CBC, while others lacked the capacity or political will to follow through. These asymmetries contributed to the unevenness observed in the results.

To move from aspiration to impact, several actions must be considered:

1. **Redesign Teacher Training**: Pre-service and in-service education must embed CBC principles deeply, not as add-ons. Universities and colleges of education need to revise their curricula to align with the demands of learner-centred, competence-focused teaching.
2. **Institutionalise Continuous Professional Development**: A national framework for ongoing CBC training, mentorship, and classroom support should be rolled out, particularly in rural and underserved schools.
3. **Reform Assessment Systems**: Aligning assessments with CBC requires a shift from rote-based examinations to formative, competency-based evaluations. This will necessitate a rethink of national testing frameworks like the BECE.
4. **Invest in Infrastructure and Learning Resources**: CBC thrives in resource-rich, flexible learning environments. Investment in digital learning tools, teacher aids, and school infrastructure is non-negotiable.
5. **Strengthen Policy-Implementation Linkages**: Implementation must be locally grounded. Feedback loops, pilot evaluations, and teacher forums should be institutionalised to guide adaptation and improvement.
6. **Foster Teacher Ownership and Leadership**: Teachers must be seen not just as recipients of reform but as co-authors of change. Policy reforms should incorporate teacher voices at every stage—from design to evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine how Nigeria's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reforms have unfolded in elementary education between 2015 and 2024, focusing on how curriculum ideals translated into classroom realities. Through a rich synthesis of secondary data from national policy documents, evaluation reports, and peer-reviewed literature, the research presents a multi-layered understanding of the reform's implementation, challenges, and emerging patterns. Unlike many previous studies that concentrated on either theoretical debates or small-scale empirical snapshots, this research offers a broader, longitudinal, and national-level analysis that uncovers a crucial divergence between *policy architecture* and *instructional practice*. One of the most striking findings, which departs from much of the existing literature, is the systemic tendency towards "surface-level compliance"—a phenomenon where CBC principles are acknowledged in

documentation and teacher lesson plans but are rarely enacted meaningfully in classroom teaching or learner assessment. Another distinctive insight is the documented resistance to pedagogical shift among teachers—not necessarily out of unwillingness, but largely due to structural barriers, workload pressures, and lack of sustained professional development. While many global studies emphasise teacher empowerment as a central pillar of CBC success, this research illustrates how institutional inertia and fragmented support systems have prevented Nigerian teachers from owning and effectively implementing CBC reforms. The findings challenge reformers and policymakers to go beyond curricular rhetoric and invest deeply in the systems, structures, and people who bring education to life. Only by bridging the gap between policy intention and classroom reality can the promise of competency-based learning truly transform the future of Nigerian basic education. This research contributes to the body of educational reform studies in several key ways. Conceptually, it introduces the idea of "implementation dissonance"—the mismatch between curriculum intent and classroom practice—not as a theoretical flaw but as a systemic consequence of under-resourced and policy-fragmented environments. This lens offers a more nuanced framework for evaluating curriculum reforms in contexts marked by decentralisation and disparity. While the research offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The exclusive reliance on secondary data—though methodologically valid—means that it cannot fully capture the lived experiences of teachers, learners, and school leaders at the granular level. Classroom dynamics, teacher beliefs, and student responses to CBC-driven methods remain underexplored. The absence of direct observational or interview data also limits the ability to probe into nuances such as emotional labour, implicit resistance, or adaptive strategies used by teachers to "make CBC work" in real time.

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