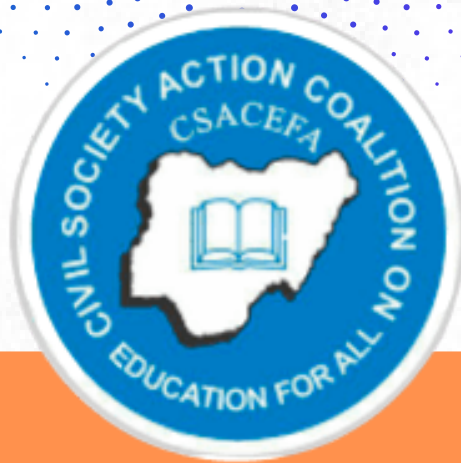




**POLICY BRIEF TO
PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY AND
GENDER EQUITY IN
NIGERIA'S EDUCATION
CURRICULUM REVIEW,
RENEWAL AND REFORM
EFFORTS**



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTION COALITION ON EDUCATION FOR
ALL (CSACEFA) – EDUCATION OUT LOUD (EOL) PROJECT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigeria's education system is at a crossroads. The existing knowledge-based curricula, while rooted in academic rigor, fails to adequately prepare students for the practical demands of the workforce. Additionally, gender inequality remains a significant challenge, with girls often marginalised in critical fields like Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and vocational and technical education (VTE). This policy brief explores the potential of gender-responsive skill-based curricula as an alternative that could address both the skills gap and gender disparities in education.

Findings from a desk review of Nigeria's curriculum reform efforts and educational policies reveal that while the knowledge-based approach has been the foundation of Nigeria's education system, it does not foster critical skills needed in today's rapidly evolving global economy. On the other hand, gender-responsive skill-based curricula, have shown to improve learners' engagement, nurture inclusive learning environments, and equip students with practical skills that enhance their employability.

This policy brief, therefore advocates for education reforms that promote both gender-responsive skill-based education and knowledge-based curricula in Nigeria. This approach will ensure that students, particularly girls, are better prepared for future employment opportunities, while promoting equality in educational outcomes across genders.

Key recommendations the informed this policy brief the need to:

- revise and integrate both skill-based learning and knowledge-based education with a focus on gender responsiveness the Nigeria's education curriculum, at all levels;
- equip teachers with the training and resources needed to deliver a more inclusive curriculum;
- ensure that both boys and girls have equal access to all educational fields, particularly STEM and the VTE;
- strengthen policy frameworks that promote gender equality and skills development across the education sector.

Thus, eight (8) major sections are highlighted in the policy brief framework to guide the formulation of a policy brief that promotes inclusivity and gender-responsiveness in Nigeria's education system. The framework for the policy brief concludes with questions to guide stakeholders' engagement for making inputs into the policy brief; as well as suggesting potential improvements on the existing curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's education system, despite undergoing multiple reforms over the years, continues to face substantial challenges that hinder its ability to prepare students for the modern workforce. These challenges are not only related to outdated curricula but also to deeply rooted in gender disparities that prevent many girls from fully participating in fields like Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and business.

Nigeria's education curriculum, which have been essentially knowledge-based, places significant emphasis on theoretical knowledge and content delivery. However, as the global economy shifts more towards skills-based curriculum models, the need for a more practical, competency-driven education has become increasingly urgent.

Highlighted in this policy brief are important considerations to guide stakeholders' participation in curriculum review, renewal and reform activities; as well as promote inclusivity and gender-responsiveness in Nigeria's education system. The document utilizes the findings of a comparative research on the efficacy of gender-responsive skills-based, knowledge-based and competency-based curricula to formulate policies that will foster not only gender equity, inclusivity and the development of practical skills for 21st century workplace; but also, the acquisition broad knowledge-based necessary for the pursuit targeted career in several disciplines.

Thus, the document presents a framework that would engender the formulation of policies that promote inclusivity and gender equity in Nigeria's education curriculum review, renewal and reform efforts.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON THE EFFICACY OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE SKILLS-BASED, KNOWLEDGE-BASED AND COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULA

2.1 Curriculum effectiveness:

(1) Knowledge-Based Curriculum: Nigeria's traditional knowledge-based curriculum focuses heavily on theoretical learning, memorization, and academic subjects. While it provides a solid foundation in subjects like mathematics, science, and the humanities, it often fails to equip students with the practical, real-world skills necessary for today's job market. Its outdated approach also perpetuates gender stereotypes, particularly in fields like STEM, where boys are typically encouraged to excel and girls are often excluded or discouraged.

(2) Skill-Based Curriculum: In contrast, skill-based education focuses on competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy, all of which are increasingly demanded in the global workforce. The research shows that when skills-based curriculum is implemented in a gender-responsive approach, it can significantly improve gender equity in education by providing equal opportunities for boys and girls, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields like engineering and computer science.

(3) Gender-Responsive Curriculum Design: The research also revealed that gender-responsive education which addresses gender inequalities through teaching content, methods, and classroom practices is crucial for breaking down traditional barriers. Research from countries like Finland, Rwanda, and Kenya suggests that gender-sensitive curricula can help close the gender gap in education by ensuring that both boys and girls are equally encouraged to pursue academic interests and careers. In Nigeria, however, the integration of gender-responsive pedagogy is still in its infancy. Girls, especially in rural areas, are frequently steered away from STEM and vocational education, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting their career opportunities.

2.2 Barriers to curriculum reform: Among the barriers hinder the effective integration of gender-responsive, skill-based curricula in Nigeria's education system are:

(1) Cultural Norms and Bias: In many communities, education for girls is not prioritized, particularly in fields that are perceived as "masculine," such as engineering, computer science, and technical trades. This limits girls' access to crucial educational opportunities and reinforces societal gender norms.

(2) Inadequate Teacher Training: Many teachers are not equipped with the knowledge or tools to deliver gender-sensitive, skill-based education. The lack of professional development and training programs in these areas exacerbates the challenge, leading to gender-biased teaching practices that undermine the objective of achieving equal educational outcomes.

(3) Limited Resources: Schools, particularly in rural areas, often lack the resources (updated textbooks, technological infrastructure, etc.) required to effectively implement skill-based education. There is of a disparity in resource allocation to schools. Allocation of resources to often favour schools located in urban settings. This disparity further exacerbates gender inequities in education, as girls, especially in low-income areas, are the first to face challenges in accessing quality education.

2.3 Enablers of curriculum reform:

(1) Government Commitments: Nigeria has committed to several international frameworks that aim to improve education, including SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). These commitments provide a solid foundation for reform, with the government acknowledging the need for more inclusive and gender-responsive educational policies.

(2) Civil Society Advocacy: Organizations like CSACEFA and other civil society groups have been at the forefront of advocating for inclusive education reforms. Their work in raising awareness about the importance of gender equality in education is a vital enabler of the gender-responsive education reforms.

(3) International Best Practices: The success stories of countries such as Finland, Rwanda, Kenya, etc.; where skill-based and gender-responsive curricula have led to improved outcomes for both boys and girls, provide valuable lessons for Nigeria. These countries have demonstrated that integrating gender-sensitive teaching into curricula leads to improved student engagement and better overall educational outcomes.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATION AND IMPACT

Based on the findings of the comparative research, the following recommendations are proposed to address the gender disparities in Nigeria's education system and equip students with the skills they need for future employment:

3.1 Curriculum Revision - Integrated and balance curriculum:

Revise the national curriculum to incorporate both gender-responsive skill-based education and knowledge-based curricula. This approach should ensure equal emphasis on academic knowledge and practical skills development, with a specific focus on improving gender balance in traditionally male-dominated subjects such as STEM and vocational training.

3.2 Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Teachers should be trained to challenge gender stereotypes, engage students equally, and create an inclusive learning environment for both boys and girls. To this end, there is an urgent need to implement mandatory training programs for teachers and educators that focus on gender-responsive pedagogy and skills-based teaching strategies.

3.3 Gender-Responsive Teaching Materials that Promote inclusive teaching and learning:

Revise textbooks, learning aids, and classroom resources to eliminate gender biases. Teaching materials should feature both male and female role models in all fields, including those traditionally associated with one gender. This will help to break down barriers and encourage both genders to pursue a wider range of subjects.

3.4 Gender equality in STEM and VTE:

Encouraging targeted programs for girls, for example, mentorship programs, scholarships, and community initiatives aimed at increasing girls' participation in STEM. Encourage schools to develop extracurricular activities that engage girls in technical and scientific subjects, creating pathways for them to excel in these fields.

3.5 Alignment of National Education Policy Strengthen Policy Support

Align Nigeria's education policies with international frameworks like SDG 4 and SDG 5. Ensure that these policies clearly define gender-responsive education and offer practical steps for implementation. Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress and ensure that gender-responsive curricula are being effectively integrated.

3.6 Increased Resource Allocation and Invest in skill-based education resources:

Increase funding for schools, particularly in rural and underserved areas, to ensure that they have access to modern teaching resources, digital tools, and vocational training facilities. This will enable the effective delivery of skill-based education, ensuring equal opportunities for both boys and girls.

3.7 Implications and impact on education policy

By integrating gender-responsive, skill-based curricula into Nigeria's education system, the proposed reforms will:

- (1) **Promote Gender Equality:** Both boys and girls will have equal access to all educational subjects and career paths, particularly in STEM fields and technical trades.
- (2) **Improve Workforce Readiness:** Skill-based education will provide students with the practical competencies needed to succeed in the modern job market, improving employment rates and economic productivity.
- (3) **Economic and Social Impact:**
 - (a) **Enhanced Socio-Economic Development:** Educating girls and women, particularly in technical and STEM fields, has significant socio-economic benefits. Studies show that each additional year of education for girls increases their future earnings by 10-20%, while also contributing to reduced child marriage, early pregnancies, and poverty.
 - (b) **Reduced Gender Inequality:** Ensuring that girls have equal access to all fields of education, including STEM and vocational training, will close the gender gap in the workforce, particularly in high-paying, traditionally male-dominated sectors.

CONCLUSION

The integration of gender-responsive, skill-based education into Nigeria's curriculum is not just a necessary step for improving educational outcomes but also a critical tool for achieving gender equality. By creating a more inclusive, practical, and gender-neutral education system, Nigeria can better equip its youth with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing global economy.

The recommendations in this policy brief provide a clear path for addressing the skills gap, reducing gender disparities, and fostering a more equitable education system for all Nigerian students.

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QUESTIONS TO GUIDE STAKEHOLDERS AND INPUT INTO EXISTING CURRICULUM AND POLICY BRIEF

1 General questions about the current curriculum

- (a) Effectiveness of the current curriculum in meeting the needs of students
 - What aspects of the current curriculum do you find most effective in preparing students for future employment?
 - Where do you think the curriculum falls short in terms of preparing students for the modern workforce?
- (b) How the current curriculum addresses the diverse needs of students
 - How well does the current curriculum address the diverse needs of students (e.g., urban vs. rural, boys vs. girls, students with disabilities, and students from various socio-economic backgrounds)?
 - Are there any specific challenges that different student groups face due to the current curriculum structure?
- (c) Do you think the current curriculum fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and other 21st-century skills?
 - If so, in what ways?
 - If not why?

2 Gender responsiveness in the curriculum

- (a) Is the current curriculum gender-responsive?
- (b) Are there any noticeable differences in how boys and girls engage with the content? If so, what are they?
- (c) How does the curriculum treat traditionally gendered subjects (e.g., STEM for boys and the humanities or social sciences for girls)?
- (d) Do you think girls are adequately encouraged to participate in STEM or vocational subjects? How can this be improved?
- (e) Are there enough gender-neutral teaching materials available for teachers to use in the classroom?
- (f) If not, what types of materials do you think should be developed to make the curriculum more inclusive?
- (g) In your experience, what impact does the existing curriculum have on breaking down traditional gender roles and stereotypes?
- (h) How can the curriculum be revised to promote gender equality in both academic and vocational education?

3. Teacher preparedness

- (a) Do teachers feel adequately prepared to teach the current curriculum?
- (b) What are the major challenges teachers face in implementing the existing curriculum, especially in terms of student engagement, gender equity, and skill development?
- (c) How well do current teacher training programs equip educators with the skills needed to teach gender-responsive, skill-based curricula?
- (d) Are there any gaps in the professional development provided to teachers, particularly in implementing gender-sensitive pedagogies?
- (e) What additional training or resources would teachers need to effectively implement a gender-responsive, skill-based curriculum?
- (f) Are there specific skills or tools that would help teachers better deliver practical, competency-based education?
- (g) How can teachers be better supported in addressing diverse learning styles and ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed?

4. Curriculum content and structure

- (a) Does the current curriculum balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills?
- (b) Is there a need for more practical skills development (e.g., technical skills, vocational training, life skills)?
- (c) How relevant is the current curriculum to the future job market in Nigeria and globally?
- (d) Are there specific competencies that should be prioritised to better prepare students for the workforce?
- (e) In your opinion, how can the curriculum better integrate gender equality and skills-based learning to enhance both educational and employment outcomes?
- (f) How can the curriculum be structured to ensure that both boys and girls are equally engaged and encouraged to participate in all subjects, including STEM, arts, and vocational studies?
- (g) Suggest some practical steps to reduce gender biases in subject selection and classroom participation.

5. Gender bias in classroom practices

- (a) How do you perceive the current classroom dynamics in terms of gender equality?
- (b) Do boys and girls receive equal attention, encouragement, and opportunities to participate in class discussions and activities?
- (c) Are there any noticeable gender biases in how teachers interact with students or assess their work?
- (d) How can these biases be addressed to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for both boys and girls?
- (e) How effective are the current teaching methods in fostering active participation from all students, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented groups (e.g., girls, students from rural areas, students with disabilities)?
- (f) What teaching strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive participation from all students?

6 Curriculum and policy implementation

- (a) Do you think the existing education policies support the integration of gender-responsive curricula and skill-based learning?
- (b) What gaps in policy support exist that could hinder the implementation of these curricula reforms?
- (c) What challenges have you observed in the implementation of educational policies at the school level?

- (d) How can the implementation process be improved to ensure that the revised curriculum reaches all students effectively?
- (e) How can local education authorities, CSOs, and policy makers work together to ensure that the curriculum reforms are successfully implemented?
- (f) What role should community engagement play in the implementation of curriculum reforms?

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- (f) What role should community engagement play in the implementation of curriculum reforms?

7 Resources and infrastructure

- (a) Does the school have the necessary resources (e.g., textbooks, teaching aids, digital tools) to implement the curriculum effectively?
- (b) What additional resources are needed to support both skill-based and knowledge-based teaching?
- (c) Are there sufficient gender-neutral resources (such as textbooks, videos, and teaching materials) available to support gender-responsive education?
- (d) What resources would be most beneficial to improve gender equality in the classroom?
- (e) How can schools in rural areas or areas with limited resources be better supported to ensure equal access to both gender-responsive education and skill-based learning?

8 Final thoughts and feedback

- (a) What are the most critical actions that need to be taken to ensure successful curriculum reform?
- (b) What do you see as the key factors for successful implementation of curriculum reforms in Nigeria?
- (c) Do you have any additional comments or suggestions on how to improve the current educational system to better serve both boys and girls?

9 Recommendations for curriculum improvement

- (a) How can Nigeria mitigate the challenges associated with the current curriculum to make it more inclusive, practical, and gender-responsive?
- (b) What specific changes should be made to ensure that both boys and girls are fully included in all subjects, with equal opportunity to excel?
- (c) What policy changes would you suggest to ensure that gender equality is incorporated into all aspects of curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practices?
- (d) What steps can be taken to encourage gender-sensitive, skill-based education at the national level?
- (e) How can policymakers ensure that schools across Nigeria, regardless of location, can implement the proposed changes effectively?

HOW TO USE THE QUESTIONS

Asking insightful and targeted questions such as those presented in this document will enable CSACEFA to collect meaningful data that will directly inform the development of a more comprehensive policy brief aimed at improving Nigeria's education system, making it more inclusive and gender sensitive. CSACEFA can also use the questions:

- (1). As reparation – to ensure that the stakeholders (teachers, policymakers, students, etc.) are selected from a range of backgrounds, including urban/rural, public/private schools, gender (both male and female), and social status (marginalized groups).
- (2). For interview and focus group discussions (FGDs): A mix of structured interviews and focus group discussions to allow participants to share their views openly while ensuring that all key topics are covered.
- (3). As a data collection method – in:
 - (a) Quantitative Surveys: that measure stakeholders' sentiments on curriculum effectiveness, gender equality, and preparedness; and
 - (b) Qualitative Interviews and FGDs - to explore deeper insights into teachers' experiences, gender-related challenges, and the barriers they face in implementing inclusive curricula.
- (4). Follow-Up Actions - to refine recommendations for the policy brief, particularly in areas of teacher training, resource allocation, gender-responsive pedagogy, and curriculum redesign.

