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Navigating Two Worlds: The Masked Challenges of a Dual Curricula in Nigerian Private International Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the increasing adoption of blended curricula in Nigerian private international secondary schools, which involve integrating the Nigerian national curriculum with foreign models. This combination is often justified as a pathway to educational quality and global competitiveness. Drawing on critical curriculum theory and policy analysis, the study examines the implementation and effects of these curricular arrangements through existing empirical literature. The analysis shows that curriculum hybridity frequently results in cognitive overload among other effects, which undermine Nigeria's national policy on education by marginalising indigenous values and weakening national identity formation.

Keywords

Hybrid Curriculum, International Schools, National Identity, Curriculum Overload, Nigerian Education Policy, WASSCE, NECO, IGCSE

1. Introduction

Education plays a foundational role in shaping individual lives and collective social consciousness (Nwanguma & Dede, 2024). Beyond the transmission of academic knowledge, education functions as a formative process through which values, norms, identities, and ethical orientations are cultivated. Dewey (1988) conceptualises education as a process of conscience formation and ethical self-development. Dewey (1988) further emphasises education's responsibility not only to develop intellectual capacity but also to nurture moral judgement and civic responsibility in students. Corroborating Dewey's (1988) assertion, OECD (2018)

posits "education is no longer just about teaching students something, but about helping them develop a reliable compass and the tools to navigate with confidence through an increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain world" (OECD, 2018: p. 3). In light of the foregoing discussion, education is inseparable from questions of purpose, meaning, and social direction. The quality and philosophical grounding of the education offered to children in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria warrant sustained and critical scholarly attention.

Similarly, the nature of education required for success in contemporary societies is undergoing a profound transformation (Flogie, Abersek, & Pesek, 2025). In an increasingly complex and uncertain global landscape, education can no longer be reduced to the accumulation and assimilation of content knowledge or the mastery of examination techniques. Rather, it must equip learners with a reliable internal compass and the cognitive, social, and emotional tools necessary to navigate uncertainty with confidence (Kominarets et al., 2022). In contemporary education, success is understood as the development of curious, inquiring learners; compassionate individuals who value social responsibility; and courageous thinkers who can apply knowledge and skills to real-world challenges (OECD, 2018). These dispositions serve as critical counterweights to some of the most pervasive threats of the present era, which are: ignorance, characterised by closed minds; hatred, rooted in closed hearts; and fear, which undermines human agency and critical engagement (OECD, 2018).

Curriculum, as the central organising framework of education, plays a decisive role in shaping these intellectual, emotional, and ethical capacities (Dimopoulos & Koutsampelas, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). Far from being a neutral or technical instrument, curriculum reflects particular worldviews, cultural priorities, and assumptions about what knowledge matters and whose knowledge is valued (Apple, 2019). It mediates the relationship between the learner and society, influencing how students understand themselves, their communities, and their place within a global order (Al-Rif'i & Mohamed, 2013). Consequently, curricular choices have far-reaching implications for academic achievement, identity formation, social cohesion, and national development.

In Nigeria, public discourse on education reform has largely centred on infrastructural deficits, teacher shortages, and students' examination performance (Adebayo, 2009; Femi, 2024). While these concerns remain pressing, far less attention has been given to the curriculum as it is enacted in practice, particularly within private international secondary schools that operate blended or hybrid models. At this juncture, it is necessary to clarify these terms in order to situate the specific curricular design examined in this study.

In curriculum research, blended learning refers to an instructional approach that integrates multiple delivery media and modalities, combines diverse teaching methods, and purposefully merges online and face-to-face instruction into a coherent learning design (Graham, 2013; Hrastinski, 2019). The emphasis, according to Graham (2013) and Hrastinski (2019), is on instructional modality rather

than on the coexistence of distinct national curriculum systems. By contrast, this paper focuses on curricular integration more broadly, extending beyond delivery modes. Kreijkes and Greatorex (2023: p. 3) define curriculum integration as "the process of bringing the content of different subjects *or curricula* together, which have traditionally been defined as separate." This definition is useful in highlighting that integration may occur at the level of content organisation, yet it does not necessarily account for the structural coexistence of entire national curriculum frameworks within a single institution.

Within international schooling literature, a blended curriculum therefore carries a more specific meaning. It refers to the structural combination of separate curriculum frameworks, often national and foreign, that function concurrently within the same institutional setting (Resnik, 2012; Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Curriculum blending in this sense, extends beyond pedagogical technique or subject integration to encompass institutional arrangements, assessment regimes, epistemological orientations, as well as classroom management practices across dual or multiple educational systems, as the case may be. For conceptual clarity, this study adopts the term blended curriculum to refer to the structural integration of the Nigerian national curriculum and foreign curricular frameworks within a single educational environment.

The curricula implementation variant examined is the single integrated syllabus model, in which teachers align instruction simultaneously with multiple assessment systems within the same classroom (Kreijkes & Greatorex, 2023). This distinction ensures that each empirical claim advanced in the study is interpreted in relation to the particular organisational form of hybridity under analysis.

This study aims to critically examine the implementation of hybrid curricula in Nigerian private international secondary schools, paying particular attention to the pedagogical, psychological, and cultural implications of the dual curriculum for learners and teachers. Grounded in the philosophy that education functions as a formative process shaping conscience, identity, and social values (Nwanguma & Dede, 2024), the study interrogates how the merging of Nigerian and foreign curricula affects knowledge acquisition, classroom practice, learner well-being, and the transmission of national values. Specifically, the study seeks to assess whether hybrid curricular practices align with the goals and ideals articulated in Nigeria's national policy on education and whether they adequately serve the holistic developmental needs of the Nigerian child.

The paper argues that such curricular arrangements, when implemented without coherent or logical integration and adequate regulatory oversight, often generate systemic pedagogical confusion, curricular overload, and misalignment between learning objectives and assessment demands. Rather than fostering curiosity, compassion, and courage, hybrid curricula frequently place excessive cognitive and emotional burdens on learners and teachers alike. Moreover, the uncritical importation of foreign curricular frameworks risks marginalising indigenous knowledge systems, cultural values, and local educational priorities, thereby weakening the

curriculum's role in national identity formation and ethical socialisation.

By situating the discussion of hybrid curricula within broader debates about the purpose of education in an uncertain world, this study contributes to existing research literature by extending scholarship on curriculum globalisation through an analysis of hybrid curricula within Nigerian secondary education, a setting that remains underrepresented in global education research. Also, by shedding light on the lived realities of teachers and students navigating dual curricular demands, the study moves beyond abstract policy debates to illuminate the practical and psychological consequences of curriculum hybridity. Additionally, the research contributes to critical curriculum theory by showing how hybrid curricula function as critical sites of ideological negotiation, where foreign educational values intersect and, at times, conflict with national philosophies of education. In doing so, the study offers empirical and theoretical insight into how curriculum choices shape identity, cultural affiliation, and notions of academic success in specifically post-colonial Nigerian contexts and also in global spheres. The research questions below guide this study.

RQ1: How do hybrid curricula in Nigerian private international schools affect students' learning outcomes, cognitive load and ability to transfer knowledge across assessment systems?

RQ2: In what ways do hybrid curricula influence students' cultural identity and the understanding of Nigerian values within private international schools?

RQ3: How do teachers and school administrators navigate the pedagogical and ethical challenges posed by implementing hybrid curricula, and what impact does this have on teaching motivation and instructional quality?

2. Analytical Framework

This research adopts a Curriculum structure-Pedagogical process-Outcome model framework which specifically places the hybrid curricula features into teaching methods which in turn influences learning outcomes. **Table 1** below is informed by Paas & Ayres (2014) argument on Sweller et al. (2011) cognitive load theory and Biggs & Tiggs (2011) cognitive alignment theory. Cognitive load theory is a concept first propounded by Sweller (1988), which provides a scientifically grounded approach for enhancing teaching by designing instruction in accordance with the way the human brain processes information (Yadav, 2023). Constructive Alignment theory, on the other hand, is an educational approach where learning activities, teaching methods, curriculum content and assessment tasks are deliberately designed to align with the intended learning outcomes so that students are guided to construct their own understanding effectively (Loughlin, Lygo-Baker, & Lindberg-Sand, 2021). This analytical framework ensures a systematic examination of how curriculum features affect learning outcomes, identity formation among Nigerian secondary students, and teacher motivation; thus emphasising the process by which educational structures shape students' learning experiences and performance outcomes.

Table 1. Curriculum features and their pedagogical and outcome implications.

Curriculum Feature	Pedagogical Mechanism	Outcome Domain
Content duplication across systems	Increased extraneous cognitive load	Learning outcomes
Assessment rule conflicts	Reduced constructive alignment	Knowledge transfer
Timetable compression	Reduced instructional processing time	Cognitive load
Language-of-instruction shifts	Identity negotiation pressure	Identity formation
Multiple accountability regimes	Role conflict and workload intensification	Teacher motivation

By integrating Cognitive Load Theory and Constructive Alignment Theory, this framework provides a robust lens for understanding how hybrid curriculum features shape pedagogical processes and, in turn, influence student learning, identity formation and teacher motivation. Cognitive Load Theory highlights the cognitive demands placed on students by structural features such as content duplication and timetable compression, while Constructive Alignment Theory clarifies how misaligned assessments and teaching activities can hinder effective knowledge construction. Together, these theories enable a systematic analysis that not only identifies challenges in curriculum design but also informs strategies to optimize learning outcomes and support both student and teacher experiences.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative literature review design, based on existing scholarly work, such as articles, policy documents and reports, to examine the implementation and implications of hybrid curricula in Nigerian private international schools. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, PROQUEST were searched using key search terms such as "international schools", "curriculum hybridity", "dual curriculum", "assessment misalignment", "cognitive load education", "postcolonial curriculum", "teacher workload international education", "Nigeria private schooling". Peer-reviewed articles from 2000 to 2025 were selected based on empirical and theoretical studies of curriculum integration; studies examining cognitive, cultural, student, and teacher educational experiences and outcomes were also selected based on relevance to the study. While other sources were excluded for lack of theoretical or empirical grounding. Each collected data set was analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase framework of thematic coding, which includes: immersive reading (familiarisation with the data), generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Findings from the categorization of data based on the afore framework were used to generate the Research questions 1 - 3.

4. Theoretical Framework: Curriculum, Power and Cultural Formation

Curriculum theory provides a theoretical lens for examining the implications of

hybrid educational models and their socio-cultural consequences. Far from being a neutral instrument for knowledge transmission, curriculum is deeply embedded in relations of power, ideology, and cultural valuation (Al-Rif'i & Mohamed, 2013). Decisions about what knowledge is selected, organised, and legitimised within schooling systems reflect broader struggles over authority, identity, and social control (Apple, 2019).

Michael Apple's (2019) curriculum theory highlights the ideological nature of any operational implemented curriculum, he argues that what is presented as "official knowledge" (2019: p. 65) in schools is shaped by the interests and values of dominant social groups rather than by objective or universal standards of knowledge. Apple's (2019) perspective emphasises the fact that curriculum operates as a system through which particular cultural norms and worldviews are normalised, while alternative knowledge systems are marginalised. He further contends that schooling systems contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities by legitimising certain forms of cultural knowledge as academically valuable and socially desirable, thereby reinforcing existing power structures under the guise of educational neutrality.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) work remains foundational in the structural analysis of educational inequality. His critical curriculum theory conceptualises inequality in education as operating through three interrelated forms of capital, which are: economic, cultural, and social; each of which shapes learners' access to and success within educational systems (Dimopoulos & Koutsampelas, 2024). Among these, cultural capital is particularly relevant to the present study. Bourdieu (1986) further distinguishes cultural capital into three states: the embodied, the objectified, and the institutionalised. This study focuses specifically on the institutionalised state, particularly as it manifests in the transfer of what is positioned as a "superior" institutionalised curriculum into contexts where national curricula are rendered comparatively inferior. Such curricular impositions often function to delegitimise existing national knowledge frameworks, positioning international or foreign curricula as benchmarks of quality and academic value. Recent theoretical work has extended these insights by synthesising sociological perspectives to better explain how educational systems reproduce inequality. Dimopoulos and Koutsampelas (2024), for instance, build on Bourdieu's (1986) framework by integrating his notion of capital with Bernstein's (2000) concepts of classification and framing to analyse how educational structures regulate access, achievement, and social mobility. This approach aligns with Apple's (2019) critical curriculum theory, which conceptualises curriculum as an ideological and political site through which dominant social interests are reproduced. Complementing Apple's (2019) perspective with Bernstein's (2000) sociology of education provides a more nuanced understanding of how curriculum structures govern access to legitimate knowledge and shape learners' identities.

Bernstein (2000) argues that curriculum is organised through principles of classification and framing, which determine how knowledge is selected, transmitted,

and evaluated, thereby reflecting underlying power relations and controlling access to what he terms "powerful knowledge" (p. 67). These insights are reinforced by Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) theory of cultural reproduction demonstrates how curriculum operates as a mechanism for sustaining social and cultural hierarchies. Educational institutions, they argue, privilege the cultural capital of dominant groups such as specific linguistic styles, dispositions, and forms of knowledge, while presenting these (linguistic styles, dispositions, and forms of knowledge) as neutral indicators of merit. Consequently, students who do not possess this culturally sanctioned capital are systematically disadvantaged, not due to a lack of ability, but because the curriculum itself is structured around unfamiliar norms and epistemologies. This process is further entrenched through what Bourdieu conceptualises as "symbolic violence: the internalisation of dominant cultural values as legitimate and natural, even by those whom the educational system marginalises" (Broadfoot, 1978: p. 76).

Within the Nigerian context, the adoption of foreign or hybrid curricula often legitimises Western histories, epistemologies, and cultural norms while rendering indigenous knowledge systems peripheral or invisible. Such curricular arrangements risk reproducing global hierarchies of knowledge in which Western epistemologies are positioned as universal and superior, while African knowledge systems are framed as local, supplementary or worse, non-academic. Recent educational research suggests that these dynamics contribute to cultural dislocation among learners and weaken the Nigerian curriculum's capacity to affirm local identities and social realities (Adebayo, 2009; Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

In light of the foregoing, the above theoretical perspectives position curriculum as an established central site where power, knowledge, and cultural formation meet. Curriculum is not merely a pedagogical tool but a social artefact through which identities are shaped and cultural meanings negotiated (Flogie et al., 2025). In the context of hybrid curricula in Nigerian private international schools, these theories provide a framework for analysing how blended curricular models may inadvertently reproduce epistemic hierarchies, privilege foreign cultural capital, and undermine the curriculum's potential to support culturally grounded and socially responsive education.

5. Curriculum and National Identity in Nigeria

The Nigerian Ministry of Education, alongside relevant stakeholders, must critically examine a fundamental question: What kind of education are Nigerian children actually receiving? This question should be asked not with the curriculum in mind, since Nigerian universities churn out thousands of graduate teachers each year who have been trained in different subject areas to pass on subject knowledge to students. The aspect that receives minimal attention is the curricula framework as it is operationalised in practice. Tanner and Tanner (1980: p. 188) define curriculum as: "the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and

experiences, under the auspices of the school, for the learner's continuous and willful growth in personal and social competence." Similarly, El-Astal (2023: p. 189) defines *curriculum* as "prescriptive content that illustrates what will be taught in a given educational program, who will teach, who will be taught, with what tools and in what context, with what effect, and how learners will be assessed." These definitions highlight that the school curriculum does not focus solely on a child's academic development but also on the child's personal and social development, which, in turn, influences a learner's behaviour, values, and interactions within the school environment. Tanner & Tanner's (1980) definition of education above, further highlights the need for significant attention to the curriculum in operation within any school in Nigeria.

The Ministry of Education and relevant stakeholders may not realise that the majority of private schools offering a foreign curriculum in the country import the culture and history of that curriculum (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These schools do not teach their learners the history of their host country, Nigeria; instead, they focus on the history of America and Europe, without reference to Nigeria. The implication is that Nigerian children who attend these schools adopt a foreign educational system, resulting in little or no knowledge of Nigerian culture and history.

Olofu and Anoh (2019) posit that the 1969 National Conference on Curriculum Reforms in Nigeria was designed to de-westernise the Nigerian curriculum and establish an educational framework that is authentically Nigerian. Regrettably, in 2026, many international schools operating in Nigeria appear to have reversed decades of decolonisation efforts, reinstating curriculum frameworks primarily oriented to the West (Nwanguma & Dede, 2024; Olofu & Anoh, 2019). Olofu and Anoh (2019) further contend that education in Nigeria is guided by clearly articulated national goals, philosophies, and ideals, which are intended to inform and regulate all educational activities. This implies that all schools, whether public or private, are expected to comply with the Nigerian national policy on education (FRN, 2014). The critical question, therefore, is: to what extent are foreign-operated schools in Nigeria aware of and aligned with these policy directives, which firmly stipulate the following foundational principles?

According to the Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014):

1) Education is an instrument for national development and social transformation.

2) Education is essential for promoting a progressive, unified Nigeria.

3) Education should maximise the creative potential and skills of individuals for self-fulfilment and the broader development of society.

4) Education is compulsory and a right for every Nigerian, regardless of gender, social status, religion, ethnicity, or individual challenges.

5) Education must be qualitative, comprehensive, functional, and responsive to societal needs.

Consequently, the quality of instruction across all levels of education must ac-

tively foster the following values:

- Respect for the dignity and worth of the individual.
- Faith in the capacity of humans to make rational decisions.
- Moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and social relations.
- Shared responsibility for the common good of society.
- Promotion of the physical, emotional, and psychological development of all learners.
- Acquisition of functional skills and competencies necessary for self-reliance (FRN, 2014).

On this foundation, all private schools are expected to develop curricular frameworks and pedagogical approaches that reflect these national ideals. It is evident that through the national curriculum, the government transmits values and ideologies intended to promote cultural cohesion and societal development. This principle is not unique to Nigeria. Debre (2024) reports that Paraguay introduced a national sex education curriculum strongly influenced by Catholic and evangelical perspectives, emphasizing sexual abstinence while excluding diverse sexual identities and orientations. This policy aimed to address rising teenage pregnancy rates, demonstrating how governments assert cultural priorities through curriculum.

Similarly, countries worldwide remain cautious about foreign influences in their educational systems. International schools in China, for example, are increasingly required to conform to state educational regulations (Wu, 2024). Beijing now mandates integrating patriotic education and appointing Chinese assistant principals to teach ideological framework in all international schools. This ensures that foreign institutions align with the state's political and ideological standards (Wu, 2024). The Nigerian context is thus situated within a global pattern in which governments attempt to safeguard cultural integrity and national identity through curriculum design, highlighting the tension between foreign curricular adoption and local educational imperatives.

6. The Rise of Private International Schools in Nigeria

Federal Ministry of Education (2024) defines private secondary schools as educational institutions owned and established by corporate organisations, religious bodies, individuals, or establishments such as universities, the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), or River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), and fully financed and governed by these entities. The number of private schools in Nigeria has multiplied over the past two decades, with about 90% of schools in Nigeria owned by private individuals (Onyemachi, 2021). This rise in numbers can be attributed to private individuals' desire to create an improved educational system, with facilities and maintenance superior to those provided in government-owned schools (public schools).

Adebayo (2009) argues that one of the key factors driving the rise of private schools in Nigeria is the public's loss of confidence in the government educational

system, a consequence of poor planning and chronic underinvestment. This neglect, in Adebayo's view, has brought the system to the brink of collapse, leaving educational infrastructure in a dilapidated and appalling state. While some private school owners claim to address these deficiencies, their efforts are often motivated as much by profit as by educational improvement. To justify high tuition fees, many of these schools offer state-of-the-art facilities and a wide range of co-curricular activities, placing a heavy financial burden on parents. It is important to note, however, that not all private schools provide such luxury. From the mid- to late 19th century, a segment of private schools emerged to serve Nigeria's elite. Later, a new category of schools emerged in the educational landscape, adopting the label "International Schools."

According to Abolade & Oyelade (2018), the emergence of international schools in Nigeria dates back to the early 1980s. For example, the International School, University of Lagos (ISL), was established in 1981 to meet the educational needs of the children of university staff, while Danbo International School in Kaduna was founded the same year to provide advanced educational opportunities for children. By January 2015, the International Schools Consultancy (ISC) reported that Nigeria had 129 international schools. The ISC defines an international school as one that delivers a curriculum in English outside an English-speaking country or offers an English-medium curriculum other than the national curriculum and operates with an international orientation. Consequently, the concept of "international schools" in Nigeria gained prominence in the early 1980s, with a marked increase in the number of such institutions in the decades that followed. Similarly, World Schools (2026) defines an international school as an institution distinguished by its autonomy from national education systems, with a primary focus on delivering an internationally recognized curriculum, predominantly in English, while also promoting proficiency in the local language.

As the number of international schools in Nigeria grew, a competitive dynamic emerged among educational marketers. This competition often revolved around which school could organise the most prestigious overseas student trips or attract the highest number of expatriate teachers and administrators (Nanbak, 2020). In this context, some educational marketers identified the importation of foreign curricula into the Nigerian educational system as a unique selling point.

The adoption of foreign curricula entails introducing "a behavioural and cultural pattern alien to the Nigerian educational system," which can significantly influence students' cultural and behavioural development (Öztabak, 2022: p. 221). Cultural gaps may lead teachers to misinterpret students' behaviour, resulting in conflicts that leave students feeling misunderstood or marginalised. Such conflicts can manifest in higher rates of disciplinary referrals or even school attrition (Öztabak, 2022). Among the imported curricula are the International Baccalaureate, Montessori, British National Curriculum, American Curriculum, and, more recently, the Canadian Curriculum (Olofu & Anoh, 2019).

The introduction of these curricula raises an important question: Is the Nige-

rian government aware of the cultural influences being imported into its education system? Drawing on Dewey's (1988) conception of education as central to shaping individuals' consciences, one might ask whether it is appropriate to entrust foreign curricula with moulding the values, behaviour, and development of Nigerian citizens within Nigeria. Femi (2024) posits that foreign curricula can provide students, particularly those with limited travel or exposure to other cultures, with a broader worldview. He further argues that such curricula may attract international students, appeal to learners aspiring to work in multinational contexts, and equip graduates with the competencies required to function effectively in a global society. Looking beyond Africa, scholars such as Drake and Burns (2004: p. 5) maintain that an integrated curriculum "maximises students' achievement and preparation for standardised tests." In a similar vein, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) suggest that a hybrid curriculum can strengthen teacher capacity. By engaging with multiple systems, teachers are exposed to diverse curricular frameworks and pedagogical practices, which may enrich classroom teaching and learning. This dual exposure can also enhance their ability to align assessment with specific educational goals and student needs, an idea consistent with Biggs and Tang's (2011) work on constructive alignment.

Despite these arguments in favour of hybridity, caution is necessary. Sassen (2000) warns against the uncritical globalisation of curricula, arguing that globalisation entails "a partial and incipient denationalisation" (p. 217) that risks stripping education of its historically national character. Even Drake and Burns (2004), while highlighting the advantages of integration, emphasise that for such a curriculum to function effectively, it must ensure inclusivity, managerial accountability, contextual relevance, and adequate preparation for subsequent levels of education.

Thus, while the benefits identified by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) are compelling, the Nigerian government must ensure that national values remain central within international schools. Regardless of the adopted curriculum, school management should intentionally embed Nigerian history, customs, and civic traditions into teaching and learning, including the celebration of national days. In this way, global competitiveness need not come at the expense of national identity.

Olofu and Anoh (2019: p. 3) define a Nigerian school as "a place that helps mould a diverse population of tribes and languages into one society with a shared national identity." They further assert that schools prepare future generations for their citizenship roles by teaching students about laws and the nation's political system through civic education, and by instilling patriotism through rituals such as reciting the national pledge and anthem. Students also learn the pledge of allegiance and the stories of the nation's heroes and their achievements. In this way, schools' function as vital conduits for transmitting national values, culture, and collective accomplishments from one generation to the next. This essential role must not be compromised by the operations of private international schools within Nigeria.

7. Emergence and Integration of Nigerian and Foreign Curricula: Trends and Practices

Nigeria has one of the fastest-growing international school sectors globally (ISC Research, 2023). Private international schools in Nigeria are regulated by the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) education secretariat through the Department of Quality Assurance (Härmä, 2019). The emergence of blended and hybrid curricula in Nigerian private and international schools became more pronounced in the early 2000s and gained considerable traction in the 2010s (Femi, 2024). These curricula merge the Nigerian national curriculum with foreign curricula, such as the British or American curricula, to align with global educational standards and parental expectations. While foreign curricula have been present in elite private schools since the 1980s and 1990s, formal practices and discussions around blending them with Nigerian educational content became increasingly visible in the 2010s (Femi, 2024). In practice, some schools operate separate streams for Nigerian and foreign curricula, while others integrate the two, requiring teachers to deliver lessons according to both WASSCE and IGCSE standards.

For example, many international schools operate both curricula in parallel. In some cases, a school may have a separate arm that offers only the Nigerian curriculum, alongside another arm that follows the British curriculum. However, certain schools integrate the two curricula into a single blended syllabus. In such settings, teachers present topics according to both, let's say, WASSCE (West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination) and IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) requirements. For instance, in an English Language class on summary writing, the teacher first explains the rules for WASSCE, which include listing key points in simple numbered sentences. The teacher then introduces the IGCSE approach, which requires presenting information in chronological order, structured in paragraphs, and incorporating as many connectives as possible. Notably, some connectives that are discouraged in WASSCE are essential for achieving high marks in IGCSE. After teaching both approaches, the teacher must ensure that students do not confuse the two methods during examinations, as students in hybrid curricula schools are expected to write both WASSCE and IGCSE papers successfully.

8. Findings

The table below structures the findings of this study, based on the study's research questions, to clearly present the analytical logic. Drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship on international schooling (Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Bunnell, 2014), curriculum globalisation (Tikly & Barrett, 2013), assessment alignment (Loughlin, Lygo-Baker, & Lindberg-Sand, 2021) and cognitive load theory (Sweller et al., 2011), the analysis identifies consistent empirical patterns linking hybrid curriculum structures to three outcome domains: learning outcomes, identity formation and teacher motivation. The purpose is not to generalise but to demonstrate how specific curriculum features generate identifiable pedagogical and social effects

within hybrid systems. To clarify this relationship, Table 2 brings together key empirical evidence and links specific curriculum features to the processes and outcomes identified in the literature.

Table 2. Empirical findings mapped to research questions.

Research Question	Core Curriculum Feature Identified	Empirical Evidence from Literature	Demonstrated Outcome	Theoretical Anchor
RQ1: Learning outcomes and cognitive load	Redundant curricular content; dual assessment rules; misaligned examination criteria	Unnecessary instructional demands increase extraneous cognitive load, reducing working-memory (WM) efficiency and limiting knowledge transfer (Sweller et al., 2011; Huang, Liu, & Han, 2024). Misalignment between learning objectives and assessment weakens instructional coherence (Biggs & Tang, 2011).	Reduced knowledge retention; confusion across assessment systems; impaired transfer of learning	Cognitive Load Theory; Constructive Alignment Theory
RQ2: Identity formation	Privileging foreign epistemologies; marginalisation of national knowledge frameworks; symbolic curriculum hierarchy	International schooling structures reproduce global hierarchies of status and mobility (Bunnell, 2014; Hayden & Thompson, 2013). Curriculum globalisation embeds Western epistemologies within quality frameworks (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).	Cultural hierarchy effects; stratified epistemic positioning; mediated identity formation	Post-colonial Curriculum Theory
RQ3: Teacher motivation and instructional coherence	Multiple accountability regimes; compressed timetables; competing performance metrics	Role overload and accountability pressure; reduce teacher efficacy and increase stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Assessment misalignment disrupts pedagogical coherence (Biggs & Tang, 2011).	Reduced instructional efficacy, professional strain, and diminished coherence in delivery	Self-Efficacy Theory; Constructive Alignment

Across the three research questions, a consistent pattern emerges: curriculum structure mediates outcomes. Redundancy and assessment misalignment shape cognitive load; epistemic hierarchy shapes identity positioning; and accountability complexity shapes teacher efficacy. The findings are based on established peer-reviewed scholarship on instructional design, global education structures, various national educational policies and curriculum globalisation. The empirical evidence provided distinguishes observable effects from normative interpretation. While the study advances policy implications for curriculum coherence and epistemic balance, the findings are grounded in a well-documented theoretical and empirical framework. By structuring the analysis in this manner, the causal logic connecting hybrid curriculum features to learning, identity and teacher outcomes is made explicit, thereby strengthening the analytical clarity of the study.

9. Discussion, Challenges, and Implications of Hybrid Curricula in Nigerian Private International Schools

This section discusses the practical realities of implementing hybrid curricula in Nigerian private international schools. While existing literature highlights the potential academic and global advantages of curricular hybridity (Drake & Burns, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), the lived experience of implementation often reveals structural, pedagogical and identity-related tensions. Drawing on the

preceding analysis, this discussion moves beyond descriptive claims to interrogate the challenges that emerge at the levels of the hybrid curricular design, classroom practice, assessment alignment and national identity formation. It also considers the broader implications for policy, school leadership and teacher professional development.

For teachers, the combined curriculum often transforms teaching into a burdensome task (Väfors Fritz, 2022). The complex and extensive schemes of work that must be completed within fixed timeframes leave teachers demotivated. This lack of motivation affects teaching quality, learning outcomes, and overall enthusiasm for the profession. Tran and Moskovsky (2022) highlight the close relationship between teacher motivation and student outcomes, demonstrating that demotivated teachers exhibit lower self-efficacy and passion, ultimately impacting student performance. Huang, Liu and Han (2024: p. 25171), citing Locke (1969), defined teacher job satisfaction (TJS) as "a positive emotional experience resulting from an individual's evaluation of his or her job performance or work values." Similarly, Huang, Liu and Han (2024), citing Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2019), posit that teachers' emotional responses to their jobs affect their willingness to leave. If teachers feel psychologically strained about certain work practices, they could leave their jobs. This action could potentially lead to a gradual decline in student's interest in education and reduced academic achievement (Huang, Liu, & Han 2024). According to Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2019) teacher self-efficacy consistently shows that increased accountability demands and role overload are associated with stress, emotional exhaustion, suspected underachievement and reduced perceived effectiveness.

Hybrid systems often require teachers to satisfy dual examination frameworks, maintain parallel documentation standards and reporting systems and preparing students for different assessment logics within compressed timetables. These structural complexities in hybrid educational systems may generate professional strain and diminish instructional efficacy. When such systems produce poor learning outcomes will these poor outcomes be attributed to teacher capability or to systemic configuration? Furthermore, Constructive Alignment Theory further suggests that misaligned curricular expectations undermine instructional coherence (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Teachers working within structurally fragmented systems must divide pedagogical attention across competing objectives, which can weaken clarity in lesson design and reduce depth of engagement. Huang et al. (2024) and Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2019) argue that structural complexity in hybrid curriculum environments may generate professional strain and diminish instructional efficacy. These outcomes are not attributed to teacher capability but to systemic configuration. Thus, understanding teacher performance in hybrid systems requires considering both individual self-efficacy and the structural demands of the educational environment, rather than attributing outcomes solely to teacher capability.

Similarly, for students, navigating dual curricula can impose excessive cognitive demands, as processing overlapping or conflicting instructional materials aligned

to different assessment frameworks increases extraneous cognitive load (Sweller et al., 2011). In hybrid curriculum contexts where national and foreign syllabi operate concurrently, students often engage with similar content framed under distinct terminologies and assessment expectations. Such redundancy does not automatically deepen learning; rather, it can overload working memory (WM) and reduce the efficiency of schema construction. Combining two different curricula within a single educational system can create significant confusion among students, as differing rules and assessment methods often lead to misunderstandings and examination errors (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). Students face the daunting task of retaining large volumes of information within limited classroom periods, typically lasting forty minutes. High-performing students are compelled to sift through complex content, retaining only the information necessary to succeed in examinations while discarding other knowledge that may be equally vital for long-term problem-solving (OECD, 2018). Struggling students, on the other hand, are often unable to retain any of the material presented, leaving them perpetually behind their peers. This pattern ultimately undermines the development of problem-solving skills needed to address real-world challenges.

Additionally, Constructive Alignment Theory establishes that effective learning depends on the coherence between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks (Biggs & Tang, 2011); when hybrid systems require simultaneous preparation for distinct examination frameworks, alignment may be fragmented. Students are then expected to navigate parallel performance criteria, which can dilute conceptual focus and weaken knowledge transfer.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that the learning effects of hybrid curricula are mediated not simply by curriculum volume but by structural coherence. Redundant content combined with assessment-rule divergence increases cognitive burden and reduces clarity of expectations. These findings are empirically grounded in instructional design research and provide a clear causal pathway between curriculum configuration and learning outcomes.

Palindia (2011: para. 1), reflecting on the dangers of operating multiple curricula in the Indian educational system, laments: "You can really feel the need for a uniform syllabus for India, if you underwent a 12-year school in a normal government school and then sat in IIT entrance examination...you can really feel heat of a deprived childhood where there are two different worlds in the same country and multiple standards and more than one syllabus." Similarly, Lewis (2018) advocates a uniform curriculum system that establishes a common definition of academic success through a single assessment framework and defines the essential knowledge and skills expected of all learners. Against this backdrop, the discussion turns to the challenges and educational consequences of hybrid curricula for teachers and students.

Wilson and Peterson (2006) emphasise that knowledge retention requires learners to transfer new learning to novel situations. Without a solid foundation, students cannot effectively apply what they have learned. Bransford et al. (2000: pp.

77-78) further argue that: "Time spent learning for understanding has different consequences for transfer than time spent simply memorizing facts or procedures from textbooks or lectures. In order for learners to gain insight into their learning and their understanding, frequent feedback is critical: students need to monitor their learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding."

The lack of consistent classroom structure inherent in hybrid curricula can exacerbate this confusion, leading to inconsistent teaching methodologies and poorly implemented assessments. Consequently, students encounter an overloaded curriculum that impedes academic progress. Molokomme (2023) describes such curricula as overloaded, over-ambitious, and under-focused, moving at a pace that may result in students falling several grade levels below expectations.

Additionally, some international schools adopt blended curricula, prioritising financial gain over educational quality. In pursuit of profit, these schools often employ unqualified or inadequately trained teachers to deliver foreign curricula. This practice leads to underachievement, parental disappointment, and diminished student self-esteem. Adiyaman and Keser Özmantar (2023) emphasise that accreditation is critical for maintaining educational standards; schools without proper accreditation often fail to provide the resources students need to succeed in international examinations. Many schools charge exorbitant fees for foreign examinations while outsourcing students as external candidates to approved centres, leaving parents unaware of the educational gaps and students disadvantaged. Such practices erode learner confidence, as students internalise failure in a system designed to exploit them.

Exposure to multiple curricula without the intent to pursue international education abroad can impose excessive academic pressure, undermining mastery of local systems and affecting performance in national examinations such as the WASSCE (West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination) and NECO (National Examination Council). Many parents subject their children to dual curricula without plans for overseas education. Rather than mastering a single curriculum, students spread their focus across multiple examinations, often resulting in suboptimal outcomes. Given that WASSCE and NECO results are internationally recognised, the additional burden of foreign curricula may represent wasted effort, resources, and time, further frustrating students.

The psychological and health implications of this academic rigour are also considerable. Udousoro Akpan et al. (2024) report that a substantial proportion of Nigerian youth experience mental health challenges directly linked to academic pressures, affecting overall well-being and life outcomes. Their study, which included 400 respondents (211 males and 189 females aged 19 - 21), found that 70% reported high levels of academic stress contributing to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. This rigorous educational environment, rather than nurturing well-rounded individuals, risks producing graduates who lack critical skills and ethical grounding, while perpetuating societal decay in values and dis-

cipline (Tran & Moskovsky, 2022).

Also, educating students under two divergent paradigms may weaken cultural continuity. Students may emerge lacking deep-seated cultural affiliations and an insufficient grounding in local customs and traditions. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) emphasises respect as a fundamental cultural value, integrated into the curriculum to foster proper social conduct. In Nigeria, respect encompasses interactions within families, communities, and society at large, and it is vital that younger generations inherit and uphold this cultural heritage. The integration of foreign curricula that neglect Nigerian cultural practices threatens to erode these values (Olofu & Anoh, 2019). Research on global international schooling demonstrates that schools that operate hybrid curricula do not function only as pedagogical environments but also as sites of social positioning within global education markets (Bunnell, 2014; Hayden & Thompson, 2013). International certification is frequently associated with transnational mobility, prestige and access to global opportunity structures. Tikly and Barrett (2013) argue that curriculum globalisation often embeds Western epistemological standards within discourses of quality, thereby constructing implicit hierarchies of knowledge. Within hybrid systems, when foreign curricula are symbolically framed as gateways to global capital while national curricula are treated as regulatory obligations, a hierarchy of epistemic value may emerge. Students may internalise the relative status distinctions attached to different knowledge traditions. This does not imply that hybrid curricula inherently produce cultural erasure; rather, identity effects are mediated by how curricular components are integrated and symbolically framed within educational systems.

Globally, countries are taking deliberate steps to preserve indigenous knowledge and cultural identity within education. India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020-2025) emphasises traditional learning, Sanskrit studies, and Indian knowledge systems while regulating foreign influences (Sharma & Sharma, 2025). Similarly, Italy has reintroduced Bible reading, Latin, and memorisation of poetry to revive cultural traditions in schools (Volpe & Vitiello, 2025). These examples underscore the importance of educational systems actively safeguarding cultural heritage. Given these global practices, it is critical that Nigeria strengthen regulatory oversight, monitor international schools' activities, and ensure strict compliance with the National Policy on Education.

10. Conclusion

There is an urgent need for all educational stakeholders to take decisive action. For Nigeria to achieve meaningful national development, it is imperative to cultivate an authentically Nigerian identity. Central to this goal is asserting control over the educational system, which currently operates in a "free-for-all" manner, allowing foreign curricula and values to be implemented with minimal oversight or regulation.

To safeguard the interests of Nigerian children, stakeholders must investigate

the content and pedagogical approaches of all foreign curricula in use. Following such an investigation, educational psychologists and curriculum experts should assess whether blended or hybrid curricula genuinely serve the needs of Nigerian students. The Ministry of Education should conduct rigorous evaluations of all curricula operating under the guise of international education. Stakeholders must critically reflect on and address the following questions:

a) Are international schools strictly compliant with the National Policy on Education (NERDC)?

b) Does the foreign curriculum promote Nigerian culture and tradition, as stipulated in the National Policy on Education?

c) Is the adoption of blended curricula primarily a profit-driven strategy by private international school owners?

d) Does the blended curriculum truly benefit Nigerian learners?

Answering these questions is essential if the Ministry of Education aims to create an educational system that promotes the physical, emotional, and psychological development of Nigerian children, as articulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). Without deliberate intervention to curtail the unchecked adoption of foreign curricula, Nigerians cannot reasonably expect future citizens to demonstrate loyalty, discipline, or a strong sense of nationhood. Ensuring that education reflects and reinforces national values is central to cultivating well-rounded, culturally grounded individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to Nigerian society and the world at large.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Manuscript Preparation Process

The authors declare that all ideas, analyses, and interpretations are the authors' own, informed by a thorough examination of relevant articles, texts, and educational policies significant to the study. The authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the article's content.

Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article because no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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