

Teachers Perception towards the Basic (1-6) Standards-Based Curriculum in Ghana: A Study at North Gonja District

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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' perceptions of the Basic (1–6) Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) in the North Gonja District of Ghana. Using focus group interviews, classroom observations, and thematic analysis, the research found that while teachers generally viewed the SBC as a progressive step toward learner-centred and competency-based education, their enthusiasm was undermined by several challenges. Key issues included inadequate training, limited teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, and weak implementation support. Although some teachers appreciated the curriculum's focus on problem-solving and creativity, most associated it mainly with changes in textbooks rather than deeper pedagogical shifts. Statistical analysis confirmed that professional development, resource availability, and implementation readiness significantly influenced positive perceptions, while large class sizes had a negative effect. The findings highlight that curriculum reforms in Ghana remain highly centralized with little teacher involvement, and their success depends on sustained investment in teacher capacity, resources, and supportive school environments. The study concludes that greater teacher participation, ongoing professional development, and improved infrastructure are essential for effective curriculum delivery in resource-constrained rural settings.

Keywords: Teachers' perceptions, Standards-Based Curriculum, curriculum reform, North Gonja District

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the shift toward competency- and standards-based education reforms continues to confront entrenched systemic barriers. Persistent shortages of qualified teachers, inconsistent professional development, and inadequate teaching resources have been shown to limit effective classroom delivery and slow progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education (UNESCO-TTF, 2024). Even in high and middle-income countries, translating competency frameworks into classroom practice is often hindered by misaligned assessment systems, heavy workloads, and insufficient school-level support for teachers (Aurora Institute, 2024).

Across Africa, comparable challenges have been documented in countries such as Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. While teachers in these contexts generally express support for competence-based reforms, they also report barriers including limited in-service training, scarcity of teaching materials, and large class sizes (Ogembo, 2025; Nsengimana, 2023; Mpofu, 2024; Sepadi, 2024). In Kenya, teacher readiness has been identified as the single most decisive factor influencing the faithful implementation of the competency-based curriculum, with the depth of training and sustained professional support proving particularly important (Betty, 2025; Mule, 2025). In Rwanda, variations in the application of competence-based pedagogies have been linked to differences in school capacity, teacher understanding, access to resources, and leadership involvement (Carter, 2021; Nsengimana, 2023).

In Ghana, the introduction of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) in 2019 was aligned with the national vision of equipping learners with 21st-century skills. However, studies consistently point to gaps in teacher preparedness, the adequacy of learning materials, and teacher confidence in applying new assessment practices (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023). Heavy workloads, large class sizes, and uneven access to professional development have been identified as significant constraints (Ntumi, 2023; Apau, 2021). These classroom-level challenges are compounded by systemic issues such as constrained basic education financing and delays in resource disbursement, which weaken the foundation for effective curriculum delivery (World Bank, 2024).

In the North Gonja District, the rollout of the SBC occurs within a context marked by limited infrastructure, budgetary constraints, and reliance on central government transfers for essential goods and services (North Gonja District Assembly, 2023; MoFEP, 2022). Previous district development plans have highlighted persistent shortages of trained teachers and environmental barriers to educational access—conditions that continue to influence instructional quality under the new curriculum (NDPC/NGDA, 2016). While national studies provide broad insights into teacher perceptions of the SBC, empirical research from rural northern contexts such as North Gonja remains scarce. This is significant, as resource constraints, leadership dynamics, and community-specific factors may distinctly shape how the curriculum is perceived and implemented in such settings. The lack of disaggregated data on teacher perceptions in these rural contexts leaves several questions unanswered. Few studies examine perceptions in terms of discrete but interrelated components such as readiness, perceived relevance, assessment confidence, and workload tolerance, or how these dimensions interact with local school conditions (Ntumi, 2023; Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023).

The study at North Gonja District, addresses the gaps, seeking not only to quantify these dimensions but also to link them to enabling and constraining factors; including access to teaching materials, class sizes, opportunities for professional development, and leadership support; within a rural, resource-limited environment (MoFEP, 2022; World Bank, 2024).

Below are a few questions that underpin the above challenges in the implementation of the standards-based curriculum in rural North Gonja.

1. How do teachers perceive the Basic (1–6) Standards-Based Curriculum in Ghana?
2. What are the implications of these perceptions for teaching and learning in the North Gonja District?

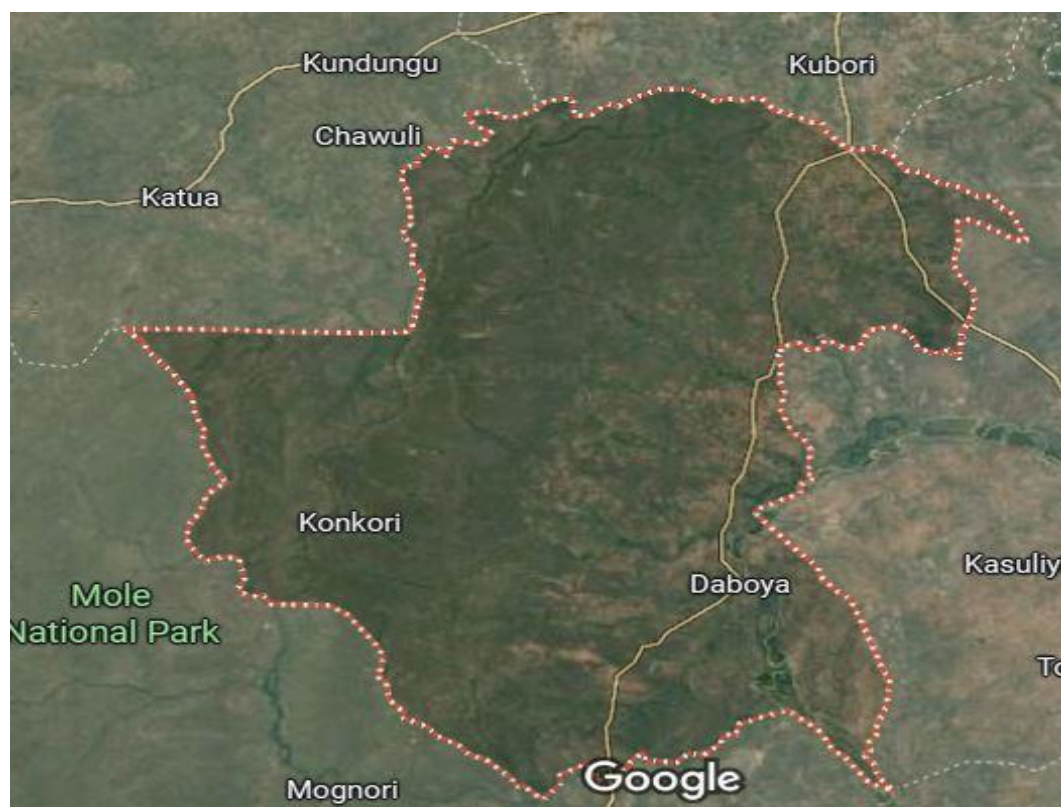
METHODS

Study area

The study was conducted in the North Gonja District of the Savannah Region, Ghana (approx. 9.42° N, 0.53° W). It is a predominantly rural area with a dispersed population density of about 8–10 persons per km² (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The district covers a vast stretch of the Guinea savanna ecological zone, characterized by low-lying, gently undulating terrain with an average altitude of about 150–200 m above sea level. The soils, developed mainly from Voltaian sandstone formations, are predominantly savanna Ochrosols, with sandy to silty loam textures that are inherently low in organic matter, moderately acidic, and prone to erosion during the rainy season. In some areas, iron concretions occur close to the surface, restricting root penetration and limiting agricultural productivity.

Climatically, the district experiences a tropical savanna climate with a prolonged dry season from November to April and a unimodal rainy season typically stretching from May to October. Mean annual rainfall averages between 950mm and 1,150mm, peaking in August and September, followed by a rapid decline. The intense but short rainy period allows for only one main cropping season, influencing local livelihoods and food security. Temperatures remain high year-round, averaging 27–35°C, with harmattan winds during the dry months further desiccating the landscape. North Gonja is one of the least urbanized districts in Ghana, with settlements widely dispersed and basic social amenities limited. Economic activity is dominated by subsistence agriculture, agro-pastoralism, fishing along the White Volta, and small-scale trading. Infrastructure development is constrained, with limited road networks, under-resourced health facilities, and an education system facing acute shortages of trained teachers, inadequate school buildings, and insufficient teaching and

learning materials (NDPC/NGDA, 2016; North Gonja District Assembly, 2023). Many communities are accessible only by unpaved roads, which become impassable during peak rainy months, disrupting school attendance and educational service delivery. Within this context, the implementation of Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) in basic schools unfolds under significant logistical and resource constraints. Schools often operate with multi-grade teaching, large pupil-to-teacher ratios, and uneven access to continuous professional development opportunities. These realities, coupled with infrastructural limitations and irregular supply of instructional materials, shape teachers' perceptions of the SBC and influence the degree to which its learner-centered and competency-based principles can be fully realized in classroom practice.



North Gonja

Sampling design

Teachers in the North Gonja District generally have mixed perceptions about the Basic (1–6) Standards-Based Curriculum in Ghana. Many view the curriculum as a progressive step toward improving teaching and learning outcomes, particularly because it focuses on developing core competencies such as problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking. They appreciate its learner-centred approach, which encourages active participation and practical application of knowledge rather than rote memorisation. This shift, in their view, aligns well with global best practices in education and holds promise for producing students who are better prepared for real-life challenges.

The total population of teachers in the district was approximately 240 in 2025. To ensure the study was both representative and feasible, a sample size of 150 teachers was selected. This figure was determined by applying Yamane's (1967) principle:

Mathematically, $n = \frac{N}{[1 + N(e)^2]} = \frac{240}{[1 + 240(0.05)^2]} = 150$, simplified sampling formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Selecting 150 teachers allowed the research to capture diverse perspectives across grade levels while maintaining statistical reliability.

However, teachers also express significant concerns about implementation. One of the most common issues is inadequate training and professional development to enable them to fully understand and apply the curriculum's principles. While workshops and orientation sessions have been organised, many believe these

are too brief and insufficient for mastering the new teaching methodologies. The shortage of teaching and learning materials, coupled with large class sizes, further complicates effective delivery. Some also worry that the transition has been too sudden, leaving little time for teachers to adapt their lesson planning and assessment strategies to the new format. In addition, the success of the curriculum is seen as heavily dependent on the availability of resources, consistent monitoring, and strong administrative support. Teachers note that without sustained investment in infrastructure, textbooks, and training, the intended benefits of the Standards-Based Curriculum may not be fully realised. They also point out that rural schools, such as many in the North Gonja District, face greater challenges in implementation due to limited resources and logistical constraints compared to urban counterparts.

Data analysis

The perceptions of teachers toward the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) in the North Gonja District were systematically examined using qualitative thematic analysis. Data from semi-structured focus group interviews and classroom observations were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to ensure accuracy and familiarity. An inductive coding approach was applied to identify recurring patterns and concepts in teachers' accounts, with emerging themes refined through iterative comparison and discussion. The analysis sought to capture both positive and negative perceptions, allowing for nuanced understanding of teachers' attitudes toward the SBC. Codes relating to perceived benefits; such as the curriculum's emphasis on problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, and learner-centered approaches were grouped into broader themes highlighting alignment with global educational best practices.

Many teachers acknowledged that the SBC represented a progressive shift towards promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills in pupils.

- *"This new curriculum is good because it allows the children to think on their own and not just memorize."*
- *"We now teach them how to solve real-life problems, which is better than before."*

Conversely, codes reflecting challenges; such as inadequate training, inadequate teaching and learning materials, large class sizes, and logistical difficulties, weak implementation support from authorities were organized under themes related to implementation constraints.

Despite some appreciation for its learner-centred orientation, many teachers perceived the SBC as primarily a change in textbooks, rather than a transformation in pedagogy or philosophy.

- *"To me, it's just new books. The way we teach hasn't really changed much."*
- *"They gave us new textbooks and called it a new curriculum."*

Another recurring theme was the lack of comprehensive training on the SBC. Teachers felt ill-equipped to implement the curriculum effectively.

- *"We were only trained for a few days, and that's not enough to understand all the changes."*
- *"Sometimes I am confused myself, so how do I help the children?"*

Teachers consistently cited the unavailability or inadequacy of materials such as textbooks, teaching aids, and visual learning tools.

- *"The curriculum talks about using teaching and learning materials, but where are they?"*
- *"Even modern classroom furniture is not available; how do we teach creatively?"*

Overpopulated classrooms made it difficult to apply the learner-centred strategies that the SBC promotes.

- *"How can you do group work with 50 pupils in one room with traditional furniture?"*
- *"You cannot go round and help every child when the class is too large."*

Teachers equally expressed a lack of follow-up, mentoring, or support from education officials or supervisors during implementation.

- “After the training, no one came to check how we are doing.”
- “We need regular visits and feedback, not just orders from above.”

Teachers felt excluded from the curriculum reform process and saw the changes as top-down initiatives imposed without their input.

- “They don’t consult us; they just bring the curriculum and expect us to deliver.”
- “If we were involved, it would reflect the realities of our schools better.”

To ensure credibility, themes were validated through cross-checking against observational data, which provided an additional layer of evidence regarding classroom realities and instructional practices. This triangulation confirmed that while teachers recognized the SBC’s potential to improve educational outcomes, they also perceived significant gaps in resources, infrastructure, and capacity building that limit effective adoption. The data revealed a complex interplay between teachers’ optimism for the SBC’s long-term benefits and their frustration over immediate challenges. The qualitative approach made it possible to trace these mixed perceptions back to contextual factors unique to rural districts such as North Gonja, where infrastructural and logistical barriers are more pronounced than in urban settings.

Table 1. Summary of Teachers’ Perceptions toward the Standards-Based Curriculum in North Gonja District (n = 150)

Theme / Variable	Mean \pm SD	Minimum	Maximum
Positive perception score (1–5 scale)	3.7 \pm 0.62 ^a	2.4	4.9
Perceived training adequacy (1–5 scale)	2.4 \pm 0.69 ^b	1.0	3.9
Resource availability rating (1–5 scale)	2.1 \pm 0.57 ^b	1.0	3.3
Class size challenge score (1–5 scale)	4.3 \pm 0.49 ^a	3.2	5.0
Implementation readiness (1–5 scale)	2.6 \pm 0.64 ^b	1.3	4.0

Mean values in a column followed by the same superscript letter are not significantly different at $p < 0.05$

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Results Predicting Positive Perception Score

Predictor Variable	B	SE(B)	β	T	p-value
Constant	1.482	0.312	—	4.75	<0.001
Perceived training adequacy	0.428	0.081	0.42	5.28	<0.001
Resource availability rating	0.316	0.095	0.29	3.32	0.001
Class size challenge score	-0.217	0.087	-0.21	-2.49	0.014
Implementation readiness	0.295	0.088	0.27	3.35	0.001

Model Statistics: $R = 0.721$ $R^2 = 0.520$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.507$ $F(4, 145) = 39.31$, $p < 0.001$ Dependent variable: Positive perception score (1–5 scale).

Source: Field survey, 2025.

RESULTS

Effects of teachers’ perception on the Basic (1–6) Standards-Based Curriculum in Ghana

The results in Table 1 show that teachers in the North Gonja District generally hold a moderately positive view of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) for basic schools, with a mean score of 3.7 ± 0.62 on a 1–5 scale. This reflects a sense of optimism about its potential to improve teaching and learning, especially given its

learner-centered and competency-based design. Many teachers seem to appreciate the curriculum's emphasis on active engagement and practical skills, which aligns with modern educational practices.

However, their optimism is tempered by significant practical concerns. Perceived training adequacy scored much lower at 2.4 ± 0.69 , indicating that many teachers feel underprepared to implement the SBC effectively. This is mirrored by the resource availability score of 2.1 ± 0.57 , pointing to a shortage of teaching and learning materials that could hinder the curriculum's intended methods.

Class size challenges stand out as a pressing issue, with the highest mean score of 4.3 ± 0.49 , showing that overcrowded classrooms are seen as a major barrier to effective delivery. This is especially problematic in rural contexts like North Gonja, where large teacher-pupil ratios and multi-grade teaching are common. Implementation readiness was also relatively low at 2.6 ± 0.64 , reflecting only moderate preparedness in terms of infrastructure, administrative support, and logistical arrangements.

The multiple regression results in Table 2 examine the extent to which perceived training adequacy, resource availability, class size challenges, and implementation readiness predict teachers' positive perception scores toward the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) in North Gonja District. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(4, 145) = 39.31$, $p < 0.001$, explaining approximately 52% of the variance in teachers' positive perception scores ($R^2 = 0.520$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.507$). This indicates that the combination of these four factors provides a strong explanation for variations in how teachers perceive the SBC.

Perceived training adequacy emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that teachers who felt they had received adequate professional development tended to have more favorable views of the curriculum. Resource availability also had a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.001$), highlighting the role of adequate teaching and learning materials in fostering positive perceptions. Implementation readiness showed a similarly strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that schools with better infrastructure, administrative support, and logistical preparedness were more likely to have teachers who viewed the curriculum favourably. Conversely, class size challenges had a significant negative relationship with positive perception scores ($\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.014$), suggesting that overcrowded classrooms diminish teachers' ability to engage with and appreciate the curriculum's learner-centered approach.

DISCUSSION

Effects of teachers' perception on the Basic (1–6) Standards-Based Curriculum in Ghana

The findings from this study reflect a broader pattern in educational reform implementation, where positive attitudes toward curriculum innovation often coexist with significant structural and operational challenges. The moderately high positive perception score (3.7 ± 0.62) suggests that teachers in the North Gonja District recognize the potential of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) to enhance learning outcomes. This aligns with observations by Fullan (2007), who argues that teacher buy-in is a critical prerequisite for the success of any educational change, as their attitudes and beliefs strongly influence classroom practice. The SBC's learner-centered and competency-based focus resonates with international best practices that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). However, the low scores for perceived training adequacy (2.4 ± 0.69) and resource availability (2.1 ± 0.57) reveal a gap between teachers' enthusiasm and their preparedness to implement the curriculum effectively. This mirrors findings by Akyeampong et al. (2013), who note that insufficient professional development and lack of instructional materials are persistent obstacles to curriculum reforms in sub-Saharan Africa. Without sustained and context-specific training, teachers may revert to traditional, teacher-centered methods despite the curriculum's progressive orientation. The particularly high-class size challenge score (4.3 ± 0.49) underscores a major barrier to effective curriculum delivery. Overcrowded classrooms limit opportunities for individualized attention, collaborative learning, and formative assessment which are key features of competency-based education. UNESCO (2015) highlighted that in rural African contexts, large class sizes and multi-grade teaching often undermine the effectiveness of new pedagogical approaches. The low implementation readiness score (2.6 ± 0.64) further signals systemic weaknesses in infrastructure, administrative support, and logistics, echoing the concerns of Osei (2006) that without adequate institutional capacity, even well-designed reforms risk falling short of their objectives.

The regression analysis highlighted that while teachers' perceptions of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) are shaped by multiple factors, professional development opportunities are the most influential driver of positive attitudes. The strong effect of perceived training adequacy ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) reinforces the argument made by Guskey (2002) that sustained, high-quality teacher training is essential for translating curriculum reforms into meaningful classroom practice. When teachers feel well-prepared through targeted workshops, continuous mentoring, and follow-up support, they are more likely to embrace new pedagogical approaches and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly.

Resource availability also emerged as a key determinant ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.001$), consistent with Akyeampong et al. (2013), who observed that without access to adequate instructional materials, curriculum implementation often becomes superficial. The SBC's emphasis on active, competency-based learning requires not only textbooks but also supplementary materials, manipulatives, and digital resources; especially in contexts where experiential and collaborative learning are encouraged.

Similarly, the positive relationship between implementation readiness and teachers' perceptions ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$) supports the notion that systemic support, ranging from functional infrastructure to effective school leadership; plays a pivotal role in enabling reform uptake (Fullan, 2007). Schools with well-coordinated administrative structures and logistical provisions are better positioned to provide the enabling environment needed for the SBC's learner-centered methodologies. In contrast, the significant negative effect of class size challenges ($\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.014$) underscores the persistent structural barrier posed by overcrowded classrooms. Large class sizes can limit opportunities for differentiated instruction, reduce teacher-student interaction, and hinder formative assessment; core elements of the SBC framework. UNESCO (2015) similarly warns that in many rural African settings, reforms risk being undermined if pupil-teacher ratios are not addressed in tandem with pedagogical changes.

Implications of perceptions for teaching and learning in the study area

The perceptions teachers hold about the Basic (1–6) Standards-Based Curriculum have significant implications for teaching and learning in the North East Gonja District. When teachers view the curriculum positively; believing it is relevant, practical, and responsive to learners' needs; they are more likely to engage in innovative, learner-centred approaches. This encourages critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving among pupils, which aligns with the curriculum's intended outcomes. However, when perceptions are mixed or negative; often due to inadequate training, limited resources, or misalignment between policy and classroom realities, implementation suffers. Teachers may revert to old, teacher-centred methods, reducing the curriculum's effectiveness. In rural and resource-constrained areas of North East Gonja, these challenges can deepen learning inequalities, as pupils may not benefit fully from the curriculum's promise of competency-based learning. Additionally, positive perceptions can foster a stronger sense of ownership and motivation among teachers, leading to improved lesson preparation, assessment practices, and classroom interactions. On the other hand, negative or uncertain perceptions can create resistance to change, limit curriculum innovation, and weaken the link between policy reforms and actual learning outcomes. This ultimately affects pupils' mastery of foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills. In the long term, the quality of education in the district will depend on sustained teacher support, adequate teaching and learning materials, and continuous professional development to bridge the gap between the curriculum's intentions and the realities of its delivery. Without these measures, the curriculum's ability to transform learning in North East Gonja may remain limited.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study reflect a familiar pattern in education reform, where teachers' enthusiasm for curriculum innovation is tempered by structural and operational constraints. The moderately high positive perception score (3.7 ± 0.62) suggests that teachers in the North Gonja District recognize the Standards-Based Curriculum's (SBC) potential to enhance learning, echoing Fullan's (2007) assertion that teacher buy-in is essential for successful reform. Its learner-centered, competency-based approach aligns with global best practices that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Yet, the low ratings for perceived training adequacy (2.4 ± 0.69) and resource availability (2.1 ± 0.57) reveal a

gap between teachers' willingness to implement the SBC and their readiness to do so effectively. This gap mirrors findings by Akyeampong et al. (2013), who identified insufficient professional development and lack of instructional materials as recurring barriers to reform in sub-Saharan Africa. Without sustained, context-specific training, teachers may revert to traditional methods despite the SBC's progressive aims. The high score for class size challenges (4.3 ± 0.49) highlights a critical barrier; overcrowded classrooms restrict individualized support, collaborative learning, and formative assessment, which are central to competency-based education. UNESCO (2015) notes that in rural African contexts, large class sizes and multi-grade teaching frequently erode the effectiveness of new pedagogical models. Low implementation readiness (2.6 ± 0.64) further points to systemic gaps in infrastructure, administrative capacity, and logistical support, consistent with Osei's (2006) view that weak institutional frameworks can undermine even well-designed reforms. Regression analysis confirms that professional development is the strongest positive predictor of teachers' perceptions ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing Guskey's (2002) argument that high-quality training is essential for translating reform into classroom change. Resource availability ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.001$) and implementation readiness ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$) also play significant roles, underscoring the need for adequate materials, infrastructure, and leadership. Conversely, class size challenges ($\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.014$) remain a significant negative factor, reflecting a structural issue that, if left unaddressed, could hinder the SBC's long-term success.

Limitation of the study

A key limitation of the study is that it focused solely on teachers in the North East Gonja District, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other districts in Ghana with different socio-economic, cultural, and educational contexts. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal biases, social desirability, or incomplete recall, potentially affecting the accuracy and objectivity of the responses. The relatively small sample size further limits the ability to draw broad conclusions about all teachers' perceptions of the Standards-Based Curriculum across the country.

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