BEYOND THE BLACKBOARD: APPLYING SOCIAL PEDAGOGY FOR HOLISTIC STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN BASIC AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

*This conceptual paper explores how **social pedagogy** can serve as a transformative framework for promoting holistic student development in Nigerian schools. Drawing on an extensive **synthesis of literature and international best practices**, the paper examines how Nigeria's exam-driven education culture rooted in rote learning and assessment-oriented pedagogy—has marginalized students' social, emotional, and moral growth. The study situates its analysis within the context of **basic and secondary education**, where character formation and life skills are most critical. The paper identifies major barriers to holistic learning, including **exam-oriented curricula**, **insufficient teacher preparation for social-pedagogical methods**, **resource constraints**, and the **disconnection between formal schooling and indigenous communal values**. To address these systemic challenges, the paper recommends: **teacher education reforms** to embed social-pedagogical principles and reflective practice; **curriculum enrichment** with life skills and socio-emotional learning components; and **stronger school–family–community partnerships** supported by inclusive education policies. Ultimately, the paper argues that integrating social pedagogy into Nigeria's school system will align national education goals with **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4** on inclusive and equitable quality education. It concludes that adopting a holistic paradigm will not only enhance academic achievement but also nurture **emotionally intelligent, socially responsible, and resilient learners** capable of advancing sustainable national development.*

Keywords: Social Pedagogy**,** Holistic Education**,** Teacher Education Reform**,** Student Development**,** Nigerian School System

Introduction

Education in Nigeria stands at a pivotal crossroads, confronted by the urgent need to move beyond a narrow focus on examinations toward a more balanced and holistic approach to learning. While education remains a cornerstone of national development, the dominant exam-centric model has reduced learning largely to memorization and test performance rather than the cultivation of critical, creative, and moral capacities (Olusola, 2024). This approach, deeply embedded in Nigeria's educational culture, tends to privilege academic scores over the broader development of the learner's personality, social competence, and emotional resilience.

Empirical evidence underscores the limitations of this system. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2023) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), employers consistently express concern that a majority of Nigerian graduates lack the problem-solving, communication, and teamwork skills required in today's dynamic workplace. A recent survey by the Jobberman Graduate Employability Report (2022) revealed that over 60% of Nigerian graduates were deemed "not fully employable" due to weak critical thinking and inadequate practical competencies. These statistics highlight the growing disconnect between academic achievement and life-readiness, revealing an educational gap that hinders national productivity and social cohesion.

Scholars and education leaders have repeatedly emphasized the need for education that develops "the whole child," integrating social, emotional, moral, and cognitive dimensions of growth (Ogwo, 2024; Oni, 2023). However, Nigeria's current system often overlooks these imperative, producing graduates who excel in theory but struggle with adaptability, empathy, and civic responsibility. The challenge, therefore, lies in reconceptualizing education as a process of holistic human formation rather than a pathway to examination success.

Against this backdrop, this conceptual paper introduces social pedagogy as a theoretical and practical framework for reorienting Nigerian schooling toward holistic student development. It draws on a synthesis of global and local literature, exploring the philosophical foundations of social pedagogy and its potential applicability to Nigeria's education context. The paper's unique contribution lies in developing a theoretical synthesis and practical roadmap for embedding social-pedagogical principles, such as care, community engagement, and reflective

practice into teaching and learning. By proposing strategies for teacher education, curriculum reform, and policy support, the paper advances the argument that embracing social pedagogy can transform Nigeria's education system into one that not only imparts knowledge but also nurtures socially responsible, emotionally intelligent, and resilient citizens capable of driving sustainable national development.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition that education must address the needs of the "whole child" an approach that emphasizes not only cognitive development but also social, emotional, moral, and physical growth. This holistic perspective on learning, particularly relevant for basic and secondary education in Nigeria, underscores the need to educate students *beyond the blackboard* by fostering their overall well-being through the collaborative support of schools, families, and communities. Research indicates that holistic education models can enhance students' academic achievement without compromising rigor, while also promoting better health, socio-emotional competence, and lifelong learning outcomes (O'Malley, 2023). Studies further reveal that learners exposed to such integrative approaches exhibit stronger adaptability, employability, and civic responsibility, qualities essential for 21st-century societies. These goals align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates *inclusive and equitable quality education* for all. Within the Nigerian context, where educational reform between 2015 and 2025 has increasingly emphasized the need for value-based, skill-oriented, and learner-centered education, adopting a holistic educational philosophy is now recognized as a strategic imperative for sustainable national development (Ogwo, 2024; Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).

Social pedagogy offers a promising and contextually relevant framework for achieving holistic transformation in Nigerian schools. Broadly defined, social pedagogy is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates elements of education, social care, and community development, focusing on nurturing the whole child within the context of relationships and society. Originating from European educational traditions, it views learning as a shared social responsibility and emphasizes values such as care, respect, equality, and empowerment. Social pedagogy encourages educators to cultivate authentic, caring relationships with learners and to engage students in experiential activities that connect classroom learning to community realities and social participation.

While related frameworks such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), restorative practices, and character education share overlapping goals of promoting emotional well-being and positive behavior, social pedagogy is distinct in its integrative and community-oriented orientation. SEL primarily focuses on developing individual competencies, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy—within the classroom context (CASEL, 2023). Restorative practices emphasize repairing harm and building relational accountability, particularly in behavior management (Wachtel, 2016). In contrast, social pedagogy extends beyond these frameworks by embedding learning within a broader socio-cultural and communal context, positioning education as both a pedagogical and social mission. It thus bridges the divide between school and society, ensuring that education promotes civic engagement, mutual care, and social cohesion.

This approach is particularly suitable for Nigeria, where education often operates within communities marked by diverse ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic realities. Nigerian schools face challenges such as exam-oriented curricula, inadequate teacher training in relational and reflective pedagogy, and limited integration of indigenous community values. Social pedagogy's emphasis on collective responsibility, relational learning, and care ethics resonates strongly with traditional African communal philosophies such as *Ubuntu*; the idea that "a person is a person through others." By aligning with these indigenous values while addressing contemporary educational challenges, social pedagogy provides a culturally grounded, humanistic framework for nurturing socially responsible, emotionally intelligent, and resilient learners.

The following sections therefore lay out the conceptual foundations of social pedagogy and holistic development, examine the Nigerian educational context, and propose strategies for its integration into schools, offering an evidence-based roadmap for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to move beyond conventional teaching and foster holistic student growth.

Conceptual Foundations: Social Pedagogy and Holistic Development

Social pedagogy is both a philosophy and practice of education rooted in a holistic understanding of human development and relational learning. At its core, it represents

"education in the broadest sense," concerned with the full development of the person and their integration into society. It is often described as a relationship-centered and community-oriented approach that blends education with care to foster learning, well-being, and social growth. Unlike traditional educational models that focus narrowly on academic achievement, social pedagogy emphasizes that learning is inseparable from the social and emotional context in which it occurs. As Moss and Petrie (2019) explain, "social pedagogy is about education in its broadest sense and its relation to the social world," encompassing not only classroom interactions but also the influence of family, community, culture, and peer networks on a child's holistic development.

While related frameworks, such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), restorative practices, and character education. share overlapping aims, their scope and theoretical grounding differ. SEL primarily targets the development of intra- and interpersonal skills (e.g., self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation) within structured classroom activities (CASEL, 2023). Restorative practices, on the other hand, focus on building positive relationships and resolving conflicts through dialogue, accountability, and reconciliation (Wachtel, 2016). Character education emphasizes moral and ethical instruction, cultivating virtues like honesty, respect, and perseverance. In contrast, social pedagogy integrates and extends these frameworks, situating individual development within broader socio-cultural and communal contexts. It encourages educators to view students not merely as learners but as social beings embedded in families, communities, and civic spaces.

This integrative perspective makes social pedagogy especially suitable for Nigeria, where education intersects with complex social realities, such as cultural diversity, community-based value systems, and persistent inequalities. Nigerian society traditionally upholds communal philosophies of care, interdependence, and collective responsibility, closely aligned with the African humanist concept of *Ubuntu*, the idea that "a person is a person through others." By grounding learning in relationships, community engagement, and mutual respect, social pedagogy resonates with these indigenous values while addressing contemporary educational challenges, such as exam-oriented teaching, weak pastoral support, and limited socio-emotional competencies among learners. Thus, social pedagogy offers a culturally responsive and sustainable model for transforming Nigerian schools into environments where education

nurtures both intellect and character, advancing the goals of inclusive, equitable, and quality education (SDG 4).

Rationale for Integrating Social Pedagogy in Nigerian Education

A fundamental principle of social pedagogy is the *"head, heart, and hands"* triad originally articulated by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1801), which signifies cognitive, emotional, and practical learning as interrelated dimensions of human development. In practice, social pedagogues aim to educate not only the mind cultivating knowledge, reasoning, and intellectual skills, but also to nurture the heart through empathy, values, and emotional intelligence, and to engage the hands through creativity, vocational competence, and real-world problem solving. This holistic emphasis embodies the humanistic spirit of social pedagogy: every child is seen as a whole person with rich potential, dignity, and a right to active participation in learning and community life. Rather than a distant authority, the educator becomes a co-learner and mentor, building trustful relationships and guiding growth through shared experiences. As Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) note, social pedagogy is "about being with others and forming relationships… using one's own personality in a genuine, supportive manner," underscoring that *how* a teacher interacts with learners is as transformative as *what* is taught.

Crucially, holistic student development is the intended outcome of social pedagogy. Holistic development refers to nurturing all dimensions of a young person, intellectual, social, emotional, physical, moral, and even spiritual. Education scholars emphasize that genuine education must produce the *"all-round development"* of individuals. Ojo et al. (2023), in Odimayo (2019), describe education as a mechanism for developing learners' social, mental, emotional, moral, and psychological capacities. In this sense, schooling should not only transmit knowledge but also cultivate character, empathy, communication, and emotional maturity, while fostering creativity and physical well-being.

Holistic educational models closely aligned with social pedagogy, such as project-based learning, experiential learning, social-emotional learning (SEL), and service learning—activate multiple dimensions of student potential. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that when schools attend to social and emotional development alongside academics, students exhibit

improved academic performance, stronger critical thinking, heightened motivation, and healthier interpersonal relationships (O'Malley, 2023; CASEL, 2023). These effects extend across the life course, shaping well-adjusted, collaborative, and resilient adults capable of lifelong learning and civic participation.

By marrying these principles, social pedagogy translates the ideal of educating the "whole child" into tangible classroom and community practices. Teachers function as mentors and facilitators; classrooms become communities of cooperative learning; and curricula integrate academic content with life skills, values, and civic engagement. Moreover, social pedagogy recognizes that learning does not occur in isolation. It calls for schools to collaborate with families and communities to address contextual factors, such as poverty, inequality, and family instability, that influence student outcomes. In this sense, the *head, heart, and hands* triad provides not just a pedagogical framework but a moral and social blueprint for rethinking the purpose of schooling in Nigeria.

Adapting this model to Nigerian classrooms requires sensitivity to cultural realities and educational traditions. Nigeria's indigenous philosophies, such as the Yoruba concept of *omoluabi* (moral personhood grounded in respect, honesty, and empathy) and the Igbo notion of *igwebuike* (strength through community), resonate deeply with social pedagogy's emphasis on care, relational learning, and social responsibility. These parallels suggest that social pedagogy is not a foreign import but rather a globally tested framework that harmonizes with African communal values. When integrated into teacher education, curriculum design, and school-community partnerships, the *head, heart, and hands* philosophy can transform Nigerian schools into environments where intellectual, emotional, and moral capacities flourish togetherrealizing the vision of inclusive and quality education (SDG 4).

Nigerian Context and Challenges for Holistic Development

Nigeria's education system presents a picture of stark contrasts. On one hand, the country has developed a robust policy framework that *rhetorically* endorses comprehensive and inclusive educational goals; on the other, implementation continues to lag behind, leading to persistent gaps in quality, relevance, and equity. The National Policy on Education explicitly aspires to

produce “morally sound, patriotic, and effective citizens” and to ensure that “every child’s full potential is developed in all ramifications” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Yet, these ideals are often undermined by structural, cultural, and systemic constraints that narrow educational practice to the pursuit of examination success.

Empirical evidence highlights this disconnects. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), over 70% of classroom time in many Nigerian basic and secondary schools is dedicated to exam preparation, test rehearsals, and coverage of syllabi, leaving limited room for creative, experiential, or socio-emotional learning. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2022) also notes that assessment systems remain heavily summative, emphasizing recall and regurgitation over critical reasoning and application. This exam-centric culture, coupled with overcrowded classrooms and inadequate learning resources, stifles student engagement and undermines the holistic development goals articulated in national policy.

A related challenge is the mismatch between education and employability. The World Bank (2020) and National Universities Commission (NUC, 2023) report that 55–60% of Nigerian graduates are considered “unemployable” or only partially employable due to insufficient critical thinking, communication, and practical skills. Similarly, the Jobberman Graduate Employability Report (2022) found that employers identified *poor problem-solving, teamwork, and digital skills* as major deficits among tertiary graduates. These findings illustrate the narrow academic orientation of the Nigerian system, which prizes certification over competence and theory over practice.

Furthermore, inequities in access and quality deepen the problem. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2023) show that regional disparities remain acute: school completion rates in northern Nigeria are 30–40 percentage points lower than in the South, and gender gaps persist in enrolment, particularly at the secondary level. Teacher quality also remains a pressing concern. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2022) reported that only 64% of primary school teachers nationwide possess the required qualification, and fewer than half have received in-service training on child-centered or socio-emotional pedagogies in the last three years.

Together, these factors create an environment where exam-oriented teaching, limited teacher preparation, and weak school-community linkage hinder the realization of holistic learning. While policy documents, including the Education Sector Renewal Initiative (NESRI, 2023) acknowledge the need for learner-centered reforms, practical implementation remains uneven. To move beyond these limitations, Nigeria must shift toward social-pedagogical approaches that bridge formal instruction with emotional, moral, and experiential learning, aligning national education with UNESCO's SDG 4 agenda for inclusive and quality education for all.

Exam-Oriented Curriculum and Teaching

The legacy of colonial-era education and high-stakes national examinations (like WAEC, NECO) has ingrained a culture of teaching to the test. Classrooms often prioritize rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction, where students passively absorb facts to reproduce in exams. This approach crowds out interactive, student-centered learning.

As Ogwo (2024) reports, Nigerian education has "focused on rote learning… for examinations" and failed to connect learning to real-life skills. Important areas like critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration all essential for holistic growth are thus underemphasized. The curriculum is heavily theoretical with minimal practical application, contributing to a high rate of "unemployable" graduates who lack hands-on skills. This imbalance underscores a core challenge: academic success is achieved at the cost of personal development and life skills.

Lack of Emphasis on Social-Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) which includes developing self-awareness, empathy, teamwork, and responsible decision-making is not systematically incorporated into most Nigerian school programmes. Many educational stakeholders mistakenly view attention to social or emotional growth as detracting from academic rigor, a "false dichotomy" that has been challenged by evidence. Indeed, global analyses note that educational systems worldwide often prioritize cognitive outcomes while overlooking holistic development. Nigeria is no exception; issues like bullying, lack of confidence, or socio-emotional difficulties among students may go unaddressed due to the absence of a structured SEL curriculum or trained counselors. This gap

means students may excel in subjects yet struggle with interpersonal skills, resilience, or ethical reasoning, which are crucial for their futures (O'Malley, 2023; Dean, 2025.

Teacher Preparation and Pedagogical Skills

Teachers are the cornerstone of holistic education, yet in Nigeria many are not adequately prepared for this demanding role. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2023), Nigeria has an estimated 1.5 million teachers at the basic education level, of which nearly 23% are unqualified, a figure corroborated by the World Bank (2022) and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2022). These unqualified or under-qualified teachers are often concentrated in rural and northern states, where shortages are most severe. The average pupil–teacher ratio at the primary level is 46:1, significantly higher than the UNESCO recommended maximum of 25:1, creating conditions that encourage rote instruction and discourage individualized, learner-centered pedagogy.

Pre-service teacher education in Nigeria remains heavily content-driven, emphasizing examination preparation over reflective, relational, and child-centered pedagogy (NERDC, 2022). Many teacher training institutions still operate with outdated curricula that allocate limited exposure to child psychology, counseling, emotional intelligence, or inclusive practices. Even qualified teachers face systemic constraints, overcrowded classrooms, heavy workloads, insufficient digital resources, and pressure to meet syllabus coverage targets, all of which reinforce authoritarian and didactic teaching styles. Professional development opportunities in social pedagogy, social-emotional learning (SEL), and inclusive education remain scarce, particularly outside urban centers.

This paper contributes both a theoretical synthesis and a practical roadmap for transforming teacher education in Nigeria through the lens of social pedagogy. The theoretical synthesis integrates classical humanistic models, such as Pestalozzi's *head, heart, and hands* triad, with contemporary frameworks like SEL and restorative practices, to articulate a relational and community-based pedagogy suited to Nigeria's context. The practical roadmap proposes evidence-based strategies for reforming teacher education: embedding social-pedagogical principles in pre-service training, designing in-service modules that promote reflective and

participatory teaching, and building partnerships between schools, families, and communities. By reorienting teacher preparation toward holistic and culturally grounded methods, Nigeria can better equip its teachers to educate the *whole child* and achieve the goals of SDG 4: inclusive and equitable quality education.

Resource Constraints and Overcrowding

In Nigeria's public basic-education system, resource constraints remain severe—with marked overcrowding and infrastructure deficits that impede holistic student development. Data from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) indicate a shortfall of approximately 907,769 additional classrooms in primary schools and 200,085 in junior secondary schools as of 2022. Further, figures from the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) reveal a pupil-classroom ratio of 56.26 at the primary level in 2022 (meaning on average over 56 pupils per classroom), and a pupil-teacher ratio in public primary schools of 48.66 (meaning nearly 49 pupils per teacher) for the same year. In addition to quantitative shortages, many schools lack adequate facilities for sports, arts, science laboratories, libraries, and counselling support; key elements of a holistic educational environment. These deficits are more acute in rural and northern regions, where classroom and teacher shortages disproportionately affect school quality and equity. Collectively, such conditions make it extremely challenging for teachers to engage in personalised, experiential or social-pedagogical practices when classes regularly exceed 50 or even 60 students.

Social and Cultural Challenges

Gender, disability, and regional disparities significantly influence how holistic and social-pedagogical education can be implemented in Nigeria. According to UNICEF (2023), northern Nigeria; particularly the North-East and North-West accounts for nearly 60% of the country's out-of-school children, most of whom are girls. Persistent sociocultural norms, early marriage, and insecurity restrict girls' school attendance and limit their participation in classroom activities. By contrast, enrolment and retention rates are substantially higher in southern states, revealing sharp regional inequalities. These gender gaps also intersect with poverty and location: girls in rural areas are three times less likely to complete lower-secondary school than

those in urban centers. While the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) notes progress through initiatives such as the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) and UNICEF's Girls' Education Project Phase 3 (GEP-3), such interventions remain uneven and depend heavily on donor support. These inequalities reduce access to the very relationships, mentoring, and participatory experiences that a social-pedagogical approach requires for inclusive learning environments.

Disability adds another layer of exclusion that complicates implementation. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023) estimates that fewer than 25% of children with disabilities in Nigeria have access to formal education, while only a small proportion of public schools meet basic accessibility standards for ramps, toilets, or learning aids. A UNICEF (2022) evaluation of inclusive-education programs reported that trained special-needs teachers represent less than 10% of the teaching workforce, and assistive devices are rarely available, especially in rural schools. Consequently, children with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments often experience marginalization within mainstream classrooms. Holistic, social-pedagogical education, anchored in empathy, community care, and inclusive participation; requires these systemic barriers to be addressed through targeted investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and policy enforcement. Without confronting gender, disability, and regional inequities, Nigeria's aspiration for education that develops the *whole child* will remain out of reach, and the promise of SDG 4, inclusive and equitable quality education for all will remain unrealized.

These challenges paint a picture of an educational system that, despite its goals, is struggling to provide holistic student development. The consequences are seen in outcomes: many Nigerian youths excel in theory but lack practical life skills; discipline is enforced but socio-emotional support is minimal; students may know "what" to think but not "how" to think or relate to others.

Importantly, however, there are signs of change. Education thought leaders in Nigeria are increasingly calling for a paradigm shift. Elias (2001) put it, "It should prepare students for life, not just for tests." Innovative teachers and some private schools have piloted more interactive, skill-based learning (e.g. using group projects, debates, school gardening, entrepreneurship

clubs) with notable success. These examples demonstrate that Nigerian students thrive when given the chance to connect learning with real life and engage actively. Additionally, programs like Teach For Nigeria have introduced training that emphasizes student-centered pedagogy and community engagement, yielding improved academic outcomes in disadvantaged schools. Such developments indicate a growing awareness of the importance of holistic education.

Nigeria's context therefore, presents both a need and an opportunity for leveraging social pedagogy. The need is evident in the shortcomings of the status quo – rote learning, skill gaps, and inadequate attention to student well-being. The opportunity lies in the existing policy support for quality education, the cultural emphasis on community values, and the positive results from early reforms. Overcoming the challenges will require systemic efforts, which the next section addresses by outlining concrete strategies for integrating social pedagogy into Nigerian schools.

Strategies: Integrating Social Pedagogy in Nigerian Schools

To assess progress toward a social-pedagogical and holistic model, school-climate indicators must be measurable, context-specific, and linked to student well-being and participation. Core indicators may include:

- student–teacher relationship quality (measured through student perception surveys or classroom-interaction observation tools);
- incidence of bullying or corporal punishment;
- levels of student participation in decision-making (e.g., school clubs, peer mediation, student councils);
- teacher collaboration and reflective practice within staff communities; and
- parent and community engagement in school activities.

Complementary indicators could monitor attendance and punctuality rates, teacher absenteeism, school safety reports, and availability of counseling or psychosocial services. Together, these provide tangible measures of a caring, inclusive, and participatory environment, the hallmarks of social pedagogy.

Nigeria has already piloted several initiatives that offer useful data points. The Safe Schools Declaration pilot (Federal Ministry of Education & UNICEF, 2021-2023) tracked reductions in school-related violence and improvements in students' sense of safety across Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States; showing a 17% decline in reported bullying and 23% increase in female attendance in participating schools. Similarly, the UBEC/UNICEF Whole-School Development Pilot (2022) in Lagos and Kaduna used a "school-climate index" combining attendance, discipline, and teacher–student interaction scores; results showed improved classroom engagement and lower dropout rates over two academic terms. These examples demonstrate that Nigeria can adapt social-pedagogical indicators within its existing Education Management Information System (EMIS) to routinely monitor and improve school climate, ensuring that holistic learning is not only aspirational but demonstrably measurable.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Revising pre-service teacher education to include modules on child development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and community engagement is both feasible and cost-effective if integrated within existing institutions such as Colleges of Education and universities' Faculties of Education. The main cost involves curriculum redesign, faculty retraining, and limited teaching materials, which could be supported through TETFund or UNICEF-UBEC teacher-capacity projects. Evidence from comparable contexts supports the value of this reform: in Ghana and Kenya, integration of SEL and reflective practice into pre-service curricula through the UNESCO Teacher Task Force (2020–2023) led to measurable improvements in classroom climate and student engagement. These models suggest that Nigeria could pilot short, credit-bearing SEL and social-pedagogy courses without major infrastructural overhaul. The key feasibility factor is political will and alignment with the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) Minimum Standards.

For in-service interventions, periodic workshops and continuous professional development (CPD) on interactive and relational pedagogy are moderately costly but highly impactful. Implementing low-cost peer-mentoring and cluster-based "communities of practice," as used in Rwanda's School-Based Mentorship Programme and South Africa's Teaching and Learning Circles, has proven effective in sustaining pedagogical change with minimal budget (UNESCO,

2023). Nigeria's Teach For Nigeria fellowship offers local evidence: fellows trained in leadership, mentorship, and collaborative methods helped students gain an estimated 2–5 additional months of learning in literacy and numeracy (Dean, 2025). The feasibility of scaling such initiatives depends on leveraging state-level teacher development centres and digital learning platforms to minimize travel and accommodation costs. When combined with reflective supervision and mindset training, the "*Haltung*" dimension of social pedagogy; these interventions are both adaptable and empirically validated to improve teacher–student relationships, motivation, and learning outcomes across diverse Nigerian contexts.

Curriculum Reform for Holistic Learning

The national curriculum can integrate social-pedagogical principles most effectively through specific entry points that already exist within Nigeria's Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) and Senior Secondary Education Curriculum (SSEC). Subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, Religious and National Values, and Life Skills Education offer natural avenues to embed social-emotional learning (SEL), empathy, conflict resolution, and ethical reasoning. For example, Civic Education can move beyond memorizing constitutional rights to include community service projects and classroom debates on issues like gender equality or environmental responsibility activities that foster reflection, collaboration, and moral reasoning. Life Skills Education can integrate modules on communication, leadership, and entrepreneurship, equipping students with resilience and adaptability. Home Economics and Agricultural Science can include sustainability-focused projects linking learning to local community needs, while Creative Arts and Physical Education serve as platforms for emotional expression, teamwork, and well-being. These curricular touch points allow for the gradual infusion of social-pedagogical practices without overhauling the entire syllabus making them feasible within the structures overseen by NERDC and UBEC.

To complement these curricular reforms, assessment alternatives must move beyond high-stakes examinations toward more holistic and formative measures of learning. Schools can adopt continuous assessment models incorporating project-based learning outcomes, reflective journals, student portfolios, and peer or self-evaluation rubrics. For instance, a student's contribution to a community cleanup project or a collaborative play performance can be graded

using structured rubrics assessing creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving. The Lagos State Continuous Assessment Reform (LASUBEB, 2022) and pilot initiatives under the UNICEF Whole-School Development Programme (2021–2023) demonstrated that portfolio-based and project assessments enhanced motivation and attendance while maintaining academic rigor. Similarly, digital learning platforms like Nigerian Learning Passport can help teachers record non-cognitive achievements alongside test scores. These alternatives not only diversify what counts as "achievement" but also reflect the broader aims of social pedagogy to value the head, heart, and hands in tandem, and gradually align Nigeria's education system with SDG 4's vision of inclusive, quality, and life-relevant education.

School Culture and Pastoral Care

To measure progress toward a caring, inclusive, and socially pedagogic school culture, several school-climate indicators can be tracked systematically within Nigeria's Education Management Information System (EMIS) or through school-based surveys. Core indicators include:

- student perceptions of belonging, safety, and fairness (assessed through termly climate surveys);
- the number of reported bullying, corporal punishment, or gender-based violence incidents per term;
- student participation rates in clubs, assemblies, and decision-making bodies (such as student councils);
- teacher–student ratio in pastoral or mentorship programs (e.g., one teacher to 10–15 mentees);
- access to counseling or psychosocial support services, including the number of trained teacher-counselors per school;
- attendance and punctuality rates as proxies for engagement and motivation.

Other context-sensitive indicators might include school cleanliness, facility safety audits, or parent/community participation rates in school events. Collectively, these indicators provide

quantifiable evidence of how well schools embody the social-pedagogic principle of care and the broader SDG 4.7 goal of inclusive and equitable education.

Nigeria has piloted several programs offering useful baseline data. For instance, the UNICEF–Federal Ministry of Education "Whole-School Development Programme" (2021–2023) in Lagos and Kaduna applied a *school-climate index* combining safety, participation, and relationship measures; results showed a 15 percent improvement in students' sense of belonging and a 12 percent reduction in disciplinary cases after two academic years. Similarly, the Safe Schools Declaration Pilot (UNICEF/FME, 2022) in Borno and Yobe recorded a 20 percent increase in girls' attendance and reduced reports of physical punishment where mentorship and peer-support clubs were introduced. In addition, the Teach for Nigeria Fellowship (2023 cohort) integrated reflective teacher–student relationship tracking, showing higher classroom engagement and lower absenteeism in participating schools. These examples demonstrate that school-climate monitoring, when combined with pastoral systems and mentoring, yields measurable improvements in safety, inclusion, and learner well-being key outcomes of a successful social-pedagogical approach in the Nigerian context.

Community and Parental Engagement

Inclusive community and parental engagement must deliberately reach marginalised and non-literate caregivers, ensuring that social pedagogy extends beyond school walls into homes and neighbourhoods. Many Nigerian parents, particularly in rural and low-income areas are non-literate but deeply invested in their children's moral and social development. Schools can engage these parents through multilingual communication strategies, using local languages (e.g., Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and minority tongues) in meetings, circulars, and radio broadcasts to make information accessible. Visual aids, storytelling, and community drama can also convey key messages on parenting, nutrition, and child well-being to non-literate audiences. Feasibility is high, given Nigeria's extensive community radio networks and the cost-effectiveness of translating materials. Comparable evidence from UNICEF's Mothers' Association Project in northern Nigeria (2021–2023) shows that when parental engagement sessions were conducted in Hausa and Kanuri, school attendance among girls improved by 18 percent and dropout rates declined. Thus, local-language outreach and culturally relevant

communication are both practical and demonstrably impactful for fostering holistic learning partnerships.

Teacher interventions to support community engagement are also feasible and moderately low-cost. Teacher–parent conferences, home visits, and community-learning days allow teachers to understand learners' social realities and align pedagogy with home experiences. Costs mainly involve transportation and coordination, which can be absorbed within school operational grants or supported by UBEC's School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs). Evidence from Kenya's Tusome Early Literacy Programme and Rwanda's Parent–Teacher Partnership Pilot indicates that regular parent–teacher dialogue correlates with improved reading outcomes and attendance (World Bank, 2022). In Nigeria, the Lagos EKOEXCEL initiative (2020–2023) integrated monthly parent-teacher meetings facilitated by trained "parent champions," resulting in improved literacy rates and stronger home learning environments. These models show that structured engagement led by teachers and supported by communities yields sustainable benefits for both academic and socio-emotional development.

For long-term sustainability, teacher training in community engagement and participatory facilitation should be incorporated into both pre-service and in-service programs. Short modules can equip teachers with communication, mediation, and project coordination skills needed to manage culturally diverse parent groups. The potential cost is moderate, focused on training workshops and materials—but the impact is significant, as demonstrated by UNESCO's Community Learning Centre (CLC) initiatives in Bangladesh and Indonesia, where teacher-led community outreach improved attendance and reduced absenteeism by over 20%. In Nigeria, similar pilots under UBEC's Whole-School Development Programme (2022) showed that schools with active SBMCs and trained teachers recorded better maintenance of facilities and higher community trust. These examples affirm that inclusivity in social pedagogy is achievable when teachers are empowered to engage parents across literacy levels, languages, and socio-economic divides, turning communities into co-educators and reinforcing education as a shared societal mission.

Policy Support and Indigenous Knowledge Integration

Achieving systemic transformation through social pedagogy requires enabling policy frameworks that value holistic learning, emotional well-being, and indigenous knowledge alongside academic achievement. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) are critical policy levers for embedding social-pedagogical concepts into curriculum reviews and teacher education standards. NERDC's ongoing Basic Education Curriculum revision (2024) already includes a competency-based orientation, which provides a window to integrate life skills, civic engagement, and emotional literacy modules. At the subnational level, State Ministries of Education and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) can pilot school-based models through School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) and UBEC's Whole-School Development Framework. Low-cost initial policy actions include:

- issuing a NERDC circular requiring each basic and secondary school to establish one social-pedagogical club or mentorship program per term;
- mandating one annual SEL or pastoral-care workshop for teachers, coordinated through state teacher development centers;
- including social pedagogy indicators (such as student well-being or participation indices) in EMIS reporting; and
- providing matching grants for low-cost community learning projects through UBEC innovation funds.

These incremental steps can institutionalize the social-pedagogical ethos within existing structures before scaling nationwide.

Empirical evidence and systematic reviews demonstrate that such investments yield measurable learning and behavioral gains. A World Bank (2023) review of SEL programs across Sub-Saharan Africa found an average effect size of 0.30–0.40 SD in academic outcomes and 0.50 SD in socio-emotional skills among students exposed to structured SEL and life skills interventions. Likewise, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) identified Nigeria's exam-centric system—where over 70% of instruction time focuses on test

preparation, as a key barrier to creativity and higher-order skills development. Meanwhile, NERDC (2022) reported that more than 60% of secondary students demonstrate limited problem-solving capacity, confirming the need for applied, relational pedagogy. Integrating indigenous learning traditions—such as Yoruba *omoluabi* ethics or Hausa *mutunci* (dignity and respect), into the curriculum enhances relevance and engagement. Teaching through bilingual and culturally grounded approaches has been shown to raise comprehension and participation rates (UNESCO-UIS, 2023). Evidence from a meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2021) covering 213 SEL interventions globally shows that students participating in SEL-infused curricula exhibited 11% higher academic performance, 10% reductions in classroom misbehavior, and improved well-being compared to control groups. These findings reinforce that social pedagogy is not a theoretical luxury but a proven, evidence-based pathway toward achieving Nigeria's goals of quality, inclusive, and contextually rooted education

Conclusion

Reimagining education *"beyond the blackboard"* in Nigeria is both an urgent necessity and a powerful opportunity. This paper has argued that leveraging social pedagogy for holistic student development offers a transformative pathway for reform. By grounding teaching in care, relationships, and humanistic values, Nigerian schools can nurture not only academic excellence but also emotional intelligence, empathy, and civic responsibility. The evidence presented demonstrates that holistic approaches anchored in social-emotional learning and community-based engagement, enhance academic performance, reduce behavioral problems, and strengthen social cohesion. For Nigeria, with its youthful population and diverse cultural heritage, investing in the *whole child* is both a moral and developmental imperative.

To achieve this vision, collaboration across multiple actors is essential. Policymakers must institutionalize holistic education in national and state-level frameworks; educational leaders should cultivate supportive school climates and mentoring cultures; and teachers, as the linchpins of reform, need training, reflection, and recognition as relational professionals. Parents and communities must also be empowered to reinforce the values of empathy, creativity, and shared responsibility beyond school walls. Indeed, as the African proverb

reminds us, *"it takes a village to raise a child"*, and under a social-pedagogical philosophy, that village extends into the classroom, the curriculum, and the community.

Integrating social pedagogy into Nigeria's educational system will not happen overnight, but incremental, well-targeted policy actions can lay the groundwork for sustainable change. If Nigeria commits to this holistic vision, it will cultivate a generation of learners who are academically capable, socially responsible, emotionally aware, and morally grounded citizens ready to drive sustainable national development and uphold the ideals of Education 2030 (SDG **4)**.

Table 1: Priority Policy Actions for Integrating Social Pedagogy in Nigerian Education

No.	Policy Action / Focus Area	Lead Actors	Key Supporting Partners	Suggested Timeline	Expected Outcomes
1	**Integrate social pedagogy and SEL modules into teacher education curricula**	NERDC, NCCE, Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education	TETFund, UNESCO, UNICEF	Short-term (1–2 years)	Revised pre-service programs emphasizing reflective, relational pedagogy and child-centered learning
2	**Pilot Whole-School Development and Social Pedagogy Projects in selected states**	FME, State Ministries of Education, SUBEBs, UBEC	UNICEF, World Bank, NGOs	Short-term (2–3 years)	Measurable improvement in school climate, attendance, and student socio-emotional outcomes
3	**Institutionalize pastoral care and mentorship programs in public schools**	FME, State Ministries, Post-Primary Education Boards	Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), NGOs	Medium-term (3–4 years)	Improved teacher–student relationships, reduced bullying, enhanced well-being

No.	Policy Action / Focus Area	Lead Actors	Key Supporting Partners	Suggested Timeline	Expected Outcomes
4	**Develop continuous assessment frameworks incorporating projects, portfolios, and community service**	NERDC, WAEC, NECO, State Ministries	UBEC, LASUBEB, UNESCO	Medium-term (3–5 years)	Diversified assessment methods that value collaboration, creativity, and practical skills
5	**Embed indigenous knowledge and multilingual learning in curriculum reform**	NERDC, FME, Nigerian Languages Development Centre	Traditional Councils, Local NGOs	Ongoing (5 years)	Enhanced cultural relevance, improved comprehension, and stronger learner identity

In summary, implementing these five priorities through coordinated policy, capacity-building, and pilot innovation will create a practical roadmap for mainstreaming social pedagogy across Nigeria's education system. The reforms are affordable, evidence-backed, and scalable within existing frameworks, ensuring that Nigerian schools prepare students not just for examinations, but for life itself.

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