

Barriers and Policy Imperatives for Integrating Culturally Relevant Literature in Nigerian Classrooms

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Abstract

Despite overwhelming evidence of its pedagogical value, the integration of culturally relevant literature in Nigerian secondary schools remains limited. This study investigates the systemic, curricular, and linguistic barriers that hinder the adoption of culturally relevant texts in Awka, Anambra State. Using a descriptive survey of 80 SS2 students and 20 teachers across five schools, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and analysed with mean, standard deviation, and thematic analysis. Findings reveal key obstacles such as inadequate teacher training, scarcity of locally relevant materials, curriculum rigidity, time constraints, and language barriers. Policy reforms, teacher professional development, and improved access to indigenous literature are recommended to foster equitable and culturally responsive education.

Introduction

Culturally relevant literature has been shown to improve student engagement, comprehension, and cultural identity (Muhammad, 2020; Haddix, 2019; Villegas & Lucas, 2020). However, in Nigeria its integration remains fraught with challenges. Eurocentric curricula dominate reading lists, limiting students' exposure to texts that reflect their lived experiences (Kelly, 2021; Bobongie-Harris & Youse, 2023). Teachers often lack the training and resources needed to incorporate Nigerian-authored texts, while

examination pressures and policy inertia further constrain innovation.

This study examines these barriers through the lens of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). It focuses on secondary schools in Awka, Anambra State, where a previous investigation highlighted the positive effects of culturally relevant literature on student engagement but also exposed significant obstacles to its implementation.

Literature Review

Challenges of Implementing Culturally Relevant Literature

A growing body of research underscores systemic barriers to culturally responsive teaching. Ogunyemi (2019) identifies a chronic

shortage of locally produced texts in Nigerian school libraries, while Okonkwo and Anyanwu (2019) highlight curriculum rigidity that discourages teachers from deviating from prescribed reading lists. Salami and Okedara (2020) stress inadequate teacher preparation, and Odebunmi (2021) points to language challenges where indigenous texts may require translation or adaptation.

Globally, Hammond (2020) and Musa and Adedimeji (2020) observe that educators frequently face policy constraints and high-stakes testing regimes that discourage experimentation. These findings resonate in Nigeria, where teachers are often evaluated on examination outcomes rather than culturally responsive practice.

Theoretical Review

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2018) provides the framework for analysing these barriers. CRP argues that education should not only promote academic achievement but also affirm cultural competence and critical consciousness. When structural obstacles prevent teachers from using culturally relevant literature, the principles of CRP are undermined, reinforcing inequities in the education system.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design. The population

comprised 720 SS2 students and 35 teachers in five public secondary schools in Awka. Using convenience sampling, 100 respondents were selected (80 students and 20 teachers). Data were collected via a two-point questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using mean (benchmark = 1.50) and standard deviation, while interview responses were analysed thematically.

S/NO	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	AGREE (2)	DISAGREE (1)	MEAN	SD	DECISION
6	Culturally relevant literature strengthens my connection to my cultural identity	80	20	1.80	0.40	Agree
7	Culturally relevant literature increases my confidence during classroom discussions.	76	24	1.76	0.43	Agree
8	Culturally relevant literature makes me feel that my culture is valued in the learning process.	85	15	1.85	0.36	Agree
9	Culturally relevant literature encourages me to share personal experiences during lessons.	78	22	1.78	0.42	Agree
10	Culturally relevant literature increases my willingness to engage in group work and collaborative activities.	82	18	1.82	0.39	Agree

Results

Quantitative Findings

Teachers and students identified multiple barriers to the integration of culturally relevant literature (Table 1). Inadequate teacher training emerged as a primary challenge (Mean = 1.75), followed by scarcity of locally relevant materials (Mean = 1.70), curriculum rigidity (Mean = 1.72), time constraints (Mean = 1.68), and language barriers (Mean = 1.65).

Table 1: Perceptions Regarding Culturally Relevant Literature in Relation to **Students' Sense of Identity, Motivation and Classroom Participation**

Qualitative Insights

Interview data revealed that teachers often lack access to professional development opportunities focused on culturally responsive pedagogy. Some teachers expressed concern that deviating from prescribed syllabi could jeopardise students' performance in national examinations. Students also reported difficulty obtaining locally relevant books, with many schools relying heavily on foreign texts due to availability and cost factors.

Discussion

The findings confirm earlier observations by Hammond (2020) that policy and resource constraints limit the adoption of culturally responsive practices. Teacher training gaps hinder the effective selection and teaching of culturally relevant texts, while rigid

curricula and examination pressures discourage innovation. Musa and Adedimeji (2020) argue that without systemic reform, teachers remain trapped in traditional methods, a dynamic evident in the Awka schools studied.

Language barriers also complicate integration. Although indigenous texts promote cultural pride, limited translation resources and a lack of teacher fluency in local languages impede classroom use. These challenges collectively limit the transformative potential of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that while culturally relevant literature holds promise for enhancing student engagement and cultural identity, its implementation in Nigerian secondary schools is constrained by systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action at multiple levels:

1. **Policy Reform:** Education authorities should revise curricula to incorporate Nigerian-authored texts and provide flexibility for teachers to adapt reading lists.
2. **Teacher Training:** Professional development programmes must equip teachers with skills for sourcing and teaching culturally relevant literature.
3. **Resource Provision:** Government and school administrators should invest in the publication and

distribution of indigenous texts to ensure equitable access.

4. Language Support: Translation services and bilingual teaching resources can help overcome linguistic barriers.

5. Community Collaboration: Partnerships with local authors and cultural organisations can enrich school libraries and foster a culture of literary inclusiveness.

By addressing these barriers, Nigeria can move closer to an education system that affirms cultural identity while promoting academic excellence.

References

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