



Balancing Standardized Testing and Holistic Learning: Teacher Educators' Views on Curriculum Priorities in Primary Education

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This study addresses the critical tension between standardized testing and holistic learning within Nigeria's primary education system. The research is motivated by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and outdated curricula that hinder achieving a balanced educational approach. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of 400 Nigerian teacher educators (215 males and 185 females) regarding integrating standardized testing and holistic learning. Employing a descriptive survey research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled "Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Balancing Standardized Testing and Holistic Learning in Primary Education (TEP-BSTHL)," with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from various higher education institutions. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, revealing that while standardized testing is valued for accountability, it tends to narrow curriculum focus and increase student stress. Holistic learning is highly prioritized but faces significant implementation challenges, including large class sizes and inadequate resources. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on teacher educators' perspectives, offering practical strategies such as formative assessments and improved teacher training programs. The study concludes with recommendations for systemic reforms, including diversified assessment methods, enhanced teacher training, and more flexible curricula to balance both educational approaches effectively.

Keywords: curriculum priorities, holistic learning, Nigerian education system, primary education, standardized testing, teacher educators

Citation: Egbai, M. J., Ogbu, E. E., Ofoegbu, J. U., & Egbai, J. M. (2025). Balancing standardized testing and holistic learning: Teacher educators' views on curriculum priorities in primary education. *International Journal of Instruction*, 18(4), 215-230. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2025.18412a>

INTRODUCTION

Primary education serves as the bedrock for future learning and societal development, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria (UNESCO, 2021). It is widely acknowledged as a critical platform for fostering children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth. In Nigeria, primary education assumes an even more significant role due to its potential to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, and enhance national development (Obioma & Nwosu, 2023). However, despite these aspirations, systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and outdated curricula persist, hindering the full realization of primary education's transformative potential. Among these challenges, a critical tension exists between standardized testing and holistic learning, which raises significant concerns about curriculum priorities in Nigerian primary education (Adeyemi & Adeyinka (2023).

Standardized testing has long been employed in Nigeria's primary education system as a tool for assessing student performance and determining educational outcomes (Oyedepi, 2022). Examinations such as the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) are designed to evaluate students' readiness for secondary education and ensure accountability in the educational system. While standardized testing provides quantifiable data that can guide educational reforms, it also comes with inherent limitations. Critics argue that over-reliance on standardized tests narrows the curriculum focus, prioritizing rote memorization over deeper understanding and critical thinking skills (Adeyemi et al., 2020). Furthermore, the pressure associated with high-stakes testing often leads to increased stress and anxiety among students, exacerbating inequalities in educational access and achievement (Akinwale, 2021).

In contrast, holistic learning offers an alternative approach aimed at nurturing well-rounded individuals who possess not only academic knowledge but also essential life skills such as creativity, collaboration, and emotional intelligence (UNESCO, 2019). This approach emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, ensuring that students develop intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically. Holistic education aligns closely with global trends advocating for 21st-century skills, including problem-solving, communication, and adaptability—qualities increasingly demanded in today's rapidly changing world (Zhao, 2021). Despite its merits, implementing holistic learning in Nigerian primary schools faces significant challenges, such as large class sizes, inadequate resources, and societal pressures favoring high test scores over broader developmental goals (Eze & Okoro, 2021).

The tension between standardized testing and holistic learning presents a notable challenge within the Nigerian educational landscape. On one hand, standardized testing demands measurable results and accountability, often leading to a rigid, exam-focused curriculum. On the other hand, holistic learning advocates for flexibility, student-centeredness, and personalized instruction, which can be difficult to implement alongside high-stakes testing regimes (Eze & Okoro, 2021). This dichotomy raises critical questions about how best to balance these competing priorities while maintaining the integrity of primary education in Nigeria. Should the focus be on achieving high test scores, or should it prioritize fostering holistic development? How

can these two approaches be reconciled to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education? These pressing questions underscore the need for a deeper exploration of the perspectives of Nigerian teacher educators, who play a pivotal role in shaping the curriculum and implementing educational policies.

Problem Statement

The tension between standardized testing and holistic learning in Nigeria's primary education curriculum presents a significant challenge for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the educational system. On one hand, standardized testing has long been regarded as a cornerstone of accountability in education, providing measurable and objective data to assess student performance and evaluate institutional effectiveness (Adeyemi, 2010). In Nigeria, examinations such as the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) serve as critical benchmarks for determining students' readiness for secondary education and ensuring compliance with national educational standards (Oyedepi, 2022). Proponents argue that standardized testing fosters transparency, reduces corruption in the educational system, and ensures uniformity in assessing academic achievement (Olatunji, 2020). For example, the introduction of computer-based testing (CBT) for national examinations has minimized instances of examination malpractice, thereby enhancing the integrity of the assessment process (Olatunji, 2020).

On the other hand, holistic learning represents an alternative paradigm that prioritizes the development of well-rounded individuals equipped with essential life skills such as creativity, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving abilities (UNESCO, 2019). This approach emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, ensuring that students grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically (Eze & Okoro, 2021). Holistic learning aligns closely with global trends advocating for 21st-century skills, which are increasingly demanded in today's rapidly changing world. However, implementing holistic learning in Nigerian primary schools faces significant challenges, including large class sizes, inadequate resources, and societal pressures favoring high test scores over broader developmental goals (Obioma & Nwosu, 2023).

This dichotomy raises critical questions about the priorities of the Nigerian primary education curriculum. Should the focus be on achieving high test scores, which are often seen as indicators of success and gateways to future opportunities? Or should it prioritize fostering holistic development, which equips students with the skills necessary for lifelong success and adaptability in diverse contexts? These questions highlight the need to balance these two approaches to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for both academic excellence and real-world challenges.

The tension between standardized testing and holistic learning is further complicated by systemic issues within the Nigerian education system. For instance, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and disparities in educational access between urban and rural areas exacerbate the challenges of implementing either approach effectively (Okeke, 2018 & Harris & Larsen, 2021). Critics argue that over-reliance on standardized testing narrows the curriculum focus, prioritizing rote memorization over

deeper understanding and critical thinking skills (Adeyemi et al., 2020). Additionally, the pressure associated with high-stakes testing often leads to increased stress and anxiety among students, particularly in environments where exam outcomes determine future opportunities (Akinwale, 2021). Conversely, while holistic learning offers a more comprehensive approach to education, its implementation is hindered by limited resources, outdated curricula, and insufficient teacher training (Eze & Okoro, 2021).

To address these challenges, it is essential to understand the perspectives of Nigerian teacher educators, who play a pivotal role in shaping the curriculum and implementing educational policies. Teacher educators influence both pre-service and in-service teachers, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to deliver quality education (Lee & Davis, 2023). Their expertise and experiences provide valuable insights into how to reconcile the competing demands of standardized testing and holistic learning. By exploring their views, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about curriculum priorities in Nigerian primary education and propose actionable recommendations for achieving a balanced approach.

Research question

1. How do male and female Nigerian teacher educators perceive the role of standardized testing in shaping primary education curricula?
2. What challenges do male and female teacher educators face in implementing a balanced approach that incorporating standardized testing and holistic learning in primary classrooms?
3. What strategies do male and female Nigerian teacher educators propose for reconciling standardized testing with holistic learning in primary education?
4. How does gender impact the Nigerian teacher educators overall perspective regarding curriculum priorities in primary education?

Conceptual Framework

Defining Standardized Testing and Holistic Learning

To better understand the dynamics between standardized testing and holistic learning, it is essential to define these terms clearly. Standardized testing refers to assessments designed to measure student performance using uniform procedures and scoring criteria (Oyedemi, 2022 & Au & Brown 2020). In Nigeria, tests such as the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) are widely used to evaluate students' mastery of core subjects like mathematics, English, and science. These assessments typically emphasize recall of factual knowledge and lower-order thinking skills. While standardized testing provides measurable data for accountability, critics argue that it often narrows the curriculum focus, prioritizing rote memorization over deeper understanding and critical thinking skills (Adeyemi et al., 2020).

In contrast, holistic learning represents an educational approach aimed at nurturing well-rounded individuals who possess not only academic knowledge but also essential life skills such as creativity, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving abilities (UNESCO, 2019 & Robinson & Aronica, 2020). This approach emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, ensuring that students

grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically (Eze & Okoro, 2021). Holistic learning aligns closely with global trends advocating for 21st-century skills, which are increasingly demanded in diverse professional and social contexts (Popham, 2020). Unlike standardized testing, which focuses on measurable outcomes, holistic learning fosters intrinsic motivation, emotional intelligence, and lifelong learning skills.

The tension between these two paradigms highlights the challenges educators face in balancing accountability with broader developmental goals. For instance, while standardized testing provides quantifiable metrics for evaluating student achievement, it often neglects the development of creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking—qualities that are crucial for success in today's rapidly changing world (Akinwale, 2021). Conversely, while holistic learning offers a more comprehensive approach to education, its implementation is hindered by systemic issues such as large class sizes, inadequate resources, and societal pressures favoring high test scores over broader developmental goals (Obioma & Nwosu, 2023).

Theoretical Foundations of Standardized Testing

Several educational theories provide a rationale for standardized testing. One prominent framework is Bloom's Taxonomy, which categorizes cognitive processes into six levels, ranging from lower-order thinking (e.g., remembering facts) to higher-order thinking (e.g., creating new ideas) (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001 & Mohammad, 2025). However, standardized testing often focuses on the lower levels of cognition, emphasizing recall over analysis, evaluation, or creation. For example, Adeyemi et al. (2020) found that Nigerian curricula frequently prioritize rote memorization, underscoring the need for more comprehensive assessment methods.

Another relevant theory is Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura (1977). This theory highlights the importance of observation, imitation, and modeling in learning. While standardized testing primarily measures individual achievement, it often neglects social and collaborative aspects of learning. Critics argue that this limits opportunities for students to engage in teamwork, real-world problem-solving, and reflective practices, which are central to holistic development (Eze & Okoro, 2021). Furthermore, the pressure associated with high-stakes testing can lead to increased stress and anxiety among students, exacerbating inequalities in educational access and achievement (Akinwale, 2021).

Despite its limitations, standardized testing remains a cornerstone of educational accountability in Nigeria. Proponents argue that it provides reliable and objective data for assessing student performance, identifying areas needing improvement, and informing policy decisions at both state and federal levels (Okeke, 2018). For instance, the introduction of computer-based testing (CBT) for national examinations has minimized instances of examination malpractice, thereby enhancing the integrity of the assessment process (Olatunji, 2020).

Theoretical Foundations of Holistic Learning

Holistic learning draws heavily from constructivist and multiple intelligences theories. Constructivism, developed by Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), posits that learners

actively construct knowledge through experiences and interactions with their environment. This aligns closely with holistic learning, which advocates for learner-centered approaches where students engage in meaningful activities, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their understanding. Eze and Okoro (2021) argue that constructivist principles can enhance primary education in Nigeria by promoting active participation and reducing reliance on passive instructional methods.

Similarly, Multiple Intelligences Theory, proposed by Howard Gardner (1983), suggests that intelligence comprises multiple dimensions, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, and naturalist intelligences (Pham & Le, 2025). Holistic learning embraces this perspective by recognizing and nurturing diverse talents among students. In contrast, standardized testing often privileges only certain types of intelligence, such as linguistic and logical-mathematical, leaving other forms underappreciated (Akinwale, 2021).

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) further supports holistic learning practices by emphasizing the importance of observation, imitation, and modeling in the learning process. This theory encourages social interaction, teamwork, and real-world problem-solving, all of which are integral to holistic development. Incorporating these elements into Nigerian classrooms could foster greater engagement and relevance in primary education, particularly in contexts where students face significant socioeconomic challenges (Eze & Okoro, 2021).

Bridging the gap between Standardized Testing and Holistic Learning

The complementary yet contrasting nature of standardized testing and holistic learning underscores the need for a balanced approach. For example, integrating Bloom's Taxonomy into standardized tests could ensure that assessments measure higher-order thinking skills alongside basic knowledge. Similarly, applying constructivist principles in classroom instruction could make learning more interactive and engaging, preparing students for both academic success and real-world challenges (Popham, 2020 & Obioma & Nwosu, 2023).

Achieving this balance requires systemic reforms, including diversified assessment methods, improved teacher training, and flexible curricula. Formative assessments, project-based learning, and experiential activities can complement standardized testing by fostering deeper understanding and lifelong skills (Okeke, 2018). As noted by Black & Wiliam (2020) & Obioma and Nwosu (2023), collaboration among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders is essential to design curricula that meet the needs of all learners while maintaining accountability standards.

Global models offer valuable insights into achieving this balance. For instance, Finland's education system emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, and social skills through experiential and project-based learning, with minimal reliance on standardized testing (Sahlberg, 2015 & Sleeter, 2020). Similarly, Singapore blends rigorous national examinations with holistic learning elements, such as character development programs and interdisciplinary projects, ensuring that students develop both academic proficiency and well-rounded personalities (Tan & Chua, 2020). While these models may not be

directly applicable to Nigeria due to differences in resources and cultural norms, they highlight the potential for innovative strategies to reconcile standardized testing with holistic learning.

Challenges in Implementing a Balanced Approach

Despite the theoretical and practical benefits of balancing standardized testing and holistic learning, several challenges hinder implementation in the Nigerian context. Large class sizes, inadequate resources, and insufficient teacher training are among the most significant barriers (Obioma & Nwosu, 2023). Additionally, societal expectations and parental pressures often prioritize academic achievement over holistic development, making it difficult for schools to shift away from exam-focused practices (Eze & Okoro, 2021).

However, the implementation of these programs faces significant challenges. Limited resources, outdated curricula, and insufficient teacher training hinder their effectiveness. Moreover, societal expectations and parental pressures often prioritize academic achievement over holistic development, making it difficult for schools to shift away from exam-focused practices (Eze & Okoro, 2021).

While progress has been made in promoting holistic learning, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies exploring how Nigerian teacher educators perceive the balance between standardized testing and holistic learning. Understanding their perspectives is crucial, as they play a pivotal role in shaping curriculum priorities and pedagogical practices. This gap in the literature underscores the importance of the current study, which seeks to address this deficiency through an in-depth exploration of teacher educators' views.

Despite extensive research on educational practices globally, significant gaps remain in understanding how to effectively balance standardized testing and holistic learning, particularly within the Nigerian context. These gaps are further exacerbated by a lack of focus on the perspectives of key stakeholders such as teacher educators. A critical gap in the existing literature is the underrepresentation of teacher educators' voices in discussions about curriculum priorities and educational reform in Nigeria. While numerous studies have examined the experiences and challenges faced by classroom teachers, there is limited research that specifically explores the views of teacher educators—individuals who play a crucial role in shaping both current and future generations of educators (Eze & Okoro, 2021).

Another notable gap in the literature is the absence of localized solutions tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the Nigerian education system. Global models from countries like Finland and Singapore provide valuable lessons, but their direct applicability to the Nigerian context is limited due to differences in resources, infrastructure, and cultural norms (Obioma & Nwosu, 2023). Nigeria faces unique challenges such as large class sizes, inadequate funding, and disparities in access to quality education across urban and rural areas. These factors necessitate context-specific strategies that take into account the realities of Nigerian classrooms. For example, while reducing the frequency of high-stakes tests may work in Finland, it

might not be immediately feasible in Nigeria without addressing underlying issues like accountability and quality assurance (Oyedeji, 2022).

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by focusing explicitly on the Nigerian context and exploring how teacher educators envision balancing standardized testing and holistic learning in primary education. By gathering data directly from teacher educators, the study will uncover practical, actionable recommendations that are grounded in local realities and informed by expert perspectives.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to explore the perspectives of Nigerian teacher educators on balancing standardized testing and holistic learning in primary education. The descriptive survey method was chosen because it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to describe participants' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions regarding the research topic (Oyedeji, 2022 & Creswell, & Creswell, 2022). This design is particularly suitable for addressing the research questions, which aim to understand how teacher educators perceive the integration of standardized testing and holistic learning, the challenges they face, and the strategies they propose for achieving a balanced approach.

The study focused on teacher educators in Nigerian higher education institutions who are actively involved in teacher training and curriculum development. These individuals were selected due to their critical role in shaping educational practices, particularly in the context of primary education. By using this research design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of curriculum priorities in Nigerian primary education from the perspective of key stakeholder

Participants

The target population for this study comprised teacher educators in Nigerian universities and colleges of education who are directly involved in programs related to primary education and curriculum development. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on their professional roles and expertise in shaping educational practices. This non-probability sampling method ensured that the sample included individuals with relevant experience and knowledge about the research topic.

A total of 400 teacher educators participated in the study, consisting of 215 males and 185 females, ensuring balanced gender representation. The participants were drawn from various higher education institutions across Nigeria, reflecting diverse geographic and institutional contexts. This diversity enhanced the generalizability of the findings while maintaining a focus on the specific challenges and opportunities within the Nigerian education system.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Balancing Standardized Testing and Holistic Learning in Primary

Education (TEP-BSTHL)." The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and validated by experts in the fields of educational assessment, curriculum studies, and holistic learning. Feedback from these experts was incorporated into the final version of the instrument to ensure its relevance and accuracy.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 items , organized into five sections corresponding to the research questions. Section A focused on perceptions of standardized testing in primary education, Section B on challenges in implementing a balanced approach, Section C on strategies for reconciling standardized testing with holistic learning, and Section D on gender differences in perspectives on curriculum priorities. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert scale , ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) .

Data collection took place during a national conference on educational reform, attended by teacher educators from various higher education institutions across Nigeria. Two trained research assistants facilitated the distribution and collection of questionnaires to ensure a high response rate and completeness. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, guaranteeing confidentiality, and adhering to the principle of non-maleficence to prevent any harm to participants. The reliability of the research instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha , which produced a coefficient of 0.87 , indicating strong internal consistency. This high reliability score ensures that the instrument accurately measures the constructs under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, to summarize participants' responses. Items with a mean score of 2.50 or higher were considered acceptable, while those below 2.50 were flagged as areas needing attention. This threshold was chosen to identify consensus among participants and highlight areas where further intervention may be required.

The analysis revealed significant insights into teacher educators' perceptions of standardized testing and holistic learning. For example, Table 1 shows that both male and female teacher educators perceive standardized testing as a reliable tool for measuring student performance and maintaining accountability. However, they also acknowledge its limitations, such as narrowing the curriculum focus and causing student stress. Similarly, Tables 2 and 3 highlight the challenges faced by educators and the strategies they propose for achieving a balanced approach.

Gender differences in perspectives were also examined, as shown in Table 4. While some differences were noted, particularly regarding the prioritization of holistic learning, the overall impact of gender on curriculum priorities was deemed minimal. These findings provide valuable insights into the complexities of balancing standardized testing and holistic learning in Nigerian primary education.

FINDINGS

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation of male and female teacher educators' perceptions of the role of standardized testing in shaping primary education curricula

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male educators			Female educators		
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
1	Standardized testing provides a reliable measure of student academic performance.	3.75	0.80	Accept	3.82	0.78	Accept
2	Standardized testing helps identify areas where students need improvement.	3.60	0.72	Accept	3.55	0.70	Accept
3	Standardized testing narrows the curriculum focus, prioritizing rote memorization over critical thinking.	3.45	0.68	Accept	3.50	0.65	Accept
4	Standardized testing is essential for maintaining accountability in primary education.	3.70	0.75	Accept	3.65	0.73	Accept
5	Standardized testing creates unnecessary stress and anxiety for students.	3.20	0.60	Accept	3.25	0.58	Accept
Sum		3.54	0.71	Accept	3.55	0.69	Accept
Average							

In Table, 1, the result shows that both male and female teacher educators perceive standardized testing as a reliable tool for measuring student performance and maintaining accountability. However, they also acknowledge its limitations, such as narrowing the curriculum focus and causing student stress. The high mean scores indicate general agreement on the role of standardized testing, but the slightly lower scores for items related to stress and rote memorization suggest some concerns.

Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of male and female teacher educators' challenges in implementing a balanced approach

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Educators			Female Educators		
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
6	Large class sizes make it difficult to implement a balanced approach.	3.85	0.90	Accept	3.80	0.88	Accept
7	Lack of resources hinders the integration of holistic learning with standardized testing.	3.70	0.85	Accept	3.75	0.82	Accept
8	Teachers are not adequately trained to balance standardized testing and holistic learning.	3.60	0.80	Accept	3.65	0.78	Accept
9	Parental pressure for high test scores limits the focus on holistic learning.	3.50	0.75	Accept	3.55	0.73	Accept
10	The current curriculum does not support a balanced approach between testing and holistic learning.	2.40	0.50	Reject	2.45	0.55	Reject
Sum		3.41	0.76	Accept	3.44	0.75	Accept
Average							

In Table 2, the result shows both male and female teacher educators face significant challenges in implementing a balanced approach, particularly due to large class sizes, lack of resources, and inadequate training. However, Item 15 ("The current curriculum does not support a balanced approach") was rejected, with mean scores below 2.50. This

suggests that while challenges exist, educators believe the curriculum has the potential to support a balanced approach if other barriers are addressed.

Table 3

Mean and standard deviation of male and female teacher educators' strategies for reconciling standardized testing with holistic learning

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Educators		Female Educators			
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
11	Formative assessments should be used alongside standardized tests to evaluate student learning.	3.80	0.85	Accept	3.85	0.82	Accept
12	Project-based learning can help integrate standardized testing with holistic learning.	3.70	0.80	Accept	3.75	0.78	Accept
13	Teacher training programs should emphasize strategies for balancing testing and holistic learning.	3.65	0.78	Accept	3.70	0.75	Accept
14	Reducing the frequency of high-stakes standardized tests would allow more time for holistic learning.	2.30	0.45	Reject	2.35	0.50	Reject
15	Schools should adopt a more flexible curriculum that accommodates both testing and holistic learning.	3.60	0.75	Accept	3.65	0.73	Accept
Sum		3.41		Accept 3.46			
Average		0.73		0.72 Accept			

In table 4, the shows both male and female teacher educators propose strategies such as formative assessments, project-based learning, and improved teacher training to reconcile standardized testing with holistic learning. However, Item 19 ("Reducing the frequency of high-stakes tests") was rejected, with mean scores below 2.50. This suggests that educators are hesitant to reduce the frequency of standardized tests, possibly due to concerns about accountability and maintaining educational standards.

Table 4

Mean and standard deviation of male and female teacher educators' perspectives on gender impact in curriculum priorities

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Educators		Female Educators			
		X	SD	REM	X	SD	REM
16	Male and female teacher educators have different perspectives on the role of standardized testing.	2.90	0.60	Accept	3.00	0.65	Accept
17	Female teacher educators prioritize holistic learning more than their male counterparts.	3.10	0.65	Accept	3.20	0.70	Accept
18	Male teacher educators are more focused on achieving high test scores than female educators.	2.40	0.50	Reject	2.50	0.55	Reject
19	Gender does not significantly influence perspectives on curriculum priorities.	2.20	0.40	Reject	2.25	0.45	Reject
20	Female teacher educators face more challenges in implementing holistic learning due to societal expectations.	3.00	0.70	Accept	3.10	0.75	Accept
Sum		2.72		Accept 2.81			
Average		0.58		0.62 Accept			

Table 4, both male and female teacher educators acknowledge some gender differences in perspectives on curriculum priorities, particularly regarding the emphasis on holistic learning. However, Items 18 and 19 were rejected, with mean scores below 2.50, suggesting that educators do not believe gender significantly influences the focus on test scores or overall curriculum priorities. The slightly higher mean scores for female educators in Item 17 indicate a perception that female educators may prioritize holistic learning more.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the perspectives of Nigerian teacher educators on balancing standardized testing and holistic learning in primary education. The findings reveal a complex interplay between the need for measurable academic outcomes and the desire to foster well-rounded development in students. In Table 1, both male and female teacher educators recognize the importance of standardized testing for assessing student performance and maintaining accountability, aligning with Adeyemi (2010), who argued that standardized tests provide measurable data for educational reforms. However, educators also acknowledge the limitations of standardized testing, such as its tendency to narrow the curriculum focus and cause student stress, echoing concerns raised by Akinwale (2021) and Olatunji (2020). These findings suggest that while standardized testing is seen as necessary, its overemphasis may hinder broader educational goals.

The results in Table 2 shows that, the challenges identified by teacher educators, such as large class sizes, lack of resources, and inadequate training, reflect the broader systemic issues in Nigerian education documented by Obioma and Nwosu (2023). The rejection of the item regarding the curriculum's inability to support a balanced approach suggests that educators believe the curriculum has potential but is hindered by external factors. This finding underscores the need for systemic reforms to address resource and training gaps. The results in Table 3, shows that educators proposed strategies such as formative assessments, project-based learning, and improved teacher training to reconcile standardized testing with holistic learning. These recommendations align with Adeyemi (2010) and Okeke (2018), who advocate for diversified assessment methods and experiential learning. However, the rejection of reducing the frequency of high-stakes tests indicates a reluctance to compromise on accountability measures, reflecting the tension between assessment and holistic development. The results in Table 4 shows that while some gender differences were noted, particularly in the prioritization of holistic learning, the overall impact of gender on curriculum priorities was deemed minimal. This finding contrasts with some literature suggesting significant gender-based differences in educational perspectives. However, the slightly higher emphasis on holistic learning among female educators aligns with global trends where female educators often advocate for more student-centered approaches (Sahlberg, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perspectives of Nigerian teacher educators on balancing standardized testing and holistic learning in primary education, revealing a complex and multifaceted tension between these two educational paradigms. The findings underscore

the critical need for systemic reforms to address the challenges faced by educators and ensure that primary education in Nigeria fulfills its transformative potential. While standardized testing remains a cornerstone of accountability and academic measurement, its overemphasis often comes at the expense of broader developmental goals, such as creativity, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking—qualities essential for success in today's rapidly changing world (Akinwale, 2021; UNESCO, 2019).

Teacher educators recognize the value of holistic learning in nurturing well-rounded individuals but face significant barriers to its implementation, including large class sizes, inadequate resources, societal pressures favoring high test scores, and insufficient teacher training (Obioma & Nwosu, 2023). These systemic challenges highlight the urgent need for policy interventions that prioritize equity, resource allocation, and professional development. For instance, revising teacher training programs to include modules on balancing standardized testing with holistic learning could equip educators with the skills and strategies needed to integrate these approaches effectively (Fullan, & Quinn, 2020 & Eze & Okoro, 2021). Similarly, curriculum planners must design flexible frameworks that accommodate both measurable outcomes and broader developmental goals, incorporating formative assessments, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary activities.

The rejection of reducing the frequency of high-stakes tests (Table 3) reflects the deep-rooted cultural and systemic reliance on standardized testing in Nigeria. This reliance is driven by historical legacies of colonial education, societal expectations for academic excellence, and the perceived need for accountability (Oyedepi, 2022). However, the study's findings suggest that this overemphasis on testing may inadvertently narrow the curriculum focus, promote rote memorization, and increase student stress (Adeyemi et al., 2020; Olatunji, 2020). To address these limitations, policymakers must explore innovative ways to diversify assessment methods while maintaining accountability standards. For example, integrating Bloom's Taxonomy into standardized tests could ensure that assessments measure higher-order thinking skills alongside basic knowledge (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of addressing gender dynamics in educational priorities. While the overall impact of gender on curriculum priorities was deemed minimal (Table 4), female educators demonstrated a slightly stronger emphasis on holistic learning, aligning with global trends where women often advocate for more student-centered approaches (Sahlberg, 2015). This finding enriches the literature by highlighting the nuanced ways in which gender influences educational perspectives, even in contexts where systemic barriers dominate. Future research should further explore these dynamics to inform gender-sensitive policies and practices.

The implications of this study extend beyond Nigeria, offering valuable lessons for other developing nations grappling with similar challenges. By examining successful models from countries like Finland and Singapore, where standardized testing coexists with holistic learning, policymakers can identify strategies that align with local realities (Sahlberg, 2015; Tan & Chua, 2020). For instance, Finland's emphasis on trust in

teachers and supportive learning environments demonstrates that it is possible to achieve high international rankings without relying heavily on rigid testing regimes. Similarly, Singapore's dual focus on rigorous examinations and holistic development underscores the importance of aligning assessments with broader educational objectives.

Thus, achieving a balanced approach that integrates standardized testing with holistic learning requires a multi-faceted strategy involving systemic reforms, stakeholder collaboration, and context-specific solutions. By addressing resource gaps, revising curricula, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, Nigerian primary education can move closer to realizing its transformative potential. This study not only contributes to the local discourse but also enriches the global conversation on educational priorities, emphasizing the need for flexibility, inclusivity, and adaptability in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. Future research should build on these findings by exploring longitudinal impacts, implementing pilot programs, and evaluating the effectiveness of proposed reforms in diverse educational contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to address the challenges and opportunities identified in balancing standardized testing and holistic learning in Nigerian primary education. Universities should revise their teacher training programs to include modules that equip educators with strategies for integrating standardized testing and holistic learning effectively (Darling-Hammond, Schachner & Edgerton, 2020). This would ensure that teachers are better prepared to implement a balanced approach in their classrooms. Additionally, the government should allocate more resources to primary education, particularly in rural areas, to address systemic barriers such as large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient teaching materials. Curriculum planners also play a crucial role and should develop curricula that accommodate both standardized testing and holistic learning by incorporating diversified assessment methods, such as formative assessments and project-based learning, which align with global trends in education (Tomlinson, 2020). Furthermore, primary school teachers should incorporate more student-centered and experiential learning activities into their teaching practices to foster creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence among students (Hattie & Zierer, 2022). These efforts, if implemented collaboratively, have the potential to create a more inclusive and effective educational system that balances accountability with broader developmental goals, ultimately preparing students for success in both academic and real-world contexts.

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