



# ASSESSING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHIFT FROM CONTENT BASED TO COMPETENCY BASED CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceptions of primary school teachers in Nigeria regarding the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum. A descriptive survey design was used, and the population comprised 149 public higher Basic education teachers in two Local Government Areas of Cross River State. The instrument for data collection was a 15-item questionnaire titled "Basic Education Teachers Questionnaire on the Shift from Content Based to Competency Based Curriculum in Nigeria" (BETQISCCN). The questionnaire was validated by three experts in teacher education and educational psychology and had a reliability coefficient of 0.81. The major findings of the study revealed that both male and female basic teachers in Nigeria had a positive perception of the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum, with an overall acceptance of the curriculum reform. This suggests that teachers believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student learning outcomes, their own teaching practices, and empower students to become agents of change in their communities. One of the recommendations is that Nigerian government and educational stakeholders to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge in implementing the competency-based curriculum.

**KEYWORDS:** Primary school, teachers, perception, content based, competency based, curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nigeria's education system has undergone significant reforms aimed at enhancing the quality of education and equipping students for the challenges of the 21st century (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013).

A pivotal aspect of these reforms is the transition from a content-based curriculum to a competency-based curriculum. This shift is driven by the need to move beyond traditional rote memorization towards a skills-based approach that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and

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collaboration (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Research has criticized the content-based curriculum for its focus on memorization and recall, which limits students' ability to think critically and solve problems, contributing to a lack of preparedness for the modern workforce (Kozma, 2011). In response, the Nigerian government introduced a new curriculum framework that emphasizes developing key competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and communication (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2017). The content-based curriculum focuses on transmitting knowledge and acquiring facts, concepts, and skills in specific subjects or disciplines (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This approach emphasizes covering a specific body of knowledge, with teachers often expected to deliver predetermined curriculum content to students (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Characteristics of this approach include a focus on knowledge transmission from teacher to student, emphasis on specific curriculum content coverage, use of textbooks and other resources, emphasis on rote memorization, and preparation for standardized tests and assessments.

Conversely, the competency-based curriculum focuses on developing skills and abilities rather than merely transmitting knowledge (Spady, 1994). This approach is deemed more relevant to the modern economy, where adaptability, innovation, and complex problem-solving are essential (World Economic Forum, 2016). The new curriculum framework also emphasizes cross-cutting themes such as entrepreneurship, civic education, and values education, alongside core subjects like mathematics, language, and science (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2017). This approach prioritizes deeper understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills over mere knowledge acquisition (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Characteristics of the competency-based curriculum include a focus on developing key competencies, student-centered learning and inquiry, project-based and problem-solving learning strategies, emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, and preparing students for 21st-century success rather than just standardized tests.

The key differences between content-based and competency-based curriculum approaches can be summarized as follows:

- **Focus:** Content-based curriculum emphasizes knowledge transmission, while competency-based curriculum emphasizes key competencies and skills development.
- **Emphasis:** Content-based curriculum focuses on specific curriculum content coverage, while competency-based curriculum emphasizes deeper understanding and critical thinking skills.
- **Teaching approach:** Content-based curriculum often involves a traditional, teacher-centered approach, while competency-based curriculum involves a student-centered approach.
- **Assessment:** Content-based curriculum often involves standardized tests and assessments, while competency-based curriculum involves authentic, performance-based assessments (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Teacher perceptions are crucial for the successful implementation of curriculum reform, as teachers are key stakeholders responsible for translating the curriculum into practice (Fullan, 2007). Teachers' perceptions of curriculum reform can significantly influence their motivation, attitude, and behavior towards implementing the new curriculum (Guskey, 2018). Research shows that teacher perceptions can either facilitate or hinder curriculum reform implementation, depending on whether they are positive or negative (Hall & Hord, 2020).

Studies consistently demonstrate that teacher perceptions are critical in curriculum reform implementation (Hargreaves, 2018). Teachers' perceptions of curriculum reform can influence their willingness to adopt new teaching practices, enthusiasm for the reform, and ability to overcome obstacles and challenges (Spillane, 2004). Moreover, teacher perceptions can impact student learning outcomes, as teachers who are positive about curriculum reform are more likely to create supportive learning environments that foster student engagement and motivation (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In the context of Nigeria's shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum, teacher perceptions are particularly important. The new curriculum requires teachers to adopt a more student-centered approach, focus on developing key competencies, and assess student learning more holistically (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2017).

Teachers who are positive about the curriculum reform are more likely to be motivated to learn new skills, adapt their teaching practices, and overcome challenges associated with implementing the new curriculum (O'Sullivan, 2004).

Conversely, negative teacher perceptions can hinder curriculum reform implementation, leading to resistance to change, lack of enthusiasm, and poor student learning outcomes (Hargreaves, 2018). Therefore, understanding teacher perceptions of the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum in Nigeria is essential to identify strategies for supporting teachers in this transition and ensuring successful curriculum reform implementation.

The theoretical framework of teacher change is based on the idea that teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices are shaped by their experiences, knowledge, and context (Fullan, 2007). Understanding teacher change is critical for curriculum reform implementation, as teachers are key stakeholders responsible for translating the curriculum into practice.

Theoretical frameworks that inform teacher change include Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that teachers' behaviors and attitudes are shaped by observations, experiences, and social interactions, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which suggests that teachers' intentions to implement curriculum reform are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

The theoretical framework of curriculum implementation is based on the idea that curriculum reform implementation is a complex process involving multiple stakeholders, factors, and stages (Hall & Hord, 2011). Theoretical frameworks that inform curriculum implementation include the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2011), which suggests that teachers' implementation of curriculum reform is influenced by their concerns, levels of use, and stages of implementation, and the Innovation-Decision Process Model (Rogers, 2003), which posits that teachers' adoption of curriculum reform is influenced by their perception of the innovation, its relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, and trialability.

A study by Okebukola (2013) on teacher perceptions of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) curriculum in Nigeria found mixed

reactions, with some teachers seeing it as an opportunity for improved teaching and learning, while others expressed concerns about resource availability and inadequate training. Another study by Adeyemi and Adu (2013) on teacher perceptions of Nigerian curriculum reform in secondary schools found that teachers perceived the reform as positively impacting student learning outcomes but expressed concerns about the lack of teacher involvement in the reform process. A study by Totto et al. (2012) on teacher perceptions of curriculum reform in Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa found that teachers in these countries perceived the reforms as positively impacting student learning outcomes but expressed concerns about resource availability, inadequate training, and high-stakes testing. A study by Webb et al. (2011) on teacher perceptions of curriculum reform in the United States found that teachers perceived the reforms as positively impacting student learning outcomes but expressed concerns about lack of autonomy, high-stakes testing, and inadequate resources. A study by Kennedy (2012) on teacher perceptions of curriculum reform in Australia found that teachers perceived the reforms as positively impacting student learning outcomes but expressed concerns about lack of teacher involvement in the reform process, inadequate training, and high-stakes testing.

Despite these studies, there is a significant gap in knowledge regarding teacher perceptions of the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum in Nigeria. Specifically, there is a need to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do primary school teachers in Nigeria perceive the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum?
2. What factors influence teacher perceptions of curriculum reform?
3. How do teacher perceptions of curriculum reform impact their teaching practices and student learning outcomes?

## METHODOLOGY

1. This study sets out to assess Basic teachers' perceptions of the shift from content based to competency based curriculum in Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. This design seeks information from respondents as the situation exists without manipulating any variables. The study was carried out in Calabar Municipal North and Calabar South

Local Government Areas of Cross River State. The population comprises 149 public higher Basic education teachers in the two Local Government Areas (93 females and 56 males). The population also serves as the sample size because of the number. Instrument for data collection was perception questionnaire titled "Basic Education Teachers Questionnaire on the Shift from Content Based to Competency Based Curriculum in Nigeria." (BETQISCCN). A 23-item questionnaire designed by researchers and validated by three experts in teacher education and educational psychology. The instrument has part 1 and 2. Part one sought for demographic information of respondent, while part two is group A, B and C. A sought information to determine the perception of public Basic school teachers on the shift from content based to competency based curriculum in Nigeria. 'B' sought information to determine the perception of public Basic school teachers on factors that influence teacher perceptions of curriculum reform and 'C' sought information to

determine the perception of public Basic school teachers on curriculum reform impact on their teaching practices and student learning outcomes. The research questions had four response categories of strongly agree (SA); Agree (A); disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) scoring 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was face validated by three experts in the Department of Psychology/ Measurement and Evaluation, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri. Their contributions gave rise to the final instrument used for the study. The instrument was subjected to trial testing using Cronbach Alpha to determine its internal consistency using thirty six primary school teachers outside the study population. The reliability of (BETQISCCN) was 0.81. The instrument was administered to the respondents with the help of two trained research assistants which ensured 100% return. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The decision rule was that any mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted otherwise it was rejected. The value of 2.50 was considered as a benchmark for decision making

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of male and female Basic teachers' perceptions of the shift from content based to competency based curriculum in Nigeria

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male teachers			Female teacher		
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
1	I believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student learning outcomes	3.52	0.63	Accept	3.55	0.67	Accept
2	I feel prepared to implement the competency-based curriculum in my classroom.	3.51	0.70	Accept	3.52	0.73	Accept
3	I have enough resources to implement the competency-based curriculum in my classroom	3.23	0.58	Accept	3.25	0.59	Accept
4	I have received adequate training to implement the competency-based curriculum in my classroom.	3.41	0.59	Accept	3.40	0.61	Accept
5	I believe the competency-based curriculum will improve my teaching practices	3.59	0.78	Accept	3.56	0.76	Accept
6	I believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student engagement in my classroom	3.05	0.61	Accept	3.08	0.59	Accept
7	I believe that integrating eco-friendly concepts will empower students to become agents of change in their communities	3.42	0.51	Accept	3.40	0.51	Accept
8	I believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student creativity in my classroom.	3.35	0.64	Accept	3.38	0.67	Accept
9	I believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student critical thinking skills in my classroom	3.51	0.73	Accept	3.50	0.73	Accept
10	I believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student problem-solving skills in my classroom	3.35	0.63	Accept	3.33	0.64	Accept
	Cluster mean	3.494			3.497		
	Average mean response						

Both male and female basic teachers in Nigeria have a positive perception of the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum. The average mean responses for both groups are above 3.4, indicating an overall acceptance of the curriculum reform. This

suggests that teachers believe the competency-based curriculum will improve student learning outcomes, their own teaching practices, and empower students to become agents of change in their communities.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of male and female Basic teachers' perception on the curriculum reform on the shift from content based to competency based

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male students			Female students		
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
1	I use more student-centered learning strategies in my classroom since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.44	0.62	Accept	3.45	0.64	Accept
2	I use more project-based learning strategies in my classroom since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.55	0.72	Accept	3.58	0.73	Accept
3	I use more performance-based assessments in my classroom since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.23	0.58	Accept	3.25	0.59	Accept
4	I have observed an improvement in student learning outcomes since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum	3.51	0.61	Accept	3.49	0.63	Accept
5	I have observed an improvement in student engagement since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.59	0.78	Accept	3.56	0.76	Accept
6	I have observed an improvement in student motivation since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.10	0.60	Accept	3.13	0.59	Accept
7	I have observed an improvement in student creativity since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.40	0.51	Accept	3.42	0.51	Accept
8	I have observed an improvement in student critical thinking skills since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.45	0.74	Accept	3.48	0.77	Accept
9	I have observed an improvement in student problem-solving skills since the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.	3.55	0.73	Accept	3.50	0.73	Accept
	Cluster mean	31.86			3.540		
	Average mean response						

Both male and female basic teachers in Nigeria have a positive perception of the impact of the curriculum reform on their teaching practices and student learning outcomes. The average mean responses for both groups are above 3.5, indicating that teachers have observed

improvements in areas such as student-centered learning, project-based learning, and student outcomes. This suggests that the implementation of the competency-based curriculum has positively influenced teaching practices and student learning.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of male and female Basic teachers' perception on the factors that influence teacher perceptions of the curriculum reform

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male students			Female students		
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
1	The competency-based curriculum has changed my approach to teaching and learning.	3.15	0.52	Accept	3.19	0.54	Accept
2	I believe that the competency-based curriculum has improved student engagement and motivation	3.05	0.49	Accept	3.09	0.50	Accept
3	The competency-based curriculum has helped me to better assess student learning outcomes	3.12	0.50	Accept	3.14	0.49	Accept
4	I believe that the competency-based curriculum has prepared students better for the challenges of the 21st century.	3.53	0.63	Accept	3.50	0.63	Accept
Cluster mean		3.213			3.230		
Average mean response							

Both male and female basic teachers in Nigeria have a positive perception of the factors that influence their perceptions of the curriculum reform. The average mean responses for both groups are above 3.2, indicating that teachers believe the competency-based curriculum has changed their teaching approach, improved student engagement and motivation, and better prepared students for the challenges of the 21st century. This suggests that teachers recognize the potential benefits of the curriculum reform and are receptive to the changes

## DISCUSSION

The results from the three tables suggest that primary school teachers in Nigeria have a positive perception of the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum, as well as the impact of this curriculum reform on their teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

As described in the introduction, the shift to a competency-based curriculum is driven by the need to move beyond rote memorization and towards a more skills-based approach that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The study findings align with this, as both male and female teachers had average mean responses above 3.4 for their perceptions of the curriculum reform (Table 1). This indicates an overall acceptance of the shift, suggesting that teachers believe the new competency-based approach will improve student learning and empower students to become agents of change, as noted by the authors.

Furthermore, the teachers had positive perceptions of the impact of the curriculum reform on their teaching practices and student learning outcomes, with average mean responses above 3.5 for both male and female teachers (Table 2).

This aligns with the authors' discussion of the competency-based curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning, project-based learning, and improved student outcomes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2017).

Regarding the factors that influence teacher perceptions of the curriculum reform, the average mean responses for both male and female teachers were above 3.2 (Table 3). This suggests that teachers recognize the potential benefits of the competency-based curriculum, such as changes to their teaching approach, improved student engagement and motivation, and better preparation of students for the challenges of the 21st century. This is consistent with the authors' discussion of the importance of teacher perceptions in the successful implementation of curriculum reforms (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2018; Hall & Hord, 2020).

Overall, the study findings indicate that primary school teachers in Nigeria have a positive perception of the shift to a competency-based curriculum, which aligns with the authors' emphasis on the need for this reform and the importance of teacher perceptions in its successful implementation.

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings indicate that primary school teachers in Nigeria have a positive perception of the shift from a content-based to a competency-based curriculum. The results suggest that teachers believe the new curriculum reform has the potential to improve student learning outcomes, empower students to become agents of change, and better prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Nigerian government and educational stakeholders should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge in implementing the competency-based curriculum. This will ensure that teachers are equipped to effectively deliver the new curriculum and address any challenges that may arise during implementation.

2. Teachers should be involved in the development of the competency-based curriculum to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard. This will increase their ownership and

3. motivation to implement the new curriculum effectively.

4. Nigerian government and educational stakeholders should establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the implementation of the competency-based curriculum. This will help identify areas of strength and weakness, and inform policy decisions to improve the curriculum reform.

5. The Nigerian government should provide adequate resources and infrastructure to support the implementation of the competency-based curriculum. This includes textbooks, technology, and other learning materials that align with the new curriculum.

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