

# **RE-ADAPTING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM TO THE LEARNING REALITIES OF GEN Z STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Ugwu Sabina Ogechukwu and Ijeoma Nina Nwabueze**

Department Of English And Literary Studies, Faculty Of Arts, Godfrey Okoye University, Thinkers Corner, Emene, Enugu State.

---

**Abstract:** This study examined the extent to which the current English language curriculum in Nigerian institutions of higher learning reflects the learning realities of Gen Z students and assessed how digital literacy is integrated into the teaching and learning of English. Anchored on Communicative Competence Theory and New Literacies Theory, the study conceptualised language learning as a socially situated and digitally mediated practice. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised thirty-nine respondents made up of nineteen lecturers and twenty students from the Department of English, spanning 100–400 levels. Using a census sampling technique, data were collected through a structured questionnaire validated by experts and tested for reliability, yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.81. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that the English language curriculum only marginally reflects the learning realities of Gen Z students and is widely perceived as outdated and weakly connected to students’ lived academic and social experiences. The study further found that although digital resources enhance engagement, digital literacy is not formally or consistently embedded in the English curriculum. The results suggest that curricular conservatism and limited digital integration may shape perceptions of relevance and indirectly influence declining interest in English and Literary Studies. The study recommends curriculum reform, structured digital literacy integration, and institutional support for innovative pedagogical practices.

---

**Keywords:** English language curriculum, Gen Z students, digital literacy, communicative competence, Nigerian institutions of higher learning

## **Introduction**

The English language curriculum in Nigerian higher education has historically occupied a central position in the formation of intellectual, communicative, and civic competencies among undergraduates. As a discipline, English has served not only as a medium of instruction but also as a vehicle for critical thinking, cultural transmission, and national integration. However, contemporary higher education

is undergoing profound transformations driven by generational shifts, technological change, and evolving labour-market demands. Gen Z students, who constitute the majority of current undergraduates, approach learning with expectations that differ markedly from those of previous cohorts. These changes have intensified debates about the relevance, structure, and pedagogical orientation of the English language curriculum in Nigerian universities.

Globally, higher education curricula are increasingly judged by their capacity to respond to digital realities, global competitiveness, and sustainable development goals. In this context, English language programmes are under pressure to demonstrate practical relevance beyond literary appreciation and grammatical competence. Nigerian universities are not isolated from these pressures, as students, parents, and policymakers increasingly prioritise employability, digital skills, and global mobility, a trend reflected in curriculum sustainability debates within Nigerian undergraduate English programmes (Chimuanya et al., 2022). As a result, English language curricula that remain heavily text-bound and examination-oriented risk being perceived as disconnected from contemporary realities. This tension foregrounds the urgent need to re-adapt the curriculum to align with the learning habits and aspirations of Gen Z students. One of the defining characteristics of Gen Z learners is their deep immersion in digital environments. Their everyday engagement with social media, multimedia texts, and algorithm-driven platforms has reshaped how they process information and construct meaning. Research on digital literacies among Nigerian youth demonstrates that language learning is now inseparable from identity negotiation and online participation, particularly within transnational digital spaces (Afolalu, 2024). Digital literacy in this context goes beyond basic computer skills to include critical engagement with online texts, multimodal communication, and ethical participation in digital publics. Without such integration, the English curriculum risks losing relevance in an increasingly digitised academic and professional landscape. Curriculum innovation thus comes out as an important variable in this discourse. Curriculum innovation is

understood as a methodical redesign of the course material, learning goals, and assessment methods to capture the current knowledge systems as well as student requirements. This means a reconsideration of what is considered legitimate texts, competencies which are valued, and the kinds of experiences that may result in meaningful learning in English language education. Empirical research on computer-based research on assessment in Nigerian universities suggests that the students are more engrossed when curriculum delivery and evaluation align with technology-mediated communication practices they are conversant with (Egbe et al., 2023). These discoveries indicate that innovation is not only desirable, but it is required to keep students engaged. Learner centred pedagogy is closely related to curriculum innovation. Learner-centred pedagogy focuses on the experiences, interests, and learning styles of the students in the teaching-learning process and the focus is on their experiences as opposed to the instructions by teachers. To the Gen Z students, used to interactive and participatory online environments, the passive methods of lecturing can be considered foreign. Curriculum readaptation and student integration have been compared with the findings indicating that learners react better to the pedagogies that acknowledge their sociocultural origins and learning patterns (Bukhtiyarova, 2023). The implications of this change in pedagogy are enormous to the organization and delivery of the English courses in Nigerian universities. Another important variable needed in re-adapting the English curriculum is digital literacy. Digital literacy refers to the qualities to read, writing, analyzing, and producing texts on various digital media using a variety of semiotic means. The competence in English

language is growing more overlapped with digital fluency in the age of artificial intelligence and automated communication. The studies on new methods of teaching English in colleges reveal that the implementation of AI-based learning systems can widen the scope of student communicative resources and enhance the relevance of the curriculum (Liu and Feng, 2024). Such integration can close this perceived gap between academic English and the actual needs of communication in the real world for Nigerian undergraduates.

The decisions of policy frameworks are also decisive in influencing classroom practice and curriculum. Policies of national higher education are commonly expressed in terms of general objectives of innovation and competitiveness on a global scale, but they are not always translated into classroom practices on an even footing. COVID-19 remote and emergency teaching experience demonstrated that there were structural deficits between the policy intentions and pedagogical realities in English language teaching (Gallegos Ibarra, 2022). It is often easy to have a mismatch between policy aspirations and classroom practice, especially in resource-limited institutions. This underscores the necessity to bring policy speech in line with instructional facts.

The issue of global relevance also makes curriculum re-adaptation hard. ELPs are also already being assessed on their capabilities to equip students with skills to engage in international academic and professional practices. This necessitates compromising local lingual realities with global conventions of communication. The academic discussion of undergraduate English curricula in Nigerian universities holds that globalization does not demand eliminating local situations and linguistic

identities (Chimuanya et al., 2022). This kind of positioning is especially relevant to the students of Gen Z who operate within the transnational digital and academic environments.

Artificial intelligence has also become a disruptive element of higher education that changes the production and consumption of knowledge. Intelligent writing, grading and feedback applications break down conventional concepts of authorship and language proficiency. The researchers of artificial intelligence in education note that AI should be used as pedagogical assistance but not as an alternative to critical thinking (Tan, 2023). In the case of English language teaching curricula, this would require the introduction of AI ethics, algorithmic bias, and automated discourse into the teaching material, and redefine the meaning of studying English in the twenty-first century.

Sustainability which should be included in the re-adaptation of the English curriculum should also be taken into consideration, but sustainability simply means the relevance and resilience of academic programmes in the long run. Sustainable curricula refer to the curricula that keep up with societal change and retain traditional values of disciplines. Artificial intelligence literacy research in the curriculum shows that sustainability improves when innovation is integrated in disciplines and not as an extracurricular (Southworth et al., 2023). This, in English studies, is being attentive to the structure of language, literature, and critical theory and adopting new genres, media and pedagogical means.

The other dimension that is important is the sociocultural identity of the learners. The desire to teach the English language in Nigeria is seriously intertwined with the issues of identity, power, and

postcolonial history. Gen Z students live in several linguistic and cultural identities, both digital and non-digital, shaped by their association with academic English. Through the lens of adaptation in literature and education, learners tend to redefine their linguistic identities and curricular expectations through their mobility in space and are thus able to reshape their language identities (Paldsdotir, 2023). The re-adapted curriculum should therefore justify the linguistic repertoires of students as well as orient them towards critical and contextual language use.

Finally, to re-adapt the English language curriculum in higher education in Nigeria it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive strategy combining curriculum innovation, digital literacy, learner-centred pedagogy, and coherent policy implementation. The notion of such re-adaptation is not related to the rejection of intellectual traditions of English studies, but the re-contextualisation of the same to a new generation of learners. The studies in educational management prove the idea that curriculum reform can be most successful when institutional leadership and technological infrastructure support it (Siminto et al., 2023; Cui, 2024). With these variables clearly defined and harmonized, English language education can be relevant, interesting, and viable by facing the fervent social and technological change.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine the extent to which the current English language curriculum in Nigerian institutions of higher learning reflects the learning realities of Gen Z students.
2. To assess how digital literacy is integrated into the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent does the current English language curriculum in Nigerian institutions of higher learning reflect the learning realities of Gen Z students?
2. How is digital literacy integrated into the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian institutions of higher learning?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is anchored on Communicative Competence Theory and New Literacies Theory, which together provide a robust linguistic and pedagogical lens for understanding the re-adaptation of the English language curriculum to the learning realities of Gen Z students in Nigerian higher education. These theories foreground language as a functional, socially situated, and meaning-driven practice rather than a purely structural system. In a higher education context increasingly shaped by digital communication and global interaction, both theories emphasize the alignment of curriculum content with real-world language use. While Communicative Competence Theory addresses the appropriateness and effectiveness of language use in social contexts, New Literacies Theory accounts for evolving literacy practices in technologically mediated environments. The combination of both theories allows for an integrated understanding of language proficiency, digital literacy, and learner-centered pedagogy. This dual-theoretical framing is particularly relevant to Gen Z learners whose academic and social lives are deeply embedded in multimodal and digital spaces. The theories jointly illuminate the gap between traditional English curricula and contemporary communicative demands in Nigerian universities.

Communicative Competence Theory was initially developed by Dell Hymes, and later developed by applied linguists, and it is the conceptualization of language proficiency as the capability to apply language in line with the different forms of social circumstances. Bachman and Palmer explain that communicative competence is divided into interconnected elements comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic capabilities, all of which lead to meaningful communication (Bachman and Palmer, 2024). This view changes the focus from memorizing the language forms to the practical use of language in real life. Gong, Lai, and Gao (2022) also show that cultural awareness, as well as intercultural interaction, affects communicative competence significantly, in particular, in the context of formal learning. In this respect, communicative competence is not absolute but is dependent on circumstances, identity, and the purpose of communicating. The theory can therefore make a good basis for analyzing the problem of whether the English curriculum equips the learners with transferable skills in communication. Learners belonging to the Gen Z generation demand that competence should be a representation of the modern interaction methods outside of the classroom. In the context of higher education, Communicative Competence Theory can be applied to curriculum innovation with a focus on engaging and interacting with learners and using language in real-life situations. As demonstrated by Owens and Hite (2022), structured communication activities (especially those that assume collaborative and global communication) can be highly effective in terms of their positive impact on the communication skills of students. This supports that learners of language should be engaged in learning language through

experience and tasks and not through examination. Hargie (2025) also states that skills in communication are gained by deliberate training and practice over time and therefore curriculum designs are required to incorporate communication activities in different courses. This method is in line with learner-centered pedagogy, where students engage in the construction of meaning by interacting with each other. However, in Nigerian universities, the curriculum of English studies tends to favor literary history and theory over practice. The Communicative Competence Theory is hence a critical approach to assessing and reorganizing curriculum content. It focuses on the outcomes that are applicable in academic, professional, and civic communication.

Though the Communicative Competence Theory justifies how language is supposed to be effectively used, the New Literacies Theory justifies where and in what medium modern communication takes place. New Literacies Theory, proposed by James Paul Gee, is the re-conceptualization of literacy as a social practice situated in cultural, technological, and ideological environments (Gee, 2023). Literacy, in this case, is not only print-based but also digital, visually based, multi-modally based, and participatively based meaning-making. Another similar view is that Paul (2022) states that literacy should be perceived as an extensive cognitive and social process that is influenced by the evolving communicative conditions. The Gen Z learners cannot fathom literacy practices outside the realm of digital platforms, i.e., social media, internet forums, and collaborative tools. These realities require an English curriculum to be representative of many literacy practices as opposed to the emphasis on traditional print-based texts only. The New Literacies Theory,

therefore, questions traditional assumptions of the curriculum in higher education.

Another theorist, New Literacies Theory, presupposes how technology is to influence how learners interact with language and knowledge. According to Soyoo, Gee, and Liu (2025), digital tools, such as artificial intelligence, are not the tools but the agents of the development of new literacy practices. This view brings out the need for students to interact with meanings in both human and technological events of negotiation. Kalantzis and Cope (2023) also state that multiliteracies demand pedagogical strategies that acknowledge diversity of communication, culture, and learning directions. The insights are especially applicable in adapting the curriculum in Nigerian universities where students are more and more engaged in the hybrid learning setting. The theory promotes the incorporation of digital literacy skills in English language teaching. It also justifies the daily literacy activities of students as learning tools instead of learning distractions.

Communicative Competence Theory and New Literacies Theory are complementary theories to re-adapt the English curriculum when put together. Communicative competence offers the standards of the efficient and proper use of the language, whereas the new literacies describe the changing circumstances in which this communication takes place (Bachman and Palmer, 2024; Gee, 2023). They co-exist in support of a curriculum that is accurate in linguistic, communicative, and digital flexibility. According to Gong et al. (2022), the identities and pedagogical decisions by the teachers are influenced by theoretical orientations, indicating that curriculum reform should be theoretically based. The combination of the two theories promotes interactive,

technology-based, and culturally responsive instructional practices. The synthesis is especially appropriate to Gen Z learners who present themselves in various communicative domains at the same time. It also fills the gap between teacher policies and classroom practices.

These theories are relevant in the context of Nigerian higher education due to their ability to challenge the current curricular patterns. The conventional English courses tend to focus on textual content and assessment, where the focus on communication practice and digital literacy does not play a significant role. Owens and Hite (2022) present data that learning through the use of collaboration, real-life communication, and interaction mediated by technologies is more advantageous to learners. Likewise, Hargie (2025) emphasizes that the idea of communication competence is acquired through prolonged pedagogical attention as opposed to being presumed as a result of content exposure. New Literacies Theory supports the necessity to match the content of the curriculum with the real-life communicative experiences of students (Kalantzis and Cope, 2023). Combined, these theories do authorize a learner-focused and innovation-based curriculum reform. They also provide a pattern of evaluation of the relevance and sustainability of the curriculum.

Finally, the implementation of Communicative Competence Theory and New Literacies Theory gives more conceptual power to the present study. All the theories serve to clarify why English language curricula should be changed according to the generational changes, the technological advancements, and the needs of communication on a global level. They offer some analytical instruments

to study curriculum innovation, digital literacy, and learner-centered pedagogy as part of higher education in Nigeria. The theories are congruent with the policy and classroom practice interests of the study through the forging of functional language use and the modern-day literacy practices. They provide a way to reinvent English education as socially useful and future-facing as well. In this theoretical perspective, re-adaptation of the curriculum is not only a pedagogical requirement, but also a strategic reaction to Gen Z learning realities. The analysis and interpretation of the findings of the study are therefore based on the framework.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Several related empirical studies were reviewed to establish their relevance and connection to the present research on re-adapting the English language curriculum to the learning realities of Gen Z students in Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

Oludare (2023) assessed the pre-service teacher training of the English language in a government-owned public university in Southwestern Nigeria. The research design in the study was evaluative, and the method employed involved questionnaires, interviews, and analysis of the curriculum documents to determine the alignment of teacher preparation with the expected outcomes of the English language curriculum. The results included the presence of communication gaps, insufficient training in pedagogical techniques, and insufficient exposure to modern tools in instruction, which mutually reduced the effectiveness of the curriculum. The research also found there to be a mismatch between the intentions of the curriculum and the realities experienced in the classroom especially in the area of learner engagement and communicative competence. As far

as the current research is concerned, both papers are related to the effectiveness of the curriculum in Nigerian higher education. However, whereas Oludare (2023) addresses the preparation of teachers and their instructional abilities, the current paper is based on the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of Gen Z students and incorporates digital literacy into teaching the English language.

Udeh (2023) studied the academic performance in Nigerian universities and its relationship with English language proficiency. The research utilised a mixed-method design of a survey and standardised proficiency tests and interviews with students and lecturers to examine the effects of the students' command of the English language on their understanding, critical engagement, and academic performance. The results indicated that English proficiency and general academic performance were strongly correlated, and poor English proficiency was associated with low confidence and poor participation. The research suggested curriculum design and remedial language support. The current research is similar to Udeh (2023) in identifying the key place of the English curriculum in the academic life of students. This has a difference in focus: Udeh (2023) provides emphasis on proficiency outcomes, while the current work is concerned with how the structure of the curriculum, as well as the relevance of digital learning, mirrors the Gen Z learning reality.

Isa and Nte (2024) examined core competencies and teaching issues in the intelligence studies programmes in non-military universities in Nigeria. The researchers used a case study as a qualitative approach to examine curriculum design, teaching expertise, and classroom practices in chosen universities. The research showed that curricula were not practically

oriented and related to the real world, as most of the instruction was based on theoretical teachings. The paper has highlighted the need to match the curriculum content to the realities of the current times and the demands of the profession. The study can be applied to the current study despite the differences in the disciplinary focus in that it focuses on curriculum relevance and competency-based education. The main distinction is that unlike professional intelligence research, the current study is dedicated to the English language education and Gen Z learning reality.

Li (2022) researched curriculum change in British and American Literature in one of the provincial medical universities in China as an English major. Curriculum analysis and classroom observation were used in the study in order to investigate the possibilities of the traditional literature curriculum adapting to the modern needs of learners. Results showed that historical and text-based approaches minimized student engagement whereas reformed approaches of adding learner-centred approaches enhanced relevance and motivation. In the current research, the author agrees with Li (2022) in the promotion of curriculum innovation and learner-centred pedagogy. Nevertheless, at the same time when Li (2022) speaks about literature curriculum reform in a Chinese context, the current work touches upon the English language curriculum in higher education in Nigeria with the consideration of digital literacy.

The article by Wang et al. (2024) discussed the change in the identity of language teachers in English curriculum reforms in China. Through narrative inquiry and interviews the study established that curriculum reforms meant that teachers needed to renegotiate their professional identities, pedagogical beliefs, and classroom practices. The paper has

emphasized the conflicts between conventional programs and new and emerging learner-centred programs. Like the current research, Wang et al. (2024) emphasize the need to make the classroom practice consistent with curriculum reforms. The variation is in scale: Wang et al. (2024) concentrate on teacher identity, and the current research predicts the actualities of learning on the student side and the incorporation of digital literacy.

Ulla et al. (2022) examined the effect of reforming English-Medium Instruction (EMI) on the language proficiency of students in higher education. The research concluded based on surveys and classroom statistics that curriculum reforms that lacked sufficient pedagogical and technological assistance produced disproportional results in language growth. The authors contended that instructional strategies and learning resources should be used to facilitate curriculum innovation. This research is parallel to the current research as it is concerned with the curriculum reform and learning effectiveness. Nevertheless, the current study puts more emphasis on Gen Z digital learning realities and the incorporation of digital literacy into teaching English.

Chimbi and Jita (2022) performed a critical discourse analysis of the curriculum change of Ubuntu-based education in African situations. The paper analysed policy statements and storytelling of the reforms and identified the conflict between humanistic principles of education and the neoliberal orientation of the curriculum. The results indicated that social realities and cultural identities of the learners are usually overlooked in curriculum reforms. The current research is correlated to this criticism by asking whether the current English curricula are manifested in the real lives of students. It is a matter of focus:

Chimbi and Jita (2022) examine policy discourse in general whereas the current research empirically studies the relevance of the English curriculum and the practice of digital literacy.

To review curriculum reform in African higher education, Agbaje (2023) claimed that universities need curriculum innovation to suit the needs of society. Through a policy analysis and comparison of examples, the study revealed the necessity of responsive, skills-oriented, and socially relevant curricula. The paper contributes to the current study by corroborating the stance that there is an inevitability of curriculum reform. Agbaje (2023), however, takes a policy-level approach at a macro-level, whereas the given study targets Gen Z students at the disciplinary level of English language education.

All in all, the analyzed articles reveal the interest in the relevance of curriculum, the engagement of learners, and the disparity between the educational policy and classroom activity. Although a lot of research focuses on reforming curricula, teacher capacity, or language proficiency, fewer studies focus on digital literacy and Gen Z learning realities in English language programmes. The current research paper addresses this gap by empirically investigating the connection between the English language curriculum in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria and the realities of Gen Z learning as well as incorporating digital literacy into teaching and learning.

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey research, as it was aimed at investigating how the existing English language curriculum used in Nigerian institutions of higher

learning captured the learning realities of Generation Z students and how digital literacy was incorporated into the teaching and learning of English. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain systematic data on the opinions and experiences of both students and lecturers regarding curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and digital interactions without manipulating any variables. The descriptive survey design also allowed for the comparison of responses from different groups within a natural academic environment. Through this approach, current curriculum practices and existing gaps were examined as they occurred in real instructional settings, thereby providing a reliable framework for understanding curriculum relevance and digital integration in English language learning.

The population of the study comprised lecturers and students in the Department of English in selected institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The study involved a total of thirty-nine (39) respondents, consisting of nineteen (19) lecturers and twenty (20) students selected across levels ranging from 100 to 400. The inclusion of both lecturers and students was deliberate, as lecturers are responsible for curriculum implementation and pedagogical decisions, while students are the direct recipients of the curriculum. This dual participation ensured a comprehensive evaluation of curriculum relevance and instructional practices from both teaching and learning perspectives.

Given the relatively small population size, a census sampling technique was adopted. All nineteen (19) lecturers and twenty (20) students in the department were included in the study, resulting in a total of thirty-nine (39) respondents. The use of the census

method eliminated sampling bias and ensured that all relevant perspectives within the department were captured. This approach was particularly suitable for departmental studies where the population is manageable and full inclusion enhances the validity and reliability of findings.

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured to elicit responses on the relevance of the current English language curriculum and the extent of digital literacy integration in teaching and learning. It was divided into two sections. Section A focused on how well the English language curriculum reflected the learning realities of Generation Z students, including issues of relevance, pedagogy, and student engagement. Section B examined the integration of digital literacy, covering the use of digital tools, platforms, and modern media practices in instruction. The items were structured using a four-point Likert scale of Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2), and Very Low Extent (1), allowing respondents to indicate the degree to which each statement applied.

The instrument underwent face and content validation. It was reviewed by three experts in English language education, curriculum studies, and educational measurement to ensure clarity, relevance, and adequate coverage of the study variables. Their suggestions led to modifications in wording and item structure, thereby improving the overall quality and validity of the instrument.

**Table 1:** Extent to which the current English language curriculum reflects the learning realities of Gen Z students in Nigerian higher institutions

To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using respondents outside the study population. The data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. This value indicated a high level of internal consistency, confirming that the instrument was reliable for the study.

Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A cut-off mean score of 2.50 was used for decision-making. Items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted, while those below 2.50 were rejected. The analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 to ensure accuracy and clarity in data presentation.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from departmental authorities before administering the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and no identifying information was collected. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. These measures ensured that the study adhered to standard ethical practices in educational research.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents the analysis of the data gathered.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	The current English language curriculum reflects the learning preferences of Gen Z students.	2.84	0.71	Marginally Accepted
2	The curriculum adequately incorporates contemporary issues relevant to Gen Z learners.	2.67	0.76	Marginally Accepted
3	Teaching methods used in English courses align with how Gen Z students learn.	2.58	0.80	Marginally Accepted
4	The curriculum content feels outdated in relation to students' real-life experiences.	3.01	0.69	Strongly Accepted
5	Students can easily relate course materials to their academic and social realities.	2.42	0.83	Rejected

The data in Table 1 indicate that respondents expressed mixed perceptions regarding the extent to which the current English language curriculum reflects the learning realities of Gen Z students. While Items 1, 2, and 3 recorded marginal acceptance, Item 4 recorded strong agreement, suggesting that many respondents perceive the curriculum as outdated in

relation to students' lived experiences. Item 5 fell below the cut off mean, indicating that respondents generally do not find the curriculum easily relatable to students' academic and social realities. Overall, the findings suggest that although some elements of the curriculum moderately reflect Gen Z learning realities, significant gaps still exist.

**Table 2:** Extent to which digital literacy is integrated into the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian higher institutions

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
6	Digital tools are regularly used in the teaching of English courses.	2.61	0.77	Marginally Accepted
7	Students are encouraged to engage with digital texts and online learning resources.	2.93	0.65	Strongly Accepted
8	Lecturers integrate social media and digital platforms into English language instruction.	2.46	0.82	Rejected
9	Digital literacy skills are formally embedded in the English curriculum.	2.38	0.79	Rejected
10	The use of digital resources enhances students' engagement with English courses.	3.05	0.61	Strongly Accepted

The results in Table 2 reveal varying levels of digital literacy integration in the teaching and learning of English. Items 7 and 10 recorded strong agreement, indicating that respondents acknowledge the role of digital resources in enhancing engagement and learning. However, Items 8 and 9 were rejected, suggesting that social media tools and formal digital literacy components are not adequately embedded in the curriculum. Item 6 showed marginal acceptance, implying limited but inconsistent use of digital tools in instruction. These findings indicate that while digital resources are valued, their integration remains largely informal and uneven.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results of this paper indicate that the existing English language curriculum in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria has been represented in a partial manner to capture the learning reality of Gen Z students. This finding is in line with the studies conducted by Oludare (2023), whose review of English teacher preparation programmes in Nigerian universities indicates that there have been consistent differences between curriculum purposes and realities in classrooms, especially regarding student interest and communicative significance. The answers of both lecturers and students presented in the current research show that, although some points of the curriculum reflect the modern requirements of learning, much is not aligned to the real-life academic and social experiences of students, and Agbaje (2023) states the same in his discussion of the subject of responsiveness in the curriculum of African universities.

Marginal acceptance that has been obtained regarding items related to learning preferences and teaching methods implies that even though attempts have been

made to make the instruction modern, such an effort is not adequate to cope with the demands of Gen Z learners. This result correlates with Li (2022), who also found that the presence of traditional and text-based English curricula decelerated student motivation and engagement, whereas learner-centred reforms increased relevance. The fact that a large proportion of the respondents expressed a sense that their curriculum is both outdated and supported by empirical findings of Isa and Nte (2024) who discovered that curricula in many universities in Nigeria tend to be both impractical and out of date.

Moreover, the denial of the fact that course materials can be easily correlated with the realities of the students signifies the lack of connections between curriculum design and the identity of learners. The same was noted by Chimbi and Jita (2022), who noted that social realities and cultural identities of learners are often ignored during curriculum reforms, leading to low levels of learner engagement with course material. This detachment can lead to the loss of interest in English and Literary Studies because Gen Z learners are gaining more and more relevance, applicability, and engagement in their educational options. Udeh (2023) presents some supporting evidence that confidence, participation, and academic engagement of students tend to decrease when the English curriculum does not adhere to their communicative realities.

As far as digital literacy integration is concerned, the findings indicate an uneven and generally informal integration of digital tools in English language teaching. Though respondents have recognized the importance of digital resources, the lack of well-planned curricular implementation is consistent with the results of Ulla et al. (2022) who have found that

curriculum changes that were not backed by technological and pedagogical assistance lead to disproportionate learning outcomes. This indicates that the practice of digital engagement in English studies is still at the mercy of individual lecturer initiative as opposed to institutional policy.

The survey results that condemn the use of items connected with the formal use of social media and digital platforms to teach also emphasize institutional resistance to institutionalizing digital discourse as an academic practice. Similar tensions were discovered by Wang et al. (2024) in the process of curriculum reforms; the opposition was to innovative pedagogies that disrupt the conventional academic identities. Since Gen Z learners engage actively in an online communications platform, such exclusion cements the views on English studies as irrelevant to modern language practices.

In general, the results indicate that ideology, which is manifested in curriculum design, pedagogical conservatism, and a low level of digital integration, can have an indirect effect on course selection patterns. Agbaje (2023) cites this stand by increasing the perception of curricula as being outdated or irrelevant in society to deter investment by students. The continuity of the traditional curricular models, as well as the lack of adequate digital literacy paradigms, makes English and Literary Studies less receptive to the contemporary communicative realities.

To Gen Z students who appreciate flexibility, topicality, and digital literacy, such structural trappings can turn them off from enrolment and longer stay in the subject. The current research thus substantiates the persistent issues in the literature that curriculum mismatch with the realities of learners is one factor that has led to the waning of interest in

programmes grounded in the humanities in the contemporary higher education settings.

### **Summary of Findings**

The study established that the current English language curriculum moderately reflects the learning realities of Gen Z students but remains largely outdated in content and orientation. It also revealed that digital literacy, although valued and informally practiced, is not systematically integrated into English language teaching. These conditions collectively suggest structural and ideological limitations that may affect students' perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of English and Literary Studies.

### **Educational Implications**

The findings imply that curriculum reform is necessary to align English language education with contemporary sociolinguistic realities. Integrating digital literacies formally into course content could enhance relevance and student engagement. Lecturers require institutional support to adopt innovative pedagogical strategies that reflect evolving language practices. Failure to address these gaps may further marginalize English and Literary Studies within Nigerian higher education.

### **Recommendations**

1. Curriculum developers should revise English language curricula to reflect contemporary communicative practices and Gen Z learning preferences.
2. Digital literacy components should be formally embedded within English courses rather than treated as optional or supplementary tools.
3. Lecturers should be supported through training and adequate resources to integrate digital and sociolinguistic perspectives into English language instruction.

4. Educational policymakers should recognize the role of ideology in shaping course relevance and

#### References

Agbaje, O. (2023). Curriculum reform in African higher education: Solving society's problems and meeting its needs. *Curriculum Perspectives*. Springer.

Afolalu, L. (2024). I'm still Nigerian: Navigating race through digital literacies. *Journal of Literacy Research*. <https://journals.sagepub.com>

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (2024). The construct validation of some components of communicative proficiency. In *The writings of Lyle F. Bachman*. Taylor & Francis.

Bukhtiyarova, Y. (2023). *International student adaptation: The impact of a secondary exchange on integration in the original host country* (Doctoral thesis). University of Padua. <https://thesis.unipd.it>

Chimbi, G. T., & Jita, L. C. (2022). Reforming the school curriculum for Ubuntu (humanness): A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Research in Business and Education*, 4(1), 45–59.

Chimuanya, L., Ajiboye, E., & Omidiora, O. (2022). Revisiting the Nigerian undergraduate English curriculum for global relevance and sustainability: The future we want. In *The United Nations and sustainable development* (pp. xx–xx). Springer.

address structural barriers that limit curricular innovation.

Cui, Y. (2024). Research on the innovation in college English teaching under the background of new liberal arts. *International Journal of Educational Teaching*. <https://atlantic-press-journals.com>

Egbe, C. I., Agbo, P. A., Okwo, F. A., & Agbo, G. C. (2023). Students' perception of computer-based tests in the use of English programme in Nigerian universities. *TechTrends*. Springer.

Gallegos Ibarra, I. P. (2022). COVID-19 pandemic's impact on English teaching. <https://helvia.uco.es>

Gee, J. P. (2023). Discourse and “the New Literacy Studies.” In *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis*. Routledge.

Gong, Y. F., Lai, C., & Gao, X. A. (2022). Language teachers' identity in teaching intercultural communicative competence. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 35(3), 1–15.

Hargie, O. (2025). Training in communication skills: Research, theory, and practice. In *The handbook of communication skills*. Taylor & Francis.

Isa, M. A., & Nte, D. (2024). Who should teach intelligence? Core competences and the challenges of teaching intelligence studies in Nigerian non-military

- universities. *Indonesian Educational Administration and Leadership Journal (IDEAL)*, 6(2), 9–22.
- Kalantzis, M., & Cope, W. (2023). Multiliteracies: Life of an idea. *The International Journal of Literacies*, 30(2), 1–18.
- Li, Z. (2022). Exploration on curriculum reform of British and American literature for English majors in China's provincial medical university. *Pacific International Journal*, 5(3), 112–121.
- Liu, Y., & Feng, H. (2024). Innovative ideas and approaches for college English teaching in the era of artificial intelligence. *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Practice*.
- Oludare, B. A. (2023). *Evaluation of pre-service English language teacher preparation programme in government-owned public universities in Southwestern Nigeria*. Doctoral dissertation, Institute of Public Governance and Development Studies.
- Owens, A. D., & Hite, R. L. (2022). Enhancing student communication competencies in STEM using virtual global collaboration project-based learning. *Research in Science & Technological Education*, 40(4), 1–20.
- Pálsdóttir, K. H. (2023). *Readaptation narratives in sojourner literature*. Springer.
- Paul, P. V. (2022). Literate thought: A commentary. *Human Resources Rehabilitation*, 28(1), 1–10.
- Siminto, S., Akib, A., Hasmirati, H., et al. (2023). Educational management innovation by utilizing artificial intelligence in higher education. *Al-Fikrah: Jurnal Pendidikan*. <https://ejournal.uinmybatuangsar.ac.id>
- Southworth, J., Migliaccio, K., Glover, J., & Glover, J. N. (2023). Developing a model for AI across the curriculum: Transforming the higher education landscape via innovation in AI literacy. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*. Elsevier.
- Soyoof, A., Gee, J. P., & Liu, G. L. (2025). From tools to discourses: In conversation with James Paul Gee on literacy and artificial intelligence. *RELC Journal*, 56(1), 1–14.
- Tan, S. (2023). *Harnessing artificial intelligence for innovation in education*. Springer.
- Udeh, J. C. (2023). English language proficiency as a determinant of academic performance in Nigerian universities. *California English Language Education Journal*, 10(1), 1–18.
- Ulla, M. B., Bucol, J. L., & Ayuthaya, P. D. N. (2022). English language curriculum reform strategies: The impact of EMI on students' language proficiency. *Ampersand*, 9, 100087.

Wang, K., Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2024). Exploring contradiction-driven language teacher identity transformation during curriculum reforms: A Chinese tale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 58(1), 215–240