Teachers as Facilitators: Strategies for Implementing Student-Centred Education in Secondary School Classrooms in Western Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the roles of teachers as facilitators for the delivery of Student-Centred Education (SCE) in secondary school classrooms in Western Nigeria. It investigates how teachers understand and implement SCE principles, the teaching strategies used, and the consistency of implementation and lesson plans. Drawing from constructivist principles and adopting Bremner's theoretical framework, a qualitative approach is adopted, which comprises teacher interviews and lesson plan review. The data obtained were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Results indicated that teachers were keenly aware of SCE and use a variety of teaching strategies such as student grouping, collaborative work and sensitivity to individual differences in an attempt to promote teacher-facilitated classroom learning, playing roles which are facilitative by encouraging interaction and autonomy among students. However, a stark inconsistency between lesson planning and teaching practices was revealed, with most lesson plans showing an element of a teacher-centred approach regardless of student-centred teaching techniques in the classroom. Barriers in implementing the model in the classroom include the sheer size of classes, availability of resources and adequate teacher training, rigidity of the curriculum and non- alignment of assessment tools. Secondary school teachers showed effort in facilitating teaching; however, there is a need to address systemic and individual constraints in practice and lesson planning. Better alignment in lesson planning, development of appropriate teacher training programs, and better availability of resources should be made and provided to the teachers and education stakeholders in order to facilitate the proper implementation of SCE further.

Keywords: Student-centred education, teacher facilitation, collaborative learning, lesson planning, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Currently, education systems across the globe are in the midst of a paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centred education to more participatory, student-centred education. Student-centred education (SCE) is an approach to education that focuses on active learning, critical thinking, and collaboration, as well as the autonomy of the students (Bremmer, 2021). In the context of SCE, the teacher's role shifts from knowledge transmitter to the learner's facilitator in the construction of knowledge.

Teachers' role is widely accepted in modern pedagogy, as they are expected to facilitate inquiry, dialogue, and the creation of an inclusive learning environment in which students are actively engaged in the construction of knowledge; thus, their role is that of a "facilitator or accompanying guide" rather than the dominant authority.

In contemporary global research, the paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centred education to modern student-centred education has been supported across the globe. For instance, the research by Hattie (2020) posits that effective teaching in modern classrooms involves the use of visible learning in which students are the owners of the learning process. In the research conducted by Williams (2024), the researcher emphasises the importance of formative assessment and student engagement in modern pedagogy.

In the Nigerian context, the current education reforms in Nigeria encourage learner-centred education, but the implementation of the reforms, particularly in the secondary school system, has been wanting.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the following research questions:

1. How do teachers in Western Nigeria practice SCE?
2. How do teachers in Western Nigeria practice playing the role of facilitators in the classroom?
3. To what extent do teachers' practices in the classroom align with the lesson plan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Student-Centred Education

The SCE model continues to receive attention in academic circles, although a consensus on its definition remains elusive. Some researchers prefer to give wide-ranging definitions, such as SCE being described as a system in which "learners have a decision in their learning" (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). Some researchers prefer specificity to broad definitions and refer to SCE as active learning and problem-based learning (Weimer, 2013). Educators have interpreted SCE in numerous ways, including personalised learning, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, centre-based classrooms, flipped classrooms, and inquiry-based learning. These approaches differ in structure, scope, and implementation, leading to varied outcomes across classroom contexts. Yet, all of them highlight the need to engage learners more in the learning process.

Despite there being no universally accepted definition, the most important aspect of SCE is the shift in focus from a standardised teacher-based model to a model that is learner-focused and more personalised. Teaching is done to the learner's needs, interests, and objectives, and the students' different viewpoints dictate how the learning will occur (Kaput, 2018). From a philosophy of education point of view, SCE is based on the idea that the learner must have control over the what and how of the learning. This can be seen in, for example, Rogers (1983), who describes SCE as an approach that allows the learners to decide how much they want to learn about a particular topic, and in contrast, Cannon and Newble (2000) claim that SCE is more about learner satisfaction than control of the teaching from the instructor. In the same way, Degago and Kaino (2015) point out that SCE allows the learner to have almost complete control over their learning. This collaborative and participatory learning environment is where the learners construct and reconstruct knowledge based on their existing knowledge and their social environment, and in so doing, increase their autonomy and the ability to use knowledge in authentic situations (Pai & Mallya, 2016). While SCE does not mean the complete opposite of this, Jones (2007) has pointed out that SCE is not about total freedom, and that there is more to SCE than just capturing the interests of learners and promoting active participation, whether on an individual basis or on a group basis.

In order to better conceptualise SCE, the study employs Bremner's (2021) six-aspect framework, which outlines the key components of student-centred learning. These components include active involvement, responsiveness to learner needs, learner autonomy, relevance of skills, shared power, and formative assessment. Together, these aspects illustrate that SCE is more than just a student activity. It is about meaningful student engagement and active responsibility for learning, with the teacher providing guidance and support. Bremner's framework also reinforces the fact that learning is a continuous and iterative process, where self and peer assessment are crucial to the evolving process of acquiring knowledge.

Expanding this framework, the study demonstrates that SCE also cultivates learner autonomy and self-dependence by directly engaging students in multiple learning tasks, including discussions, writing, listening, and individual or group activities. Instead of being more on the passive side of the learning process by merely receiving information, students should be more on the active side by engaging with the content and participating in the process of knowledge construction. Such a position is consistent with the findings by Oseni et al. (2022) and Fufa et al. (2023), who both identified enhanced active participation in the classroom and increased student engagement and academic achievement, respectively, as a result of SCE. On the other hand, Tholibon et al. (2022) argue that the insufficient participation of students diminishes the effectiveness of SCE, thereby underlining the necessity of continuous engagement.

Student agency illustrates another layer of the theoretical structure for SCE. When students actively participate in the process of learning, it creates a positive environment and learning community, fostering feelings of

belonging and inclusivity (Starkey, 2019). Behaviourally, a lack of agency can result in withdrawal, absenteeism, and disruptive behaviours (Smyth, 2006). Constructivism recognises that agency means the learners are conscious of and are in control of the regulation of their cognitive processes (Starkey, 2019). Fusing these perspectives together, Bandura (1986) posits that agency is a result of purposeful learning, instruction that is modified as a result of feedback, and students' self-regulation and reflective thought. This means SCE enables students to truly own their learning and grow holistically (Bhardwaj et al, 2025).

SCE is additionally born from the constructivist belief that knowledge is constructed by the learner through their own experiences and interaction (Starkey, 2019). This belief lends itself to the development of instructional designs that are aimed at the enhancement of the learners' cognitive development and their ability to self-regulate (Neto, 2015). When growth in cognition is the emphasis, learners attain the desired learning outcomes and are more easily monitored (Pratama & Setyaningrum, 2018). This has also been corroborated by research, as seen in Neto (2015), whereby the use of educational games in teaching improved the cognitive and emotional development of learners. SCE is, therefore, reliant on the ongoing evaluation of the learners to ensure that the necessary teaching occurs to meet the learners' conditions for development, especially their cognitive development. In this, Tezer (2024) affirms that SCE significantly improves cognitive and metacognitive development, and subsequently, the quality of the overall learning experience.

Teacher's Role in Student-Centred Education (SCE)

The study emphasises the importance of teacher-centric policies in SCE success, with the most impact being on the teacher. As learning facilitators and developmental supporters, teachers help students grow both emotionally and socially, and in self-worth, personal identity, and in achieving their goals (Komolafe & Nation, 2023; Akinbote et al., 2017). This essential role makes teachers prime change agents for educational reform since their abilities can shape how and what students learn.

When it comes to SCE, teacher competence entails more than just knowing the subject. It also includes the ability to demonstrate effective pedagogy, strong classroom management skills, and the ability to foster and support learning. Competent and capable teachers are those who possess the relevant professional accreditations and teaching qualifications to direct the learning of the students (Kleiber, 2018). Competence includes the amalgamation of the pertinent skills, abilities, and knowledge to help teachers design and lead learning activities to enable students to realise and achieve their full potential (Sultan & Shaft, 2014). In terms of this perspective, the teacher moves from a direct teaching role to a more facilitating role, where the students learn by engaging in active learning through direct participation in various group work and learning activities, such as peer learning, collaborative work, and the integration of multiple disciplines (Anyanwu, 2015). This is also supported by empirical studies; Naz (2016) revealed that students taught by proficient teachers with good instructional and classroom management skills perform significantly higher than those with average teachers, and Rodrigues and Ponce (2013) advocate that SCE is aimed at and requires teachers of high proficiency who can sufficiently provide a professional setting in which learners can discover, construct, and acquire pertinent knowledge through meaningful experience.

The teacher's role in the learning process is an important part of Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical framework for social constructivism, about the concept of scaffolding. Educators, such as Jacobs and Power (2016), are increasingly agreeing that instructional decisions should be led primarily by educators (teachers and other professionals). SCE takes this one step further by promoting a more balanced approach that fosters the teacher's role as a guide for the learner while enabling the learner to co-construct knowledge through their experiences. As a result, the teacher serves as a guide or facilitator while the learner/participant is able to construct their own knowledge; therefore, the teacher is a "guide on the side" rather than a "sage on the stage" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 94). With this type of environment and the scaffolding process supporting learners in their development, learners will be encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility for their learning, develop critical thinking skills, and develop their ability to participate in democratic processes as active, responsible citizens.

Furthermore, implementing SCE has significant obstacles to overcome, as evidenced by Lee & Branch's (2017) research on how many students have learned to be more passive rather than active recipients of knowledge, making it difficult for them to shift to a more self-directed style of learning. For example, part of the teacher's

role is to slowly prepare the student for more self-directed styles of learning by encouraging student engagement, active participation, and classroom practices that promote democracy (Okumu, 2015). This teacher role is also significant in the development of democratic values, because SCE promotes shared decision-making, active participation, and critical thinking, which can be promoted in the classroom (Crick, 2007; Rachid & San, 2024). While using such practices can occur, the teacher must have appropriate teacher training and professional growth plans along with an understanding of cultural contexts; otherwise, it is unlikely that these democratic classroom practices will be effective (Bouziane, 2020).

The authors of this research also highlight that how teachers see themselves, how they do things, and how they see their role in the classroom all add to the ways they implement student-centred education (SCE). The ways teachers do things (instructional) are based on their beliefs, experiences, and professional value systems, and these different ways of doing things have been formed into patterns (i.e., ways of doing things) through the passage of time (Du Plessis, 2020; Mwanza, 2017). Even though many teachers have had training for SCE, too many teachers continue to have a teacher focus while teaching because of system limitations. Many studies indicate that 70% of teachers who were given SCE training continue to teach the traditional way; therefore, there is a large gap between understanding the theory and implementing the theory in practice (Du Plessis, 2020). With the SCE approach, teachers also identified barriers to SCE, such as the lack of an agreed-upon understanding of what SCE is, large class sizes, and problems managing their classrooms. Maden et al. (2011) also found that many teachers are aware of the effectiveness of the SCE approach to teaching, yet believe that they have not been trained adequately to teach using SCE methodology. Additional barriers to implementing an SCE approach to teaching are large classroom sizes and a shortage of resources (Saracalolu & Karasakalolu, 2011).

Also, barriers to implementing student-centred approaches to learning include limited time for teachers to meet the needs of students through the broad curriculum (the timeframe for teaching many things). The evidence that although teachers are aware of the principles of student-centred learning, they often have difficulty designing and delivering appropriate activities has been widely reported (e.g., Bayram-Jacobs & Hayrsever, 2016). Reducing the amount of curriculum content was found to improve outcomes (Connell et al., 2016), suggesting that adjusting the structure of the curriculum could help to make it more feasible to implement practices that are centred around students. Thus, the findings of this analysis are that although teachers have a significant role in supporting the successful use of student-centred practices, the effectiveness of their teaching is influenced by their skills, attitudes, professional development and the ability to develop a supportive system for students.

Teachers' Professional Preparation and Development as a Strategy for Implementing SCE

The effectiveness of implementing SCE is heavily dependent on the quality of teacher professional preparation and continual professional development. The research highlights how teachers are required to continue enhancing their competencies in order to support student learning effectively and encourage students to participate actively in the classroom. Stronge (2007) explained that teachers' ongoing professional growth is a critical factor for teachers functioning successfully within an ever-changing environment. Teachers should be prepared with three fundamental domains of knowledge before entering the classroom: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and learner knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005). Likewise, Burden and Byrd (2010) also state the importance of combining content knowledge with pedagogy and expertise in order to create effective instruction, especially when working within the student-centred model.

In the context of SCE, pedagogical competence is critical to providing teachers with the facilitative skills necessary for facilitating the learning process. Pedagogical knowledge consists of the skills that enable teachers to support, assist and direct children's learning through interactive and participatory approaches to teaching (Murphy et al., 2004). This includes the ability to provide a variety of instructional methods, meet students' individual learning needs, encourage students to participate in their own learning, and respond to students' learning with constructive feedback (Anfara & Schmid, 2007). Pedagogical competence is therefore vital for teachers who want to implement SCE strategies (e.g., collaborative learning, differentiated instruction and student-led activities). However, empirical research indicates that many teachers do not have enough pedagogical knowledge to implement these strategies effectively. For example, Obielodan et al. (2020)'s research conducted in Kwara State, Nigeria, found that teachers had limited pedagogical knowledge in terms of

implementing information and communication technology in the classroom. Likewise, Faloye (2022) found that pre-service teachers in Western Nigeria rarely used participative techniques when teaching.

Besides having pedagogical skills, effective implementation of SCE requires the teacher to possess a solid foundation of knowledge in their subject area as well as an understanding of the conceptual frameworks and structures that allow them to organise and present information in meaningful ways (Shulman, 1987; Murphy et al., 2004). According to Wenglinsky (2000), teachers who maintain current knowledge of their subject positively affect students' academic performance. When implementing SCE, it is important for the learner to be able to engage in exploration, inquiry and independent construction of knowledge; therefore, the teacher must provide accurate information and clarification.

In addition, communication skills and knowledge about student learning are important factors determining the effectiveness of the teacher in student-centred education (SCE). Teachers use communication skills to clarify and explain complex ideas, support their learners in working through academic difficulties through engaging them in meaningful conversations and discussions (Stronge 2007; McEwan 2002; Moore 2005). Research indicates students have often benefited from teachers being able to clarify complex ideas and have facilitated interactive classroom conversations (Smith 2009; Reese 2009). Just as important as the ability to use communicative skills is the knowledge a teacher has about his/her students' learning style, background, and individual differences. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden 2005) stated that teachers' understanding of their learners is a basic premise of effective teaching; Ayers 1993) affirmed that a teacher's ability to provide exceptional instruction to students is based on knowing the students well. The ability to understand student learning and how they learn, in SCE contexts, allows teachers to be able to tailor instruction according to students' strengths, potential and learning needs, which results in increasing student engagement and improving learning outcomes for all students (Goyibovaet al., 2025).

The teachers' ability to effectively utilise the SCE is enhanced by their ongoing professional development. Teachers can improve their instructional methods and stay current with changing teaching styles through participation in workshops, conferences, and professional learning communities (Smith & Wyness, 2024). Research indicates that ongoing professional development positively affects students' academic performance and attitudes towards school (Stronge, 2007). According to Taylor (2009), educators should work collaboratively and engage in mentoring to help provide support for new teachers and transition them into their professional roles.

The overall conclusion of this study is that developing teacher capacities is an important part of implementing student-centred education. There are limitations on the number of teachers that can effectively adopt student-centred education practices, such as collaboration, differentiation, and student autonomy, if the teachers do not have adequate preparation, pedagogical competence or the support of continuous professional development opportunities. In order to increase teacher capacity there needs to be a stronger connection between the concepts of SCE and teacher practice within the classroom.

Challenges in Implementing SCE

The application of SCE is limited by many obstacles, both structural and pedagogical. A large class size would make it difficult for students to engage in learning, but also makes it impossible to provide individualised instruction. Because there is no room in a classroom for students to engage in higher-order thinking, teachers are unable to help students grow at higher levels, as demonstrated by research completed by Connell et al. (2016), Borda et al. (2017), Anyanwu & Iwuamadi (2015), and Fufa et al. (2023).

The second major obstacle to the full implementation of SCE is that adequate instructional resources and materials are not available to promote active learning and critical thinking. Adequate instructional resources and materials are essential to allow teachers to implement SCE strategies, especially in public junior secondary schools in Nigeria (Folashade, 2023; Clark-Wilson et al., 2016; Summer & Böttger, 2023).

Inadequate teacher training is also seen as a significant barrier to teaching using SCE methodology. Many of the teachers in this research study lack the pedagogic knowledge and competence to facilitate a student-centred

learning environment. Teachers also lack the confidence to manage an interactive classroom and to guide their students through the learning process using new teaching strategies. An overwhelming majority of teachers have not been trained in SCE methodologies. Therefore, many teachers have difficulty managing and implementing student-centred activities (McCabe & O'Connor, 2013; Sadler, 2012; Osman et al., 2015; Blackie et al., 2010).

Curriculum rigidity and the time constraints placed on teachers serve to impede the implementation of SCE. An overloaded and exam-driven curriculum leaves little space for engaging and exploratory learning experiences to occur. As a result, teachers are often faced with the challenge of covering the syllabus of the curriculum and meeting the demands of a student-centred learning approach, which consumes more of their time, therefore favouring traditional models of teaching (Aksit et al., 2016; Tawalbeh & AlAsmari, 2015; Donkoh & Amoakwah, 2024).

One of the main issues identified in this research project is the disconnect between the lesson planning process and the implementation of lessons in the classroom as it relates to assessment. SCE promotes active learning and active participation by students, and many schools in the participating countries primarily use summative assessment in high-stakes tests. This misalignment creates barriers to the effective delivery of SCE; it creates a lack of constructive alignment amongst the teaching methodologies, the learning objectives, and the assessment processes (Anyanwu & Iwuamadi, 2015; Pham Thi Hong, 2011; Baeten et al., 2010).

METHODOLOGY

In this research, a qualitative method was used to examine how secondary-level educators in Western Nigeria employ SCE in their classrooms. The qualitative method is appropriate for this inquiry because it affords an in-depth look into the practices, beliefs, and classroom dynamics of teachers within their own natural environments. Additionally, by concentrating on teachers' narratives on actual classroom situations, the researcher captured the challenges and subtleties of implementing SCE, especially in relation to teacher facilitation, as well as their application of pedagogical methodologies.

To answer the research questions, the researcher collected data from various sources, including teacher interviews and lesson plans. Teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to capture their perspectives, beliefs, and experiences in relation to SCE implementation. Teacher interviews allowed them to explain their decisions when making lesson plans, the strategies they used to teach students, and their beliefs as to how they use SCE to promote learning and support for all students in class. The second type of data collected was lesson plan analysis. Lesson plan analysis was another way for the researcher to find out how much SCE principles are present in teacher lesson plans and to determine whether or not there is alignment between lesson objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques.

The above data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis provides a qualitative analytic strategy for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns (themes) in data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). By analysing the data, the researcher can systematically analyse recurring ideas about teacher implementation of SCE, including the strategies used by teachers, the challenges faced by teachers, and the relationship between lesson planning and classroom application.

The themes generated through this analysis illustrate how participating teachers made sense of SCE in their own classrooms, and indicate the similarities and differences in teacher practice as compared to established student-centred principles. Reflexive thematic analysis provides both a rigorous and a flexible way to analyse data, allowing the researcher to engage in depth with the data and provide meaningful interpretations of teacher roles as facilitators within student-centred classrooms.

FINDINGS

Grouping of Students as a Core Strategy

A key finding from the research study is that student identification and student grouping are major strategies for implementing student-centred learning. The study emphasises the identification and grouping of students as an

important classroom practice. In many cases, teachers purposefully group students by ability and behaviour to tailor instruction and manage diversity in the classroom. Purposeful grouping may also be seen as an attempt to create a balanced classroom environment where students can both support and challenge one another.

Evidence from teacher responses supports this practice. For example, one teacher said, "*I usually identify each student… I group them together…*" This indicates that this teacher is making a conscious decision to group students in such a way to enhance understanding and engagement. By using grouping strategies, teachers create an environment where students interact with one another and actively engage in the learning process, rather than passively receiving instruction.

According to the findings of the study, using this method greatly increases student engagement, aids in peer-to-peer learning, and helps make classrooms more inclusive for all learners. Through collaborative work, students share their ideas, help each other, and build knowledge as a team. Not only will this improve student engagement, but it also provides support for students with different learning styles and abilities, reinforcing the foundational concepts of student-based learning.

Consideration of Learner Diversity

The research found that teachers were aware of the diversity among learners and planned their instructional practices based on the knowledge of how learners learn at different rates and have different levels of cognitive ability. The findings of this research indicate that teachers incorporate these differences into their lesson planning through a deliberate process. One teacher stated, "*Students can be found in many different categories, and when planning, I account for all those categories and their differences*," This statement supports the research and provides evidence that teachers are aware of learner diversity and intentionally adjust their teaching methods to accommodate all learners, creating an environment where high-performing and low-performing learners can equally succeed.

The research supports the idea that adaptive instructional practices will improve student understanding, increase student participation, and guarantee that all students will be equally provided for. Adaptive instructional practices correspond with the principles of student-centred education, which promote equitable and effective learning outcomes through the accommodation of each learner's unique characteristics and needs.

Collaborative and Student-Led Learning

Additionally, the results of this study demonstrate that collaboration and student-led learning are key characteristics of classroom practice for the purpose of implementing student-centred education. Students are engaged in the learning process through group work, peer critiques and class discussions that focus on student participation rather than teacher-led instruction. Students are encouraged to "*work collaboratively… to provide constructive feedback…*" indicating an interactive learning environment where collaborative knowledge construction is done through the sharing of, evaluation of, and refinement of ideas.

Along with collaborative learning experiences, the study further indicates that there is a shift within the classroom to students taking ownership of their own learning via the use of self-directed and inquiry-based learning activities. Students utilise outside resources, investigate independently, contribute their ideas during discussions and, as such, build their own knowledge as opposed to being the sole source of explanation/understanding from a teacher. This not only enhances their comprehension but also nurtures their ability to think critically and solve problems.

Thus, the evidence shows that collaborative and student-led learning increases engagement and encourages active participation in the classroom. Through encouraging students to engage collaboratively, provide constructive feedback, and independently investigate knowledge, teachers create an engaging, interactive and dynamic learning environment in line with the principles of student-centred education.

Teacher as Facilitator

Teachers should not merely convey information; they serve as a tool to help students learn. While they can lead the class by regulating the classroom discussion, they assist students through guidance during learning, allowing

students to maintain an appropriate degree of independence while still having access to the teacher's help. Thus, the role of the teacher can be understood as being responsible for providing an environment which allows for active participation and interaction between the teacher and the student and between all students participating in the class through a facilitative type of teaching rather than controlling the entire instructional process through the teacher's direction and sole responsibility for the entire instructional process.

The data indicates that the teacher has a facilitative and supportive role in student learning during student learning; for example, the data states that "*the teacher is observing ... informs ... moderates [and] supports [the classroom] discussion*;" demonstrating his or her primary function in guiding and structuring student learning activities rather than interfering with or dominating interactions between students in the classroom. Instead of dominating how students learn from one another, teachers allow students to give their opinions, engage in conversations with one another, and create knowledge together, with teachers helping students only when they require clarification or assistance in determining where to go from there in their learning.

This supportive and facilitative approach helps students develop a greater degree of independence and allows them to create a comfortable environment for themselves to learn about a concept and participate in creating more complex concepts and learn a shared meaning with others through the act of learning together in a common space. It is concluded that teachers create a more inclusive and engaging environment for students through moderating learning rather than directing learning through the use of information as a way of promoting student-centred learning principles.

Misalignment with Lesson Plan

The study reveals a disconnect between how teachers perceive SCE and the actual planning that occurs in a formalised way via lesson plans. Teachers demonstrate knowledge of SCE principles and use interactive approaches in their classrooms; however, they do not typically include these approaches in their lesson planning. According to the study's findings, "*the vast majority…of teachers' comprehension of SCE reflects their lesson plans*," demonstrating some degree of disconnection between pedagogical knowledge and formal written documents.

The examination of lesson plans demonstrates that the vast majority of lesson plans are teacher-centred and rigidly formatted, delivering primarily content to students but not enabling them to engage or participate. Therefore, although it appears that teachers take a facilitator role during interactions with students in the classroom, their planning is often a continuation of the traditional approaches of instructional delivery. Subsequently, the core principles of SCE (e.g., collaborative learning, differentiation, and student autonomy) are not intentionally incorporated into lessons.

This disconnect highlights an important disconnect between the theory and reality of teaching. This indicates that in order for teachers to transition from conventional models to using SCE both in their delivery of lessons and their lesson planning, they will need more support and training to successfully make the shift. Closing the gap between the two is imperative for creating consistency with regard to the implementation of SCE as well as to maximise the student learning outcomes for which SCE was developed.

DISCUSSION

Research has shown an increased shift in the roles being occupied by teachers in the classroom to that of a facilitator of SCE through teacher moderation of discussion, providing learners guidance, assisting in active participation, etc., as opposed to using traditional, teacher-directed instructional methods as the primary means of instruction. This shift in teacher roles is indicative of the overall philosophical perspective that supports the use of SCE. Philosophically, SCE values the concepts of learner choice, learner collaboration, and the construction of knowledge through interaction with other learners (Starkey, 2019; Weimer, 2013). This shift in teacher roles is also supported by empirical data; for example, current research has shown that strategies associated with SCE (i.e., collaborative learning and engaging students with their learning) increase student participation and the quality of learning among students (Fufa et al., 2023; Tholibon et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of grouping strategies and accommodating the diversity of learners in this study aligns with many of the

principles associated with differentiated instruction, which continually gains recognition as an integral component of meeting the diverse learning needs of students in today's classrooms (Goyibova et al., 2025).

The findings point to a trend that is moving in the right direction; however, the use of SCE strategies is still generally informal and not well embedded in curriculum development. Teachers are aware of SCE principles, and they use them in their teaching methods, but primarily this is not reflected in the way they plan lesson plans, which are largely teacher-centred or very rigid in nature.

There is a continuing gap between theory and practice because teachers do not always have a theoretical framework from which to begin developing their courses. Previous researchers have also found that although teachers perceive SCE as a desirable way to teach and learn, they do not often have the experience or freedom to implement these methods due to contextual and structural limitations (Du Plessis, 2020; Maden, 2011). Moreover, Bayram-Jacobs and Hayırsver (2016) also found that even when teachers believe they understand SCE principles, they still do not have the resources necessary to create substantive student-centred activities.

The results of this research support research in education in general, which emphasises structured professional development/support throughout the implementation of SCE, which is important to enable educators to successfully implement SCE. A key barrier to the successful adoption of student-centred service delivery is educator capacity (Rodrigues & Ponce, 2013; Stronge, 2007). In addition, there is evidence that a lack of support in developing pedagogy and limited opportunities for ongoing professional development impede teachers' ability to effectively implement interactive and learner-centred strategies, especially in developing contexts (Faloye, 2022; Obielodan et al., 2020). Teachers face further professional barriers to full implementation of SCE due to systemic problems such as large class sizes, overload of curriculum material and limited instructional resources.

As a result of this research, there is evidence to support targeted professional development, institutional resources for educators to improve their capability, and the implementation of rock-solid curriculum alignment to eliminate any possible disconnect between theory and the practice of teaching (Bailey & Sowell, 2017; Smith & Wyness, 2022). Studies conducted in the field of education have consistently found that the provision of ongoing professional learning through a range of activities, including but not limited to training, mentoring, and participation in professional learning communities, results in significant improvements in both the quality of teachers' instructional delivery and the academic accomplishments of students (Harris et al., 2017; Smith & Wyness, 2022). In addition, when developing curricular frameworks, by using a student-centred approach, reducing the amount of content required to be taught to students and creating significant learning opportunities can occur (Connell et al., 2016). Strengthening teachers' capacity as educators and providing institutional supports to help teachers implement SCE effectively in classrooms is crucial for ensuring that educators not only understand SCE conceptually, but also implement it systematically and with fidelity in teaching practice.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that Western Nigerian secondary school teachers had a high awareness level of SCE and used facilitative strategies during teaching. The evidence from the interaction in the classroom shows that teachers encourage their students' participation in various classroom activities, such as cooperation in work, discussion and facilitation, which showed that they acknowledged their role as facilitators and not mere transmitters of knowledge to their students. This reveals that teachers are now making conscious efforts towards more active and participative methods of teaching and learning.

Although the teachers' classroom practice supports student-centeredness, the analysis of lesson plans indicated an incongruity between teachers' classroom practices and their lesson planning processes. While teachers apply SCE strategies when in the classroom, these are not translated to their lesson plans, as they are characterised by the traditional, teacher-centred methods. This highlights the difficulty in the translation of pedagogical knowledge to classroom practice.

Thus, for proper practice of SCE, the study strongly suggests that institutional backing, curriculum match and teachers' professional development need to be addressed and adequately supported to enable teachers to incorporate student-centeredness into both instructional practices and planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the study's findings, a few recommendations can be made for improving the successful implementation of SCE in secondary schools in Nigeria. First, it is recommended that the tenets of SCE be formally incorporated into the formal lesson planning process. As a gap was evident in the study between classroom implementation and lesson planning, school management and policymakers should support teachers in developing lesson plans with explicit SCE teaching methods, such as collaboration, differentiation, and student leadership embedded in their lesson planning. This would more accurately bridge the gap between lesson planning and the classroom implementation, as found in the study's results.

Second, it is suggested that sustained professional development and teacher training are crucial to further develop the pedagogical competence of teachers to bridge the gap between awareness and practice in implementing SCE. The teacher training programs must be designed to focus on practical classroom strategies in learning delivery and classroom management, and on the application of student-centred instruction in both teaching and assessment.

In addition, adequate instructional resources must be available to support the effective implementation of SCE. The researchers recommend providing teachers with adequate teaching tools, materials and equipment that may foster active learning, interactive and engaging teaching and learning. Lack of sufficient teaching resources will likely hinder the successful implementation of student-centred strategies.

Lastly, the curriculum policies must be compatible with the realities of the classroom. The researchers recommend that policymakers consider the current context of secondary education, including large class sizes and lack of time, in their policy formulation and practice. Flexibility in policy will ensure the institution of student-centred instruction, and, hence, bring forth better learning outcomes for students.

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