

Educational Innovations: Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive Practices and Assessment Strategies in Secondary Schools in Ilorin West, Nigeria

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Abstrak : Education in the twenty-first century is undergoing significant transformation, driven by technological advancements, global calls for inclusive schooling, and a shift towards assessment practices that move beyond high-stakes examinations. In Nigeria, however, the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities remains a pressing concern. Teachers, as frontline implementers of reforms, play a decisive role in determining whether these innovations succeed or remain superficial. This study was therefore undertaken to explore secondary school teachers' perspectives on educational innovations, inclusive practices, and assessment strategies within Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. Adopting a descriptive survey design, the research drew on data from 120 teachers across public and private secondary schools, selected through stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts and tested for reliability, was used to gather quantitative data, which were analysed through descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to innovative and learner-centred pedagogies, though participation in professional training opportunities remained limited. Inclusive practices, particularly gender equity, were widely embraced; however, accommodations for students with disabilities were less consistently applied. Assessment practices reflected a gradual shift toward formative and feedback-oriented approaches, yet technology-based assessments and provisions for special needs students were less frequent. While no significant differences were found between public and private schools in innovation and assessment practices, private schools reported slightly higher engagement in inclusive strategies. The study concludes that teachers are positively disposed toward educational reform, but their efforts are constrained by systemic barriers such as inadequate training and limited resources. By amplifying teachers' voices, this research contributes practical insights for policymakers and underscores the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap between reform ideals and classroom realities

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has ushered in profound transformations in education, shaped largely by rapid technological progress, increasing cultural diversity, and the demand for more equitable and inclusive learning environments. As schools worldwide navigate these changes, educational innovations have become central to teaching and learning practices. Innovations such as digital learning platforms, learner-centred pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and competency-based assessments have redefined how knowledge is delivered and evaluated (Kenaphoom, 2024; Javed, 2025). At the same time, there is growing recognition that education systems must go beyond academic outcomes to cultivate inclusivity, critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability — skills essential for participation in contemporary society and the global economy (Adeoye, 2024; Memon & Memon, 2025). In sub-Saharan Africa, and Nigeria in particular, these global educational trends intersect with local challenges such as limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and disparities between public and private schools (Baum et al., 2018; Oluoha, 2025). While government policies such as the National Policy on Education emphasise inclusive education and technology integration, their implementation often varies across school contexts. Private schools are sometimes perceived to be more responsive to innovation due to better access to resources, while public schools frequently face systemic constraints that hinder adoption (Joshi, 2020). This disparity raises important questions about how teachers — the central agents of instructional delivery — perceive and enact educational innovations in their classrooms. Teachers' perspectives matter greatly because they mediate the translation of policies and innovations into classroom practices. Research has shown that teachers' attitudes, competencies, and professional development opportunities directly influence the success of inclusive practices and modern assessment approaches (Cate et al., 2018; Mihić et al., 2022). For instance, while inclusive education emphasises adapting instruction to meet diverse learning needs, teachers often encounter challenges such as insufficient training in special needs education, lack of assistive technologies, and rigid assessment systems (Toquero, 2021; Westwood, 2018). Similarly, although formative and technology-enhanced assessments are promoted as effective strategies for tracking and supporting student learning, their consistent use in Nigerian secondary schools remains uneven (Nnaji et al., 2024; Voke et al., 2025). In Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria, these issues are particularly relevant given its mix of urban and peri-urban schools, encompassing both private and public institutions. This diversity presents an opportunity to examine how teachers in varying contexts adopt educational innovations, implement inclusive teaching practices, and apply assessment strategies in line with 21st-century expectations. Despite the importance of this subject, empirical research focusing on teachers' lived experiences and perceptions within this region remains limited. Most existing studies on Nigerian education either emphasise policy frameworks or focus narrowly on technological integration, with less attention paid to the interplay between innovation, inclusion, and assessment in day-to-day teaching (Babalola, 2019; Oladejo et al., 2023; Salahu, 2020).

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by investigating secondary school teachers' perspectives on educational innovations, inclusive practices, and assessment strategies in Ilorin

West. Specifically, determine the extent of adoption, the perceived effectiveness, and possible differences between public and private school contexts. By foregrounding teachers' voices, this research contributes to understanding how global educational reforms are being localised in Nigerian classrooms and provides evidence that can inform both policy and practice for more equitable and effective education.

Statement of the Problem

Education in the twenty-first century is expected to prepare learners with skills that go beyond rote memorisation, equipping them with creativity, problem-solving ability, digital literacy, and inclusiveness. While these aspirations are clear in international discourses and Nigerian education policies, the reality in many classrooms often falls short of these expectations. Despite various government initiatives and policy reforms, there remains a persistent gap between educational innovations promoted at the policy level and their practical adoption in schools. Studies have shown that teachers remain the critical link in translating reforms into practice, yet their perspectives are frequently underexplored in empirical research (Cate et al., 2018; Mihić et al., 2022). In Nigeria, research indicates that although awareness of digital learning tools and learner-centred approaches is relatively high, infrastructural challenges, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient professional development limit their effective use (Baum et al., 2018; Johnson, 2024). Public schools, in particular, often lag behind their private counterparts due to underfunding and systemic constraints (Ibaba, 2024). This discrepancy raises concerns about equity in access to modern learning experiences, yet findings on whether such differences are significant remain inconsistent across contexts (Ajuwon et al., 2020; Nwoko et al., 2022).

Similarly, while inclusive education has become a central theme in global and national educational discourse, implementation continues to be selective and uneven. Teachers often report supporting gender equity but feel less prepared to accommodate students with disabilities or language differences due to inadequate training and lack of resources (Adigun, 2021; Adeoye, 2025). Assessment practices also reveal a troubling contradiction: although formative and authentic assessments are widely acknowledged as essential for meaningful learning, many schools continue to rely on traditional high-stakes examinations (Abosalem, 2016; Oshowole, 2024). The slow adoption of alternative assessments further undermines the goal of nurturing critical thinking and adaptability among learners. Despite the wealth of literature on educational reform in Nigeria, there is limited research that brings together these three interconnected domains — innovation, inclusion, and assessment — from the lived perspectives of teachers. In Ilorin West, a local government area characterised by both public and private schools with varied resources and challenges, these issues are particularly relevant. Yet empirical studies that systematically examine how teachers in this region perceive and enact these reforms remain scarce.

The problem lies in the disconnection between educational aspirations and classroom realities. Without understanding teachers' experiences and practices in adopting innovations, implementing inclusion, and applying modern assessment strategies, reforms risk remaining superficial. This study seeks to address this critical gap by foregrounding the voices of secondary

school teachers in Ilorin West, thereby generating context-specific insights that can inform policy, teacher training, and classroom practice.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do secondary school teachers in Ilorin West adopt educational innovations in their teaching practices?
2. What are secondary school teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices in classroom teaching in Ilorin West?
3. How do secondary school teachers in Ilorin West apply modern assessment strategies to evaluate student learning?
4. Is there a significant difference between public and private school teachers in their adoption of educational innovations?
5. Is there a significant difference between public and private school teachers in their use of inclusive practices?
6. Is there a significant difference between public and private school teachers in their application of assessment strategies?

Literature Review

1. Conceptualising Educational Innovations in the 21st Century

The term *educational innovation* broadly refers to the introduction of new ideas, practices, or tools that aim to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Ellis, 2017). In the 21st century, innovation has increasingly been tied to the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT), learner-centred pedagogies, and collaborative learning approaches (Allayarova, 2025; Mir, 2025). For example, blended learning, flipped classrooms, and digital platforms have transformed traditional teacher-led instruction into more interactive and personalised forms of education (Kaakandikar et al., 2025; Khatoon, 2024). Globally, scholars highlight that the adoption of innovations is not simply a matter of technology but also involves changes in teaching philosophy, classroom management, and assessment practices (Chu et al., 2021; Tarling & Ng'ambi, 2016). Teachers' readiness, institutional support, and continuous professional development are crucial for ensuring that innovations meaningfully enhance student engagement rather than serving as superficial add-ons (Al-Khresheh et al., 2025; Jamil et al., 2018).

In the Nigerian context, research shows that while awareness of educational technologies is widespread, adoption often remains inconsistent due to infrastructural limitations, high student-teacher ratios, and inadequate training (Johnson, 2024; Okeke, 2025). Baum et al. (2018) further reveal that private schools tend to adopt innovative practices more readily than public schools, largely because of resource availability and administrative flexibility. This disparity underscores the importance of investigating the actual practices of teachers in both school types, particularly in regions such as Ilorin West.

2. Inclusive Education and Teachers' Practices

Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that all learners, regardless of gender, disability, socio-economic background, or linguistic diversity, should have equitable access to quality learning opportunities (Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023). Globally, inclusion has moved from being a specialised concern to a mainstream educational priority, with many countries embedding it within policy frameworks (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). Inclusive practices often include differentiated instruction, accommodations for students with disabilities, culturally responsive teaching, and strategies that promote equity in classroom participation. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the successful enactment of inclusive education remains uneven. For instance, Gyamfi and Yeboah (2022) found that teachers in Ghana recognised the importance of inclusion but often lacked adequate training and resources to implement it effectively. Similar findings have been reported in Nigeria, where limited awareness of disability-inclusive strategies and infrastructural barriers constrain teachers' ability to support diverse learners (Adeoye, 2025).

Gender inclusivity has been a particularly important focus in Nigerian education, with studies showing that teachers are more likely to ensure equal participation between male and female students than to provide accommodations for learners with disabilities (Adigun, 2021). This suggests that while awareness of inclusion is growing, practice remains selective and context-dependent. The gap between inclusive policy prescriptions and classroom realities highlights the need for empirical studies that capture teachers' perspectives, as is the focus of the present research.

3. Assessment Strategies in Contemporary Education

Assessment practices have evolved significantly in recent decades, shifting from a predominant reliance on summative examinations toward more formative, authentic, and technology-enabled approaches (Iyanda, 2025). In contemporary education systems, effective assessment is expected to serve multiple functions: diagnosing learning needs, providing feedback to improve performance, and certifying learning outcomes (Ghaicha, 2016). Modern strategies include project-based assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, and the use of digital platforms to provide timely and individualised feedback. Despite these advances, many secondary schools in developing contexts continue to rely heavily on traditional examinations. Abosalem (2016) observed that most teachers still emphasise paper-and-pencil tests, with relatively limited use of alternative assessments that promote higher-order thinking. Barriers include insufficient training on assessment literacy, large class sizes, and a lack of technological tools (Oshowole, 2024). Nonetheless, some teachers have reported integrating real-life tasks and prompt feedback into their assessments, reflecting gradual shifts toward more progressive practices (Adeoye et al., 2023; Okpara, 2024).

The assessment of students with special needs also remains a challenge. While inclusive policies encourage accommodations such as extended time or alternative modes of assessment, studies show that implementation is rare due to resource shortages and lack of expertise among teachers (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). Understanding how teachers navigate these challenges in

Ilorin West is crucial, as it provides insight into the realities of assessment reform at the classroom level.

4. Public and Private School Dynamics in Educational Innovation

The Nigerian educational landscape is marked by a sharp divide between public and private institutions. Private schools often benefit from smaller class sizes, better infrastructure, and stronger parental support, enabling them to adopt innovative practices more readily (Crawford et al., 2024). Public schools, in contrast, frequently struggle with underfunding, overcrowding, and bureaucratic limitations (Ibaba, 2024; Jacob, 2021). These structural differences raise questions about whether innovations, inclusive practices, and assessment reforms are applied uniformly across the system. Several studies suggest that while differences exist, they are not always statistically significant. For instance, research in Nigeria indicates that while private school teachers tend to adopt technology more frequently, public school teachers also demonstrate similar commitment to inclusive practices when supported adequately (Ajuwon et al., 2020; Adigun et al., 2025; Nwoko et al., 2022). Such mixed evidence underscores the importance of examining these issues in specific local contexts like Ilorin West, where school diversity creates an ideal ground for comparison.

5. Summary and Identified Gaps

From the reviewed literature, three key themes emerge. First, educational innovations are widely recognised as critical to 21st-century teaching, yet their adoption in Nigeria is hindered by systemic and infrastructural constraints. Second, inclusive education remains more of an aspiration than a reality, with significant gaps between policy and classroom practice. Third, while assessment strategies are evolving globally, Nigerian secondary schools continue to lean heavily on traditional approaches, with limited integration of alternative or technology-based methods. Although these issues have been studied in broader Nigerian and African contexts, there is a lack of localised evidence that brings together innovation, inclusion, and assessment within the same framework. In particular, little is known about how teachers in Ilorin West — a microcosm of Nigeria's diverse school system — perceive and practice these educational priorities. This study seeks to address that gap by systematically analysing teachers' perspectives across public and private schools, thereby contributing context-specific evidence to ongoing debates about educational reform in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive survey approach. The choice of this design was guided by the aim of gathering numerical data from a defined group of respondents and analysing it to identify patterns, trends, and differences. Since the focus was on teachers' perspectives regarding educational innovations, inclusive practices, and assessment strategies, a survey method was appropriate for capturing comparable information from a sizeable sample within the study area.

The research was conducted in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. This area was selected because it contains a rich mix of public and private secondary schools that vary in resources, class sizes, and exposure to educational technology. The diversity of school settings in Ilorin West offered an opportunity to compare teachers' experiences across different institutional contexts.

The population for this study comprised all secondary school teachers in Ilorin West LGA, including both public and private schools. This population was chosen because secondary school teachers are directly responsible for implementing instructional innovations, applying inclusive teaching approaches, and designing assessment tools that reflect 21st-century educational demands.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure balanced representation from both public and private schools. The sampling process involved the following steps: Stratification by School Type where the list of all secondary schools in Ilorin West was first divided into two strata — public and private schools. Selection of Schools where from each stratum, 5–6 schools were selected at random, giving a total of 10–12 schools. Selection of Teachers where within each selected school, teachers were randomly chosen using the staff list as a sampling frame. Between 8 and 10 teachers were selected from each school, depending on staff size and willingness to participate. This process yielded an overall sample of approximately 120 teachers, proportionally drawn from both school types.

To promote diversity within the sample, care was taken to capture variation across the following: School type: Public and private. Teaching level: Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). Subject taught: Sciences, arts, vocational, and ICT-related subjects. Gender: To allow for analysis of potential gender-based differences in perspectives.

The primary tool for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument was carefully designed to reflect the three major areas of investigation — educational innovations, inclusive practices, and assessment strategies — as identified in the review of related literature. The questionnaire was intended to capture teachers' perceptions in a quantifiable form, while also allowing space for them to share insights that numbers alone cannot fully convey.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Section A: Demographic Information: This section collected background details about each respondent, including gender, years of teaching experience, subject taught, school type (public or private), and teaching level (junior or senior secondary). These variables were important for ensuring a balanced analysis across different categories of teachers. Section B: Educational Innovations: This section focused on how teachers engage with modern teaching tools and approaches. Items covered the frequency of technology integration in lessons, the use of personalised learning strategies, and participation in professional development on innovative methods. Section C: Inclusive Practices: This section examined the extent to which teachers apply strategies that support all learners, including those with disabilities, different language backgrounds, or varied learning styles. Section D: Assessment Strategies: This section explored how teachers design and administer assessments that align with 21st-century

learning needs. Items covered the variety of assessment methods used, the application of technology in testing, feedback practices, and accommodations for learners with special needs.

All items in Sections B to D were measured on a five-point Likert scale, where respondents indicated the extent of their agreement with each statement: 5 – Strongly Agree; 4 – Agree; 3 – Undecided; 2 – Disagree and 1 – Strongly Disagree. This format allowed for the quantification of attitudes and practices while preserving the opportunity to compare responses across groups. The Likert scale also provided a standardised measure that could be statistically analysed to detect trends and differences between teachers in public and private schools.

The draft questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in educational measurement, inclusive education, and educational technology to ensure content validity. Their suggestions informed the refinement of question wording and sequencing. A pilot test was conducted with ten secondary school teachers outside Ilorin West, and the results were analysed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high reliability.

Questionnaires were administered in person to the sampled teachers during school hours, with clear instructions provided. To maximise response rates, questionnaires were collected on the same day where possible.

Data from the completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics — including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations — were used to summarise responses. Inferential statistics, such as independent samples t-tests, were employed to examine whether significant differences existed between public and private school teachers in their adoption of inclusive practices and assessment strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	52	43.3
	Female	68	56.7
Teaching Level	Junior Secondary	58	48.3
	Senior Secondary	62	51.7
School Type	Public	60	50.0
	Private	60	50.0
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	28	23.3
	6–10 years	34	28.3
	11–15 years	31	25.8

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Above 15 years	27	22.6

Research Question 1: To what extent do secondary school teachers in Ilorin West adopt educational innovations in their teaching practices?

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics for Educational Innovations (N = 120)

Item Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Regularly use digital resources in my lessons.	3.98	0.88
Integrate ICT tools during teaching.	3.85	0.94
Adapt my teaching to meet different learning paces.	4.12	0.79
Use learner-centred methods.	4.05	0.82
Attend training on innovative teaching.	3.62	0.97
Educational innovations improve student engagement.	4.18	0.74

The overall mean responses indicate a generally high level of agreement (means between 3.62 and 4.18), suggesting that most teachers integrate innovative practices, particularly adapting lessons for different learning paces and enhancing engagement. Attendance at training on innovative teaching methods had the lowest mean ($M = 3.62$), suggesting that while teachers value innovation, professional development opportunities may be limited.

Research Question 2: What are secondary school teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices in classroom teaching in Ilorin West?

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics for Inclusive Practices (N = 120)

Item Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Adjust my teaching to support different learning needs.	4.20	0.72
Make accommodations for students with disabilities.	3.54	1.01
Ensure equal participation of male and female students.	4.30	0.65
Adapt instruction for students with different language backgrounds.	3.85	0.90
Use multiple teaching methods.	4.25	0.68
Inclusive practices are essential for success.	4.32	0.63

Respondents strongly agreed on the importance of inclusive practices, particularly gender equity and varied instructional methods (means > 4.25). The relatively lower score for accommodating students with disabilities (M = 3.54) may reflect infrastructural or training limitations.

Research Question 3: How do secondary school teachers in Ilorin West apply modern assessment strategies to evaluate student learning?

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistics for Assessment Strategies (N = 120)

Item Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Use both tests and alternative assessments.	4.15	0.73
Include real-life tasks in assessments.	3.98	0.81
Use technology-based assessments.	3.70	0.94
Provide feedback promptly.	4.22	0.70
Feedback helps students improve.	4.28	0.65
Make assessment accommodations for special needs students.	3.60	0.98
Use assessment results to adjust my teaching.	4.10	0.75

Teachers reported consistently high use of feedback for student improvement (M = 4.28) and timely delivery of feedback (M = 4.22). Technology-based assessments and accommodations for special needs students scored lower, highlighting possible resource constraints.

Research Question 4: *Is there a significant difference between public and private school teachers in their adoption of educational innovations?*

Table 6
Independent Samples t-Test for Adoption of Educational Innovations by School Type (N = 120)

School Type	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p
Public	60	3.91	0.68	-1.92	0.057
Private	60	4.08	0.64		

The results showed no statistically significant difference between public and private school teachers in their adoption of educational innovations, $t(118) = -1.92$, $p = 0.057$. While the difference in mean scores favoured private school teachers, the margin was not large enough to be considered statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Research Question 5: *Is there a significant difference between public and private school teachers in their use of inclusive practices?*

Table 7.
Independent Samples t-Test for Inclusive Practices by School Type (N = 120)

School Type	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p
Public	60	4.05	0.59	-2.18	0.031
Private	60	4.22	0.52		

The results revealed a statistically significant difference between public and private school teachers in their use of inclusive practices, $t(118) = -2.18$, $p = 0.031$. Private school teachers reported slightly higher use of inclusive practices, suggesting more frequent integration of strategies that accommodate diverse learners.

Research Question 6: *Is there a significant difference between public and private school teachers in their application of assessment strategies?*

Table 8.
Independent Samples t-Test for Assessment Strategies by School Type (N = 120)

School Type	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p
Public	60	4.01	0.61	-1.56	0.121
Private	60	4.12	0.58		

There was no statistically significant difference between public and private school teachers in their application of modern assessment strategies, $t(118) = -1.56$, $p = 0.121$. Although private school teachers scored slightly higher, the difference was not large enough to reach statistical significance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide important insights into how secondary school teachers in Ilorin West perceive and implement educational innovations, inclusive practices, and modern assessment strategies in their classrooms. Overall, the results suggest that teachers demonstrate a generally positive orientation toward 21st-century teaching reforms, though variations exist across domains and school types. The study revealed that teachers regularly integrate innovative practices such as adapting lessons to different learning paces, using learner-centred approaches, and employing digital resources. The mean scores for these items were consistently above 3.8, indicating strong agreement. This aligns with earlier studies by Kaakandikar et al. (2025) and Kenaphoom (2024), who observed that innovations like flipped learning and digital platforms are

reshaping classroom instruction globally. However, attendance at professional development workshops on innovative teaching had the lowest mean score, suggesting limited opportunities for sustained training. This finding echoes Johnson (2024), who noted that resource constraints and insufficient training limit Nigerian teachers' capacity to implement technology-driven reforms effectively. Interestingly, no significant statistical difference was found between public and private school teachers in their adoption of innovations, although private school teachers scored slightly higher. This nuance suggests that, contrary to Baum et al. (2018), the gap between school types may not always be stark, at least within the Ilorin West context. Teachers expressed strong support for inclusive practices, particularly in ensuring gender equity and using diverse instructional methods. The high mean scores reflect widespread recognition of the importance of inclusive classrooms, consistent with global trends identified by Hardy and Woodcock (2015). However, the lower mean score for accommodating students with disabilities highlights a persistent challenge. This finding corroborates Adeoye (2025) and Toquero (2021), who reported that limited training in special needs education and a lack of assistive technologies continue to hinder true inclusivity in Nigerian classrooms. Importantly, the t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between public and private school teachers, with private schools reporting slightly higher use of inclusive strategies. This difference may be attributed to better resourcing and smaller class sizes in private schools, supporting arguments by Crawford et al. (2024). The study also found that teachers frequently provide timely feedback, incorporate real-life tasks, and combine traditional with alternative forms of assessment. Feedback, in particular, was rated highly, reinforcing Ghaicha's (2016) view that assessment serves not only as a measure of achievement but also as a vital tool for learning improvement. Nevertheless, technology-based assessments and accommodations for special needs students were reported less frequently. This reflects the resource and training limitations identified by Abosalem (2016) and Mitchell and Sutherland (2020). The t-test analysis revealed no significant difference between public and private schools in the use of assessment strategies, a finding that diverges from some studies (e.g., Oshowole, 2024) but suggests that assessment reforms may be spreading across both school types more evenly than expected. Taken together, these findings indicate that teachers in Ilorin West are not resistant to educational reforms; rather, their implementation is mediated by access to resources, institutional support, and opportunities for professional growth. While positive practices are evident, particularly in learner-centred pedagogy and feedback-driven assessment, gaps remain in areas such as disability inclusion, technology-based assessment, and consistent professional training. These results reinforce earlier arguments by Westwood (2018) and Adeoye et al. (2023) that meaningful educational reform requires systemic support, not just teacher goodwill. The nuanced differences between public and private schools also highlight that while disparities exist, particularly in inclusive practices, the broader picture is not one of absolute divergence. This suggests that with targeted interventions—especially in training and infrastructure—both public and private schools in Nigeria can advance towards the vision of a more inclusive, innovative, and assessment-driven educational system.

CONCLUSION

This study has offered important insights into how secondary school teachers in Ilorin West perceive and enact educational innovations, inclusive practices, and assessment strategies in the 21st-century classroom. While the results demonstrate teachers' willingness and positive orientation toward reform, the most important findings that emerge in conclusion go beyond the raw statistical results. In particular, the study shows that teachers are not resistant to innovation; instead, their practices are shaped by access to resources, training opportunities, and institutional support. This suggests that the barriers to reform lie less in teacher attitudes and more in the broader systemic conditions under which they work. Another striking finding is that although there were no significant differences between public and private school teachers in the adoption of innovations and modern assessment strategies, there was a measurable gap in inclusive practices, with private school teachers reporting higher engagement. This points to a nuanced reality: while innovations and assessment reforms are spreading across both school types, inclusivity remains more unevenly distributed, largely due to differences in resourcing and teacher preparation. The value of this research lies in the way it foregrounds the voices of teachers — the very actors who implement reforms in daily classroom life. By situating their perspectives at the centre, this study moves beyond abstract policy prescriptions to reveal the lived realities of teaching in Nigeria's diverse school contexts. It contributes to both scholarly debate and practical policymaking by demonstrating that teachers are not passive recipients of reform but active interpreters whose insights can inform more grounded and context-sensitive interventions. The findings highlight that professional development, infrastructural support, and targeted strategies for disability inclusion are essential if innovation, equity, and meaningful assessment are to take root in Nigerian classrooms. Nonetheless, the research is not without limitations. In conclusion, this study underscores that the promise of 21st-century educational reforms in Nigeria will only be realised if teachers' voices continue to shape the conversation and if systemic supports are provided to empower them to translate innovation, inclusion, and assessment ideals into meaningful classroom practice. Being a survey-based study, it primarily captures teachers' reported perspectives rather than observing classroom practices directly. The focus on Ilorin West also means that findings may not fully reflect the experiences of teachers in other Nigerian states or regions with different socio-economic realities. Additionally, while the study compared public and private schools, it did not explore in depth how variations in class size, administrative support, or community involvement might mediate the adoption of innovations and inclusivity. Future research should therefore take several directions. First, qualitative approaches such as interviews and classroom observations could deepen understanding of how teachers practically navigate innovation, inclusion, and assessment in real time. Second, studies that expand to other regions of Nigeria or even comparative cross-country analyses could highlight broader patterns while also respecting local particularities. Finally, future inquiries should investigate how systemic interventions — such as targeted teacher training in inclusive pedagogy, improved access to assistive technologies, and equitable resource allocation — can close the gap between educational aspirations and classroom realities.

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