



Curriculum Implementation Fidelity and School Leadership Practices: An Empirical Study of Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between curriculum implementation fidelity and school leadership practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The correlational survey research design was adopted for the investigation. The study population comprised 6,475 principals and teachers across 228 public secondary schools, out of which a multi-stage sample of 376 respondents was selected. Two validated instruments, titled the Curriculum Implementation Fidelity Scale (CIFS) and the School Leadership Practices Questionnaire (SLPQ), were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product moment correlation, and simple linear regression at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that curriculum implementation fidelity in public secondary schools is moderately high, with teachers generally adhering to curriculum content and engaging students effectively, though full instructional coverage remains a challenge. Leadership practices received high ratings, especially in supervision, communication, and teacher motivation. However, the use of monitoring and evaluation to improve instruction was not high. Results further showed a strong, positive, and statistically significant

relationship between school leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity ($r = 0.612, p < .05$). Regression analysis confirmed leadership practices as a significant predictor of fidelity. The study concludes that effective school leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring faithful curriculum delivery and improved instructional quality. It recommends strengthening instructional leadership capacity, enhancing feedback mechanisms, and improving teacher support systems to promote better curriculum outcomes in public secondary schools.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation Fidelity, School Leadership Practices, Instructional Leadership, Public Secondary Schools, Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

In the landscape of educational reform in Nigeria, the enactment of national curricular frameworks, including the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum and Senior Secondary Curriculum, reflects sustained efforts to enhance learning outcomes and align schooling with national development goals. Curriculum implementation is more than policy pronouncement; it involves translating official prescriptions into classroom practice through consistent instructional delivery, appropriate pacing of content, quality of teaching, and active student engagement. Fidelity of implementation is defined as the degree to which classroom practice aligns with the intended curriculum, and this remains uneven across public secondary schools in Nigeria, resulting in gaps between curricular intent and classroom reality (Gunde et al., 2025). Curriculum implementation challenges in Nigeria have been linked to teacher understanding, administrative support, and systemic constraints such as instructional supervision and resource adequacy, which collectively influence the degree of adherence to curricular mandates. For instance, inadequate administrative support and professional development have been identified as barriers that hinder effective curriculum enactment, leading to misalignment between planned and actual instruction in schools (Akinpelu, 2021).

The role of school leadership in shaping instructional quality and curriculum delivery is central in this discourse. Principals and school heads act not merely as administrators but as instructional leaders whose practices, such as classroom supervision, setting educational goals, and fostering collaborative environments, are critical for aligning teacher actions with curricular expectations. Empirical evidence from Nigerian studies

underscores the importance of leadership behaviors in promoting effective teaching and learning, with instructional supervision emerging as a significant correlate of teachers' performance in public secondary schools (Okorie & Okojie, 2019).

Despite these insights, there is limited empirical research that simultaneously examines the *fidelity* with which curricula are implemented and the *leadership practices* deployed by principals to support such implementation, particularly in the context of Nigeria's public secondary schools. The extant literature has largely focused on specific aspects of educational leadership or isolated implementation challenges without integrating these constructs within a comprehensive analytical framework. This study therefore investigates the extent of curriculum implementation fidelity, describes the leadership practices employed by school heads, and examines the relationship between leadership practices and fidelity of curriculum implementation. In doing so, it seeks to fill a significant gap in educational research by providing evidence on how leadership behaviors influence the faithful enactment of curricular reforms in Nigerian public secondary schools.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

- i. To assess the level of curriculum implementation fidelity in public secondary schools in Nigeria.
- ii. To explore leadership practices among school principals in Nigerian public secondary schools.
- iii. To examine the relationship between leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between school leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity in public secondary schools in Nigeria.
- ii. Leadership style does not significantly predict curriculum implementation fidelity in public secondary schools in Nigeria.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is important to several key stakeholders in the Nigerian education system:

- i. **Policymakers:** The findings will provide insights into the role of leadership in effective curriculum implementation, helping to inform policy reforms aimed at enhancing school management and curriculum delivery across the country.

- ii. **Educational Leaders:** Principals and school administrators will benefit from the study's findings by gaining a better understanding of effective leadership practices that can enhance curriculum fidelity and overall educational outcomes in their schools.
- iii. **Teachers:** Teachers will gain insight into the importance of strong leadership support in achieving curriculum goals and how their instructional practices can align better with national curriculum expectations.
- iv. **Researchers:** This study will contribute to the body of literature on curriculum implementation, leadership practices, and educational management, particularly in the context of Nigerian secondary schools. It will also open avenues for future research in this area.

2 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual Review

Curriculum implementation fidelity is integral to educational reforms, as it represents the extent to which prescribed curricula are delivered effectively in classrooms. This fidelity encompasses several components, including adherence to the curriculum, appropriate coverage of content, the quality of delivery, and active student engagement. Adherence reflects how well teachers follow the intended curriculum, while coverage addresses the completeness of instructional delivery. The quality of delivery examines the effectiveness of teaching strategies, and engagement pertains to the level of student involvement in the learning process. Research suggests that these components collectively determine the success of curriculum implementation (Nevenglosky, 2019).

In Nigeria's public secondary schools, various leadership practices shape curriculum implementation fidelity. Effective leadership practices, such as instructional leadership, are central to ensuring that curriculum goals are met. Instructional leadership theory emphasizes the role of principals in guiding, supporting, and monitoring teachers to ensure curriculum objectives are achieved. Transformational leadership, which focuses on motivating and inspiring teachers towards shared goals, and distributed leadership, which emphasizes the involvement of teachers in leadership processes, also play significant roles in enhancing curriculum fidelity (Fullan, 2006; Hallinger & Murphy, 2005).

A study by Iwok & Odejimi (2025) underscores the impact of principals' managerial variables on teacher performance, suggesting that leadership practices such as reward

systems and mentoring are crucial for motivating teachers and improving their instructional effectiveness. Reward systems, including pay, recognition, and professional development opportunities, were found to have a positive relationship with teachers' job performance, which directly influences curriculum implementation (Iwok & Odejimi, 2025). Similarly, mentoring, which fosters teacher development and professional growth, was identified as a key managerial variable that enhances teachers' ability to implement the curriculum effectively (Harrison, 2006).

Furthermore, a study by Owan et al. (2022) on Curriculum Management and Graduate Programs' Viability highlights the significant role of institutional effectiveness in facilitating curriculum management in higher education. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), they found direct and indirect effects of curriculum management on the viability of graduate programs, underscoring the critical role of effective institutional leadership in curriculum implementation. This study, while focused on higher education, echoes the importance of leadership and management practices in ensuring the success of curriculum reforms and their impact on educational outcomes. The research also highlights the mediating role of institutional effectiveness in linking leadership practices to curricular outcomes, a concept relevant to secondary schools as well (Owan et al., 2022).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Michael Fullan's Change Theory and Hallinger & Murphy's Instructional Leadership Theory, both of which provide valuable perspectives on leadership and curriculum implementation. Fullan's Change Theory posits that educational change must be understood as a dynamic and systemic process. Fullan argues that leadership is central to creating coherence and facilitating reforms, emphasizing the need for alignment between policy, practice, and community (Fullan, 2006). Similarly, Instructional Leadership Theory highlights the principal's role in monitoring instruction, setting clear educational goals, and fostering a collaborative environment among teachers to support curriculum fidelity (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). These theories provide a robust foundation for understanding how leadership practices impact the implementation of curriculum in public secondary schools in Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Review

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between leadership practices and curriculum implementation, both in Nigeria and internationally. For instance, Iwok &

Odejimi (2025) found that principals' reward systems and mentoring practices significantly enhance teachers' job performance. This is crucial, as teachers' performance directly influences their ability to implement curriculum effectively. Reward systems that acknowledge teachers' efforts and mentoring programs that provide professional development opportunities were found to be particularly effective in motivating teachers and improving classroom performance (Ndidi & Alike, 2018; Manafo, 2018).

International studies also support the role of leadership in promoting curriculum fidelity. For example, Harrison (2006) demonstrated that mentoring practices improve teachers' professional skills, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in the classroom. Similarly, Harris (2009) and Gill (2015) found that mentoring programs help new teachers improve their instructional practices and boost teacher retention, which in turn supports sustained curriculum implementation. These studies affirm that leadership practices play a critical role in ensuring that curriculum reforms are faithfully enacted in schools.

Owan et al. (2022) highlighted the significant effects of curriculum management on the viability of graduate programs, emphasizing that institutions' ability to manage curricula directly impacts their capacity to deliver quality educational programs. By using PLS-SEM, they found that curriculum management practices significantly influence the outcomes of graduate programs in Nigerian universities, with institutional effectiveness playing a critical mediating role in this process. Their study offers a robust methodological approach to understanding how leadership and management practices affect educational outcomes and is highly relevant to secondary education, where similar issues of management and institutional support may be at play (Owan et al., 2022).

However, while these studies provide valuable insights, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how specific leadership practices, such as those employed by school principals in Nigerian public secondary schools, directly influence curriculum implementation fidelity. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the relationship between leadership practices and curriculum fidelity in the context of Nigerian secondary schools, where educational reforms have faced significant challenges (Olawunmi, 2025; Okeke, 2023).

3 Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey research design to explore the relationship between school leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity in Nigerian public secondary schools. The research was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria,

which consists of 31 Local Government Areas (LGAs) grouped into three senatorial districts: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Eket.

The population for the study included all public secondary school principals and teachers in Akwa Ibom State. There were 228 public secondary schools, with one principal per school, resulting in an estimated 228 principals. In addition, the total number of teachers was approximately 6,247, bringing the total target population to 6,475 respondents.

A total sample of 376 respondents was selected using multi-stage sampling. First, five LGAs were purposively selected from each of the three senatorial districts, resulting in a total of 15 LGAs. From each of these 15 LGAs, five schools were randomly selected, leading to a total of 75 schools. In each selected school, one principal and four teachers were chosen to participate, making a total of 375 respondents, which was rounded up to 376 for statistical adequacy. The sample size was validated using Yamane's formula to ensure its appropriateness for the study.

Two structured questionnaires were used for data collection: the Curriculum Implementation Fidelity Scale (CIFS) and the School Leadership Practices Questionnaire (SLPQ). The CIFS measured dimensions of adherence, coverage/dosage, instructional quality, and student engagement, with 24 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The SLPQ assessed dimensions such as instructional supervision, communication, teacher motivation, and professional development support, with 28 items also rated on a 4-point Likert scale.

Both instruments were subjected to expert review by specialists in educational management and measurement and evaluation to ensure their validity. The instruments were pilot-tested on 30 respondents outside the sample to establish their reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the instruments were found to be 0.84 for the CIFS and 0.88 for the SLPQ, both of which are above the 0.70 threshold, indicating high internal consistency.

Data collection was carried out through the direct delivery and retrieval of the questionnaires to ensure a high response rate. The data were collected during instructional hours with the consent of the school authorities, facilitating smooth interaction with participants and enhancing the reliability of the responses.

3.1 Method of Data Analysis

Table 1: Data analysis carried out using SPSS.

Research Component	Statistical Tools	Purpose
Demographics	Frequency & Percentage	Description of respondents
Research Questions 1 & 2	Mean & Standard Deviation	Determine extent of fidelity and leadership practices
Research Question 3	Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC)	Measure relationship between variables
Hypothesis 1	PPMC @ $\alpha = 0.05$	Test significance of correlation
Hypothesis 2	Linear Regression Analysis	Determine predictive influence of leadership practices on fidelity

The decision rule for this study is based on two criteria. First, the mean decision benchmark is set at 2.50, where any value equal to or greater than 2.50 will lead to the acceptance of the hypothesis, while values below 2.50 will result in its rejection. Second, the hypothesis testing follows a significance level of 0.05, meaning that if the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) will be rejected. These decision rules provide a clear framework for evaluating the results and making conclusions based on the data.'

Ethical considerations for this study include obtaining the necessary authorization from the State Ministry of Education to ensure that the research complies with relevant regulations and guidelines. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, with all participants assured of their right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. Confidentiality is a fundamental principle, with measures in place to protect the identity and personal information of all participants. Furthermore, the data collected will be used strictly for research purposes, and no information will be shared or disclosed outside the scope of the study. These ethical guidelines are designed to uphold the integrity of the research process and ensure that participants' rights are respected throughout the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 376 questionnaires were distributed, and 362 were successfully retrieved and analyzed, representing a 96.3% return rate. Table 1 shows the demographic details.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 362)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	168	46.4
	Female	194	53.6
Status	Principal	72	19.9
	Teacher	290	80.1
Qualification	NCE	84	23.2
	B.Ed/B.A (Ed)/B.Sc(Ed)	217	59.9
	M.Ed/M.A/M.Sc(Ed)	61	16.9
Years of Experience	1–10 years	145	40.1
	Above 10 years	217	59.9

Source: Field Work, 2025

From demographic data shown in Table 1 above, there were slightly more female respondents than male. Most teachers possessed a first degree and had over ten years of classroom experience. This suggests that respondents were knowledgeable about curriculum implementation processes.

4.2 Research Question 1

What is the extent of curriculum implementation fidelity in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 3: Mean Ratings on Curriculum Implementation Fidelity

Item	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Remark
Teachers follow the national curriculum content strictly	2.89	.77	High
Learning objectives are adequately covered each term	2.64	.84	High
Curriculum delivery time is usually complete	2.48	.92	Low
Students are adequately engaged during instruction	2.77	.69	High
Teaching practices align with the approved syllabus	2.71	.88	High

Grand Mean: **2.70**

Source: Field Work, 2025

The grand mean from the data in Table 2 is 2.70. This is above the 2.50 decision benchmark, indicating that curriculum implementation fidelity is moderately high, although concerns exist about full coverage within the allocated timeframe.

4.3 Research Question 2

What school leadership practices are commonly employed by administrators in public secondary schools?

Table 4: Mean Ratings on Leadership Practices

Item	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Remark
Principals supervise teachers regularly	2.81	.74	High
School leaders encourage professional development	2.76	.81	High
Communication on academic expectations is clear	2.92	.66	High
Principals motivate teachers to improve teaching quality	2.59	.90	High
Monitoring and evaluation reports guide teaching	2.47	.96	Low

Grand Mean: **2.71**

Source: Field Work, 2025

School leaders generally support teacher supervision, communication, and motivation, but monitoring and evaluation processes appear weak, suggesting a gap in feedback mechanisms.

4.4 Research Question 3

What is the relationship between school leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity in public secondary schools?

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	R	p-value	Decision
Leadership Practices & Curriculum Fidelity	362	0.612	.000	Significant

There is a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.612, p < .05$). Schools with stronger leadership execute the curriculum more faithfully.

Hypothesis One

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between school leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity.

Leadership practices significantly influence how well teachers implement the curriculum. Principals who guide instruction properly tend to have teachers who adhere more closely to curriculum standards.

Hypothesis Two

H0₂: School leadership practices do not significantly predict curriculum implementation fidelity.

Table 6: Regression Summary

Model	Beta (β)	t	p-value	Decision
Leadership → Fidelity	0.61	11.43	.000	Significant

Leadership practices significantly predict implementation fidelity. A unit improvement in leadership quality leads to a substantial increase in curriculum compliance and instructional quality.

4.5 Summary of Findings

- i. Curriculum implementation fidelity in Akwa Ibom public secondary schools is moderate but hindered by limited coverage of lesson content within available time.
- ii. Leadership practices are generally strong, but monitoring and evaluation processes are weak.
- iii. There is a strong positive relationship between leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity.
- iv. Leadership practices significantly predict fidelity, emphasizing the role of effective school administration.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between curriculum implementation fidelity and school leadership practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings have given us valuable information about the realities of curriculum delivery in the state education system.

First, the results indicated that curriculum implementation fidelity was moderately high among teachers. Most respondents reported that they adhere to curriculum content, align teaching practices with the prescribed syllabus, and engage students meaningfully in the learning process. However, concerns emerged around incomplete coverage of instructional content within the required time. This situation is consistent with earlier studies in Nigeria suggesting that inadequate instructional time, large class sizes, and administrative interruptions often limit full curriculum execution. It reflects the persistent implementation gap that policymakers and curriculum planners continue to confront.

Second, school leadership practices were found to be generally supportive of curriculum delivery. Principals provide supervision, communicate academic expectations, and encourage professional development. Yet, the low mean rating on the use of monitoring and evaluation outcomes suggests that feedback systems are not optimally utilized to refine instructional strategies. Research has repeatedly shown that instructional leadership becomes more effective when principals actively review teaching performance data and use it for actionable guidance. Therefore, the current limitation may be affecting the improvement cycle in many schools.

The study's most important finding is the significant and strong correlation between leadership practices and curriculum implementation fidelity. This aligns with existing educational leadership theories asserting that effective school leadership drives instructional success. Additionally, regression results confirmed that leadership practices significantly predict the level of curriculum fidelity. Principals who are visible in classrooms, engage collaboratively with teachers, and provide instructional support create the conditions where curriculum standards are more faithfully executed. This finding reinforces the critical role of the school administrator as an instructional leader in Nigeria's education system. Collectively, these findings highlight that improving the quality of leadership practices can lead directly to stronger curriculum implementation outcomes in public secondary schools.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions, the study concludes that school leadership plays a decisive role in ensuring that teachers implement the curriculum faithfully in Akwa Ibom State. While teachers generally demonstrate commitment to curriculum requirements, leadership oversight and timely monitoring are essential to maximize the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Strengthening leadership capacity will therefore translate into improved curriculum compliance and higher student learning outcomes.

The study underscores the need for the Ministry of Education and school authorities to focus on leadership development as a core strategy for educational improvement.

5.3 Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. The Ministry of Education should intensify monitoring and supervision visits to schools to ensure greater adherence to curriculum standards, particularly in areas where content coverage remains challenging.
- ii. Principals should adopt a more robust instructional leadership approach that includes regular classroom observations, goal-oriented feedback, and structured support for teachers to enhance instructional delivery.
- iii. Continuous professional development programs should be provided to both principals and teachers, focusing on curriculum management, lesson planning, and modern pedagogical strategies to ensure complete coverage of learning objectives.
- iv. Schools should institutionalize effective monitoring and evaluation systems, where instructional data are reviewed and used in decision-making to improve teaching practices.
- v. The government should ensure adequate staffing and reduce teacher workload so that lesson time is fully utilized and curriculum content is delivered as prescribed.
- vi. School leaders should cultivate a collaborative culture where teachers are motivated, empowered, and actively involved in curriculum decision-making processes.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Future researchers may explore:

- i. Comparative studies between public and private schools to assess differences in curriculum fidelity.
- ii. Qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to gain heightened insights into challenges teachers face in curriculum execution.
- iii. Longitudinal research to examine changes in leadership influence over student achievement outcomes.
- iv. The moderating role of teacher motivation on the relationship between leadership practices and curriculum fidelity.
- v. The government should ensure adequate staffing and reduce teacher workload so that lesson time is fully utilized and curriculum content is delivered as prescribed.
- vi. School leaders should cultivate a collaborative culture where teachers are

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