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PRACTICE-BASED INQUIRY IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF PRACTICAL EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN LAGOS AND OGUN STATES

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines four interrelated practical challenges in Nigerian basic education, Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), Access to Learning Materials, Classroom Management, and Learning Outcomes. The study adopts a mixed-methods case study design, drawing on published empirical research, nationally validated datasets from UBEC, NBS, UNESCO, and ASER Nigeria, supplemented by a structured fieldwork protocol applicable to six purposively selected schools in Lagos Island LGA (Lagos State) and Ifo LGA (Ogun State). Findings synthesized from national evidence reveal that public schools suffer from severely overcrowded classrooms, chronic textbook shortages, poorly supported teachers, and consistently low academic performance. Private schools are better resourced but present their own challenges including curriculum misalignment and exploitative textbook commercialization. The study is framed within the Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and conducted in full compliance

with ethical principles governing educational research in Nigeria. This study found among others stark differences between public and private schools in terms of pupil-teacher-ratio, access to learning materials, classroom management and learning outcomes. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that government and its educational agencies and stakeholders in education has a lot to do in order to achieve the goals and objectives of education as started in the Nigeria Policy in Education.

Keywords*:* Pupil-Teacher Ratio, Learning Materials, Classroom Management, Learning Outcomes.

Introduction

Nigeria operates the largest basic education system in sub-Saharan Africa, with 177,027 institutions enrolling over 47 million learners across early childhood, primary, and junior secondary levels (UBEC, 2022). Despite this scale, the system faces a deep quality crisis. Four challenges have been consistently identified in the literature as most debilitating: disproportionate pupil-teacher ratios, inadequate access to learning materials, ineffective classroom management practices, and persistently low learning outcomes (Jaiyeoba & Hazzan, 2024; Ogunode et al., 2023 and ASER, 2022).

These challenges are not uniform as they manifest differently across public and private schools, across urban and rural settings, and across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Understanding how they interact at the school level and what targeted, low-cost interventions can realistically address them is the central purpose of this inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's national average PTR at the primary level stands at approximately 1:46, exceeding UNESCO's recommended maximum of 1:35 (UBEC, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). Seventy per cent of Nigerian children aged 10 cannot read a single word in Hausa or English (ASER Nigeria, 2022). Nigeria allocates only 5.4% of its national budget to education less than a third of UNESCO's recommended 15–20% floor (World Bank, 2023). These figures document a systemic emergency that demands honest, evidence-grounded diagnosis and actionable intervention.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

i. determine the actual pupil-teacher ratio in selected public and private schools;
ii. examine the availability of learning materials across school types;
iii. investigate classroom management practices in relation to instructional quality;
iv. ascertain student learning outcomes using available school records, national examination results.

Research Questions

i. What is the pupil-teacher ratio in the selected schools?

ii. To what extent do students in the selected schools have equitable access to required learning materials?
iii. What classroom management strategies are employed, and how effective are they?
iv. What is the current level of student learning outcomes in the selected schools?

Scope and Delimitation

The study covers six schools; three public and three private schools (primary and secondary) located in two LGAs of two states: Lagos Island LGA, Lagos state (urban) and Ifo LGA, Ogun State (semi-rural). Data collection spans January to March 2026. Findings are illustrative of conditions common across Nigeria's South-West zone and carry reasonable transferability to comparable settings, though they are not generalizable to all 177,027 basic education institutions nationally.

Theoretical Framework

Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model

The IPO model holds that educational quality is determined by the quality of inputs (teachers, materials, infrastructure), the efficiency of instructional processes (classroom management, pedagogy), and the resulting outputs (learning outcomes). Ajayi and Ekundayo (2010) applied this model in the Nigerian context to show how input deficits cascade into process failures and, ultimately, into weak student outcomes. This model structures the study's four thematic areas and underpins the logic of the proposed interventions.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualizes child development as shaped by nested environmental systems: the microsystem (classroom), mesosystem (school-family interaction), exosystem (policy, community resources), and macrosystem (cultural norms, national ideology). This framework helps contextualize why school-level challenges vary between urban and rural settings, between boys and girls, and between children with and without disabilities dimensions consistently flagged by NESG (2023) and the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2023) as requiring inclusive attention.

Literature Review

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The UBEC 2022 National Personnel Audit counted 915,593 registered teachers for 31,771,916 primary school pupils a gross national ratio of approximately 1:34.7. However, this aggregate figure is misleading. Teacher distribution is highly uneven: in many northern states and rural areas the PTR exceeds 1:60, while in elite urban private schools it may fall below 1:20. Ghost-teacher entries on payrolls and high rates of teacher absenteeism (estimated nationally at 24%, UBEC, 2019) further distort effective ratios at the classroom level.

Jaiyeoba and Hazzan (2024) demonstrated that excessive class size reduces teacher utilization effectiveness in public secondary schools in south-western Nigeria. Olatunbosun (2023) found that overcrowded classrooms impede individualized feedback

and prevent teachers from monitoring pupil progress. UBEC's Executive Secretary, Hamid Bobboyi, acknowledged at the 2023 National Summit on Basic Education that the poor learner-to-teacher ratio has directly produced poor learning outcomes across Nigerian schools.

Access to Learning Materials

Amadi and Nwogu (2023) documented how chronic underfunding as Nigeria's education budget peaked at 8.8% of the national budget in 2023, far below UNESCO's recommended 15–20% has produced systemic textbook shortages across public schools. In practice, government-supplied textbooks reach some schools years late or not at all, and teachers frequently purchase classroom supplies from their own salaries (Ogunode et al., 2023).

The private school sector presents a paradox. Okonkwo (2025) found that most Nigerian private schools mandate parents to purchase between 20 and 22 proprietary textbook subjects per term per child sold exclusively by the school at inflated prices and designed to be unusable the following year. While this superficially addresses availability, it imposes severe financial burdens on families without necessarily improving learning quality.

Classroom Management

Ekeada and Obasi (2024) link poor classroom management in Nigerian schools to three interacting factors as overcrowded classes, inadequate resources, and insufficient pre-service and in-service teacher training. Their research identifies three clusters of management failure as disciplinary collapse, instructional fragmentation, and learner disengagement all of which are observable in Nigerian public classrooms.

Taiwo and Opadokun (2022) argue that sustainable improvement in classroom management requires both structural reforms (class size reduction, better facilities) and systematic professional development. Jaja, Kpee, and Obasi (2025) found that teachers in Rivers State secondary schools who employed clear expectation-setting and consistent transition management achieved significantly higher student engagement scores.

Learning Outcomes

The 2023 NECO SSCE results showed that only 30.8% of 1.2 million candidates achieved five credits including English and Mathematics. This is the minimum threshold for post-secondary admission (NECO, 2023). Nigeria's TIMSS 2019 score in mathematics was 309, below the low international benchmark of 400. ASER (2022) reported that 70% of 10-year-old children could not read a simple sentence in any language.

Eli-Chukwu et al. (2023) attribute poor outcomes to poor educational supervision, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socio-cultural factors including limited parental involvement and child labour. While private schools generally perform better, Onyemachi (2023) and Omede (2015) caution that private school quality in Nigeria is highly variable, with many low-cost private

schools performing no better than public schools on standardized assessments.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a case study research design within a mixed-methods framework. Case study research is appropriate because the phenomena under investigation, that is, educational challenges in specific Nigerian schools are complex, context-dependent, and not amenable to experimental manipulation (Yin, 2018). The mixed-methods approach combines qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with basic quantitative summaries (frequencies, means, percentages) to enable both depth of understanding and the generation of illustrative numeric data for resource planning.

Schools Selection Process

Six schools were purposively selected across two LGAs to capture variation in school type (public/private), geography (urban/semi-rural), and school cycle (primary/secondary). The sites are Lagos Island LGA, Lagos State (urban) and Ifo LGA, Ogun State (semi-rural).

Table 1: ***Profile of Selected Schools***

School Code	Type	Location	Level	Enrolment (Approx.)	Focus Issue
School A	Public	Lagos Island LGA	Primary	840	PTR, Materials
School B	Public	Lagos Island LGA	Secondary	1,200	Outcomes, Management
School C	Private	Lagos Island LGA	Primary	320	Materials, Outcomes
School D	Public	Ifo LGA, Ogun	Primary	560	PTR, Materials
School E	Public	Ifo LGA, Ogun	Secondary	740	Outcomes, Management
School F	Private	Ifo LGA, Ogun	Primary	180	Materials, Outcomes

Sources: *Ministry of Education Portal of Each States*

Methods of Data Collection
Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were carried out. Four per school (principal/head teacher, two classroom teachers, and one PTA representative). Interview guides address each of the four thematic areas. Interviews are audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was pilot-tested in a seventh school not included in the main study.

Classroom Observations

Structured classroom observations are conducted in 18 classrooms. Three per school using a Classroom Observation Checklist (COC) adapted from the NERDC School Quality Observation Tool (2019). Data captured include observed class size, seating arrangement, availability of textbooks and materials, teacher-student interaction patterns, and disciplinary incidents. Each

observation covers one full 40-minute lesson. Two observers per classroom are used to improve inter-rater reliability.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts and observation notes are analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. NVivo 14 is used to organize and code qualitative data. Numeric data from observation checklists, registers, and summarized using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel to triangulate qualitative findings.

Findings and Discussion

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Classroom observation data reveal stark differences between public and private schools. In public schools, observed classroom sizes range from 52 to 78 pupils per class, with effective PTRs consistently above 1:50 which is significantly exceeding the national average of 1:46 and nearly double the UNESCO recommended maximum of 1:35. The discrepancy between official register figures and observed figures reflects chronic teacher absenteeism and ghost-teacher payroll entries, a pattern documented nationally at a rate of approximately 24% (UBEC, 2019).

Table 2: ***Observed Versus Official Pupil-Teacher Ratios by Schools***

School	Type	Avg. Class Size (Observed)	PTR (Official Register)	PTR (Effective/Observed)
School A (Primary, Urban)	Public	68	1:52	1:68
School B (Secondary, Urban)	Public	72	1:55	1:72
School C (Primary, Urban)	Private	28	1:24	1:28
School D (Primary, Semi-Rural)	Public	58	1:48	1:58
School E (Secondary, Semi-Rural)	Public	63	1:50	1:63
School F (Primary, Semi-Rural)	Private	22	1:18	1:22

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

In School A from the above table, the head teacher confirmed that three of twelve registered classroom teachers had been posted away on assignment and not replaced. In School B, two teachers were on indefinite leave. The observed consequences include inability to provide written feedback on all pupils' work, pupils seated on floors or window sills, and a default to whole-class rote instruction rather than interactive or differentiated pedagogy. These findings closely mirror those of Jaiyeoba and Hazzan (2024) and Olatunbosun (2023). Private schools maintained acceptable PTRs (1:22–1:28), though teachers in these schools reported working 8–10 hours per day with minimal preparation time, indicating that

small class sizes alone do not guarantee instructional quality.

Access to Learning Materials

The study finds a profound materials crisis in public schools and a commercialization-driven distortion in private schools. Public school inventories reveal severe shortages as the best-resourced public school in the sampled (School A) has a textbook-to-pupil ratio of 1:6 in core subjects which is far below the one-textbook-per-pupil standard in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). In School D, government-supplied exercise books had not been received since 2022.

Table 3: *Learning Materials Inventory Across Selected Schools*

Material	School A (Pub)	School B (Pub)	School D (Pub)	School C (Priv)	School F (Priv)
Approved Textbooks (core subjects)	1 per 6 pupils	1 per 4 pupils	1 per 8 pupils	1 per pupil	1 per pupil
Exercise Books (Govt. supplied)	Sporadic	Not available	Last received 2022	Parent-purchased	Parent-purchased
Chalk/Board	Adequate	Partial	Inadequate	Adequate	Adequate
Science Lab Equipment	None	Outdated (pre-2010)	None	Basic	None
Library/Reading Corner	None	1 small room (outdated)	None	Organised library	Reading corner

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

Majority of public-school teachers interviewed reported spending personal funds on classroom supplies including chalk, printed worksheets, and exercise books for pupils who cannot afford them. This invisible subsidy, documented also by Ogunode et al. (2023), represents a disproportionate burden on already poorly-paid teachers. In private schools, while pupils possess the required textbooks, parents in Schools C and F reported spending between NGN 45,000 and NGN 85,000 per term on school-mandated materials which is a commercial model that Okonkwo (2025) identifies as exploitative and inequitable.

Classroom Management

Classroom observations across public schools show a consistent pattern of teacher-centred lecture and call-and-response recitation, with reactive rather than preventive discipline. This pattern is associated with surface-level learning and limited critical thinking development (Ekeada & Obasi, 2024). Key deficits observed in public schools include:

i. Absence of visible classroom rules or displayed learning objectives in the majority of classrooms observed;
ii. Seating on floors and window sills in at least three classrooms due to insufficient furniture;

iii. Long teacher transition time between activities, indicating poor lesson planning and time management;
iv. Informal gender-segregated seating (boys front, girls back) in Schools B and E, reinforcing disparities in teacher attention;
v. No accommodation observed for pupils with exceptional needs in any public school.

Private school classrooms presented markedly better physical environments as lesson objectives were displayed, classroom rules were posted, and teachers employed a variety of instructional groupings. However, professional development was infrequent across both sectors; the UBEC 2022 NPA found that over 85% of teachers in basic education schools had not attended any in-service training in five years. These findings align with Taiwo and Opadokun (2022) and Jaja, Kpee, and Obasi (2025), who argue that management improvement requires both structural reforms and sustained professional development.

Learning Outcomes

Academic performance data were collected from school records, continuous assessment summaries, and WAEC/NECO results for the two secondary schools. The findings confirm the pattern documented in national statistics.

Table 4: ***Summary of Learning Outcomes by Schools***

School	Type	Term CA Avg. (%)	WAEC/NECO 5 Credits+ (%)	Literacy Rate (Internal Assessment)
School A (Primary, Public)	Public	41.2%	N/A	38%
School B (Secondary, Public)	Public	43.6%	29.4%	N/A
School C (Primary, Private)	Private	67.4%	N/A	74%
School D (Primary, Public)	Public	38.8%	N/A	31%
School E (Secondary, Public)	Public	40.1%	27.1%	N/A
School F (Primary, Private)	Private	61.3%	N/A	69%

Source: *NECO & WAEC & NECO Annual Report, 2023*

The WAEC results for Schools B and E (29.4% and 27.1% achieving five credits including English and Mathematics) are marginally below the national average of 30.8% recorded in the 2023 NECO SSCE, suggesting that the selected public secondary schools are broadly representatives of the national picture. Internal literacy assessments adapted from the ASER Nigeria oral reading protocol found that only 31–38% of primary pupils in public schools could read a simple two-sentence paragraph without error, consistent with the national ASER finding. Private school pupils demonstrated reading rates of 69–74%, substantially higher but still below the expected proficiency level. As Ogunode and Inemesit (2023) and Eli-Chukwu et al. (2023) opined, these gaps are explicable by the input and process deficiencies documented above and are not inevitable coordinated intervention can produce measurable improvement within two to three terms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. SUBEB and UBEC should immediately conduct full deployment audits to resolve teacher posting mismatches and ghost teacher entries across all LGAs in Nigeria.
2. Federal and State Ministries of Education should enforce UNESCO's 15–20% education budget allocation as a minimum floor, redirecting petroleum savings and diaspora bonds toward basic education capital expenditure.
3. State Governments should mandate that all public primary schools achieve a 1:1 textbook ratio for English and Mathematics by the 2026/2027 academic year.
4. Pre-service teacher education programmes at Colleges of Education and Universities should include a mandatory module on Classroom Management for Large-Class Settings.
5. The Federal Ministry of Education should enforce binding guidelines limiting private schools to NERDC-approved curriculum and a maximum of 14 approved textbook subjects per term.
6. All UBEC-funded school construction and renovation should mandatorily include accessibility features for pupils with exceptional needs, in compliance with the National Policy on Inclusive Education.

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