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FACTORS AFFECTING PARITY MANAGEMENT IN ACADEMIC STREAMING OF STUDENTS AT FEDERAL SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE, TUNGBO, BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study examined factors influencing parity management in the academic streaming of students at the Federal Science and Technical College (FSTC) Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 43 junior teachers and 14 senior teachers, resulting in a total of 57 educators. A stratified total census sampling technique was applied to ensure comprehensive representation. Data were collected using a self-structured instrument, titled 'Parity Management in Students' Academic Streaming at Tungbo Unity College Questionnaire' (PMSASTUCQ), which underwent face and content validation by three experts. The PMSASTUCQ comprised fifteen items divided into three sections and demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.79, as determined through Cronbach Alpha analysis. Of the copies of questionnaire distributed, 45 were completed and returned, yielding an overall response rate of 78.95%. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested through z-tests. Findings indicated that maintaining appropriate pupil-teacher ratios in all the academic streams is crucial for effective parity management, promoting both academic achievement and personal growth at FSTC Tungbo. Nevertheless, the implementation of federal character principles, coupled with resource constraints, negatively impacts student diversity and performance management. The study concluded and recommended that for effective parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTCs in Nigeria, educational disparities require urgent reforms and better resource allocation.
Keywords: Parity management; Academic streaming; Ethnocentrism; Pupil-teacher ratios; Resource allocation

1 INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in Nigeria is characterized by a diverse array of institutions dedicated to fostering academic excellence and contributing to national development. Among these, the Federal Science and Technical Colleges (FSTCs), often referred to as Unity Colleges, are crucial in equipping students with vital technical skills that drive progress within the nation. Strategically situated across various regions, these colleges strive to enhance technical education and provide equitable access to quality learning opportunities for students from varied backgrounds [1]. The significance of technical education in Unity Colleges extends beyond individual employability; it plays an essential role in promoting economic sustainability and nurturing innovation within the country. A key principle underlying the educational framework of these institutions is parity management, particularly in the context of academic streaming. Parity management ensures that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have equitable access to educational opportunities, which can significantly influence their academic journeys [2,3]. While academic streaming organizes students based on perceived abilities, it carries the risk of perpetuating inequalities if not managed equitably, potentially creating systemic barriers that disadvantage certain groups [4]. Thus, evaluating factors affecting parity management in relation to academic streaming is vital for unlocking the full potential of every student [5].

Federal Science and Technical College in Tungbo, Bayelsa State, plays an instrumental role in delivering technical education within Nigeria's south-south region. The college's location within an inland community presents challenges related to access to educational resources and the overall quality of education. Socio-economic conditions in this area further complicate equitable access to educational opportunities [6]. The diverse student demographic at FSTC Tungbo, ranging from ages 12 to 18, represents various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, many hailing from modest means. This highlights the college's dedication to nurturing an inclusive educational environment. However, despite these commendable efforts, systemic barriers persist [7]. Hence, this study sought to ascertain these complexities, focusing on the contextual factors and institutional dynamics that affect parity management in academic streaming at FSTC Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Parents and guardians have raised significant concerns about the management of academic streaming in Federal Government Colleges (FGCs). Their grievances highlight issues such as unequal resource distribution, which negatively

impacts educational quality, and a decline in academic standards to accommodate various streams. Factors such as ethnocentrism and elitism further intensify these disparities, along with inconsistent cut-off marks and state quotas. Additionally, high pupil-teacher ratios and decrepit infrastructure limit personalized support for students. However, these challenges are not uniform across all FGCs, particularly those with specialized focuses like FSTC, Tungbo. Consequently, this study was carried out to enhance technical education in Unity Colleges in Nigeria.

3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study examined factors affecting parity management in academic streaming of students at federal science and technical college, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:
1. analyze the effect of resource distribution on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
2. examine the impact of ethnocentrism on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
3. ascertain the influence of pupil-teacher ratios on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of resource distribution on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria?
2. What is the impact of ethnocentrism on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria?
3. What is the influence of pupil-teacher ratios on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria?

4.1 Hypotheses

The following three (3) null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.
1. There is no significant difference in mean scores between the junior and senior teachers' opinion regarding resource distribution's effect on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in mean scores between the junior and senior teachers' opinion regarding ethnocentrism's effect on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference in mean scores between the junior and senior teachers' opinion regarding pupil-teacher ratios' effect on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

The study's framework focuses on factors influencing parity management in academic streaming for students at Federal Science and Technical College, illustrated in Figure 1.

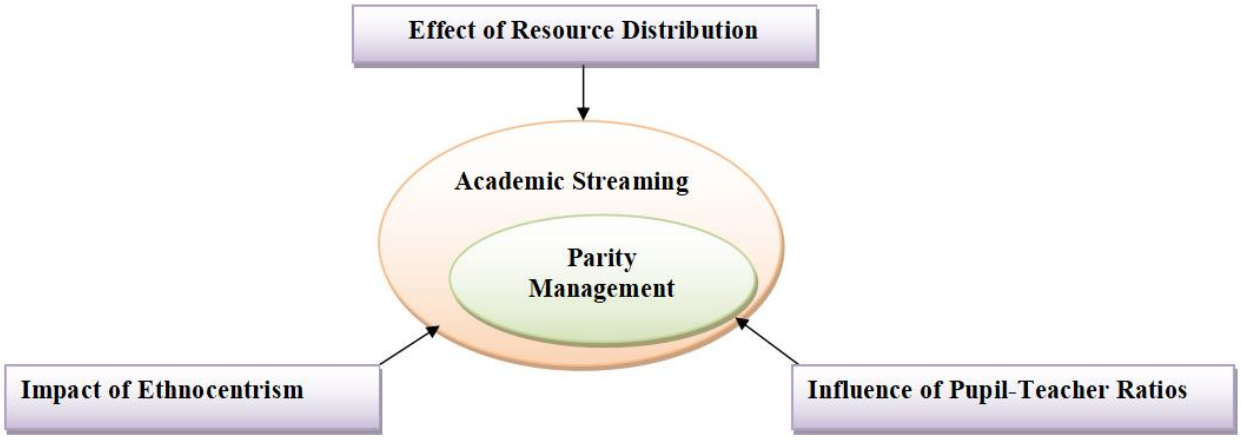

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship between Variables
Source: Researchers' conceptualization (2024).

4.3 Literature Review

The management of student parity within academic streaming systems represents a complex challenge for educational institutions worldwide, with particular relevance in Nigeria's Unity Colleges, especially FSTCs. Streaming is designed to provide tailored educational experiences that enhance learners' academic performance at varying levels [8]. However, the resulting diversity in tribal affiliations, genders, and learner capacities—including high achievers, slow learners, gifted students, and those with special needs—complicates this landscape, particularly in middle- and low-income nations [9,10]. Ethnocentrism exacerbates these disparities, as biased perceptions of student abilities based on their backgrounds often emerge in educational settings [11]. Further complicating equity, scholars such as Kamil [12] and Igbokwe [13] argue that elitism and segregation entrench inequalities, thus hindering effective parity management. The allocation of educational resources significantly influences streaming practices. Research indicates that inequities in resource distribution yield disparities in educational outcomes [10]. Lawal et al. [14] observe that inadequate teacher competency often results from skewed resource allocations, directly impacting the effectiveness of streaming. Smith supports this view, noting that high pupil-teacher ratios can compromise educational quality[15], resulting in inequitable learning experiences.

In the context of Nigeria's Unity Colleges, the quota system, the federal character principle, and catchment area policies impose systemic barriers to equitable education. Abiogu contends that these policies favour specific groups[16], undermining the essential aim of national unity. This is validated by Joshua et al. [17], who highlight how emerging inequities breed frustration and mistrust among parents and communities. Saharareporters further illustrates these concerns[18], reporting that parents often falsify their children's state of origin to secure admission, revealing deeper systemic inequities in the educational landscape. Ogeh and Alfred add that while the federal character principle is intended to enhance national unity[1], it often fosters divisiveness, reflecting systemic imbalances that degrade equity's core values. These inconsistencies become particularly pronounced in FSTCs, such as the one in Tungbo, Bayelsa State.

Current discourse emphasizes the need for effective parity management strategies among school administrators, educators, and parents by identifying specific factors affecting the management of parity in each institution [19]. Stakeholders—including the Ministry of Education—are expected to prioritize inclusive management practices, shifting focus from simply achieving demographic representation to ensuring equitable learning environments. As Fajana suggests[20], slow progress toward abolishing unjustifiable quota systems perpetuates societal disparities, resulting in a damaging "double standard" in educational achievement. Maharaj and Zareey underscore that the consequences of inappropriate streaming stretch beyond academic performance[5], affecting student interactions and relationships. The link between effective parity management in education and broader societal equity is explicit [21,22]; as Sibanda notes[23], successful equitable practices could serve as a foundation for addressing larger societal disparities, thereby seamlessly fostering unity and cohesion. The clustering of students based on ethnicity and gender emphasizes the urgent need for administrative finesse that engenders diverse, inclusive educational practices within Unity Colleges.

4.4 Theoretical Framework

Equity theory, established by John Stacey Adams in 1963, asserts that individuals evaluate their input-output ratios in relation to those of others. When they perceive imbalances, feelings of inequity can arise, leading to behavioural changes aimed at restoring fairness. This theory focuses on "inputs," which are the contributions individuals make, and "outputs," the rewards they receive. People inherently seek equity in their relationships and may adjust their efforts based on their perceptions of fairness. At the Federal Science and Technical College in Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria, equity theory provides a vital framework for assessing the fairness of academic streaming concerning performance recognition and access to appropriate resources. If students' achievements are not appropriately acknowledged, their motivation may suffer, underscoring the necessity of addressing factors that impact parity management within the institution.

5 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design, targeting a population of 43 junior teachers and 14 senior teachers, totaling 57 educators. A stratified total census sampling technique was utilized to ensure comprehensive representation of the entire population. Data collection was facilitated using a self-structured instrument, the 'Parity Management in Students' Academic Streaming at Tungbo Unity College Questionnaire' (PMSASTUCQ), which underwent rigorous face and content validation by three experts. The PMSASTUCQ consisted of fifteen items divided into three sections, with responses captured on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), assigned weighted values of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The instrument demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.79, determined via Cronbach Alpha analysis. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 45 were completed and returned—33 from junior teachers (33/43 x 100 = 81.40% return rate) and 12 from senior teachers (12/14 x 100 = 85.71% return rate), resulting in an overall return rate of 78.95% (45/57 x 100). The study addressed the research questions using mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested through z-tests.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Answer to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the effect of resource distribution on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria?

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Effect of Resource Distribution on Parity Management in Academic Streaming of Students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items- Resource Distribution	Junior Teachers (N = 33)		Senior Teachers (N = 12)		Mean Set (xx)	Remarks
		$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd		
1.	Insufficient allocation of laboratory equipment in science classes hinders parity in academic streaming for the students.	2.65	0.62	2.73	0.65	2.69	Agreed
2.	Limited access to up-to-date textbooks in technical subjects contributes to disparities in student performance in our college.	2.94	0.72	2.88	0.70	2.91	Agreed
3.	Inadequate staff strength in certain streams negatively impacts our students' academic performance and creates disparities in learning outcomes.	2.71	0.65	3.00	0.73	2.86	Agreed
4.	I am of the opinion that our students are mostly from modest background as such could not afford certain digital resources essential to assist the school administration in effective parity management.	2.60	0.61	2.77	0.66	2.69	Agreed
5	There is a noticeable inconsistent availability of science kits for hands-on experiments across the different streams in the school.	2.75	0.66	3.00	0.73	2.88	Agreed
	Cluster Mean/SD	**2.73**	**0.65**	**2.88**	**0.69**	**2.65**	**Agreed**

Criterion mean score = 2.5

Results in Table 1 indicate mean and standard deviation scores regarding the effect of resource distribution on parity management in academic streaming at FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Both junior (N = 33) and senior (N = 12) teachers agreed that insufficient laboratory equipment, outdated textbooks, inadequate staffing, and inconsistent availability of science kits hinder equitable student performance. All mean scores exceed the criterion score of 2.5, with an overall cluster mean of 2.65, underscoring the urgent need for improved resources in the institution.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of ethnocentrism on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria?

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Impact of Ethnocentrism on Parity Management in Academic Streaming of Students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items- Ethnocentrism	Junior Teachers (N = 33)		Senior Teachers (N = 12)		Mean Set (xx)	Remarks
		$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd		
6.	The admission process at FSTC, Tungbo, prioritizes ethnocentric factors, shaping the student body's diversity.	2.50	0.58	2.51	0.58	2.51	Agreed
7.	Ethnocentric considerations subtly influence the cultural richness and inclusivity within FSTC, Tungbo's school environment.	2.61	0.62	2.58	0.61	2.60	Agreed
8.	Grouping students by academic ability at FSTC, Tungbo, ensures equal opportunities, unaffected by ethnocentric influences.	2.53	0.59	2.50	0.58	2.52	Agreed
9.	Continuous assessment methods across all academic streams at FSTC, Tungbo, maintain	2.55	0.60	2.79	0.67	2.67	Agreed

	impartiality, free from ethnocentric biases.						
10	The application of the federal character principle in student academic streaming has detracted from the *pro unitate* ethos of Unity College at FSTC, Tungbo.	2.33	0.53	2.49	0.58	2.41	Disagreed
	Cluster Mean/SD	**2.50**	**0.60**	**2.57**	**0.60**	**2.54**	**Agreed**

Criterion mean score = 2.5

Results in Table 2 present mean and standard deviation scores regarding the impact of ethnocentrism on parity management in academic streaming at FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Both junior (N=33) and senior (N=12) teachers generally agreed on the influence of ethnocentric factors on student diversity and inclusivity, scoring above the criterion mean of 2.5. However, disagreement exists concerning the federal character principle's effect on unity, with a mean set score of 2.41.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of pupil-teacher ratios on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria?

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Influence of Pupil-Teacher Ratios on Parity Management in Academic Streaming of Students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

S/N	Test Items- Pupil-Teacher Ratios	Junior Teachers (N = 33)		Senior Teachers (N = 12)		Mean Set (xx)	Remarks
		$\bar{x}$	sd	$\bar{x}$	sd		
11.	The differences in pupil-teacher ratios across various academic streams significantly influence the development of soft skills among students at FSTC, Tungbo.	2.90	0.70	2.82	0.68	2.86	Agreed
12.	Variations in pupil-teacher ratios across different academic streams impact the quality of individualized support received by students in FSTC, Tungbo.	2.47	0.57	2.52	0.59	2.50	Agreed
13.	Teachers at FSTC, Tungbo, find it challenging to provide personalized feedback in classrooms with high pupil-teacher ratios, impacting student development.	2.46	0.57	2.50	0.58	2.48	Disagreed
14.	The allocation of teachers in FSTC, Tungbo, based on pupil-teacher ratios is crucial for maintaining balance in academic streaming across various disciplines.	2.77	0.66	2.91	0.71	2.84	Agreed
15	Increasing teacher training and support in response to pupil-teacher ratios may mitigate perceived disparities in academic streaming at FSTC, Tungbo.	2.58	0.61	2.64	0.63	2.61	Agreed
	Cluster Mean/SD	**2.64**	**0.62**	**2.68**	**0.64**	**2.66**	**Agreed**

Criterion mean score = 2.5

Results in Table 3 outline mean and standard deviation scores regarding how pupil-teacher ratios impact academic streaming at FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Both junior (N = 33) and senior (N = 12) teachers largely agreed that pupil-teacher ratios significantly influence students' soft skills development and the quality of individualized support received among others. While there is some disagreement on the challenge of providing personalized feedback in overcrowded classrooms, all mean scores exceed the criterion mean of 2.5. The overall cluster mean is 2.66, indicating a consensus on the importance of implementing the pupil-teacher ratios as enshrined in the national policy on education (FRN, 2014) for effective parity management in students academic streaming in Nigeria's Unity Colleges.

6.2 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in mean scores between the junior and senior teachers' opinion regarding resource distribution's effect on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Table 4 Z-test Analysis on the Mean Differences in Junior and Senior Teachers' Responses Regarding Resource Distribution's Effect on Managing Academic Streaming Parity Among the Students

Status	n	$\bar{x}$	Sd	df	z-cal	z-crit value	Sig.	Level of significance	Decision
Junior Teachers	33	2.73	0.65						
				43	2.81	1. 96	0.00	0.05	Significant
Senior Teachers	12	2.88	0.69						

Results in Table 4 indicated that a z-test analysis was conducted to examine mean differences in junior and senior teachers' responses regarding the impact of resource distribution on managing academic streaming parity among students. The calculated z-value (2.81) exceeds the critical value (1.96), and the p-value (0.00) is below the significance level (0.05), indicating a significant difference..Therefore, the null hypothesis was not retained.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in mean scores between the junior and senior teachers' opinion regarding ethnocentrism's effect on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Table 5 Z-test Analysis on the Mean Differences in Junior and Senior Teachers' Responses Regarding Ethnocentrism's Effect on Managing Academic Streaming Parity Among the Students

Status	n	$\bar{x}$	Sd	df	z-cal	z-crit value	Sig.	Level of significance	Decision
Junior Teachers	33	2.50	0.60						
				43	1.44	1. 96	0.07	0.05	Not Significant
Senior Teachers	12	2.57	0.60						

Results in Table 5 indicated that a z-test analysis was conducted to ascertain mean differences between junior and senior teachers' responses regarding the impact of ethnocentrism on managing academic streaming parity among students. The calculated z-value (1.44) is below the critical value (1.96), and the p-value (0.07) exceeds the significance level (0.05), leading to a conclusion of not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in mean scores between the junior and senior teachers' opinion regarding pupil-teacher ratios' effect on parity management in academic streaming of students in FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Table 6 Z-test Analysis on the Mean Differences in Junior and Senior Teachers' Responses Regarding Pupil-Teacher Ratios' Effect on Managing Academic Streaming Parity Among the Students

Status	n	$\bar{x}$	Sd	df	z-cal	z-crit value	Sig.	Level of significance	Decision
Junior Teachers	33	2.64	0.62						
				43	3.17	1. 96	0.00	0.05	Significant
Senior Teachers	12	2.68	0.64						

Results in Table 6 indicated that a z-test analysis was performed to evaluate the mean differences in junior and senior teachers' responses regarding the effect of pupil-teacher ratios on managing academic streaming parity among students. The calculated z-value (3.17) exceeds the critical value (1.96), and the p-value (0.00) is below the significance level (0.05), confirming a significant difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not retained.

7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings regarding resource distribution's impact on parity management in academic streaming at FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria in this study highlight significant barriers to equitable education, echoing concerns raised in previous

studies. Teachers identified insufficient laboratory equipment and outdated textbooks as critical impediments, aligning with the findings of Local Burden of Disease Educational Attainment Collaborators [10], who noted that educational disparities are prevalent in low- and middle-income nations. This indicates a clear concurrence that inadequate resources hinder academic parity, a notion that resonates with Chikpanim [9], who emphasizes the need for focused resource management in Unity Colleges. Moreover, while there is an acknowledgment of ethnocentric factors affecting diversity and inclusivity in this study, there is disagreement on the federal character principle's role in fostering unity, akin to the discussions by Obasanjo [11]as well as Okeke and Obidimma [24] on the challenges surrounding this principle. This ambiguity complicates the educational landscape, much like the findings of Smith regarding ability grouping[15], where equitable practices remain elusive.

Furthermore, teachers' consensus that pupil-teacher ratios affect soft skills and individualized support in this study, as acknowledged by Kpee and Umeghalu[25], Tyessi [19] as well as Umeghalu and Oluwuo [26], emphasizes the necessity of adhering to the national policy maximum of 1:40. This is particularly pertinent as Taylor et al. [27]and Tyessi [19] contend that equitable student allocation is hindered by systemic challenges. However, the disagreement on providing personalized feedback due to overcrowding demonstrates a divergence from Mani [3]as well as Tanggaard et al. [28], who advocate for universally accessible educational practices in streaming students based on their abilities for academic performance. Overall, the findings of this study underscore an urgent need to confront the resource limitations that obstruct academic equality and effective parity management in Nigeria's Unity Colleges, reflecting a broader imperative for systemic educational reforms as acknowledged by Lynch [8] in tandem with Magableh and Abdullah [29].

8 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was concluded that factors affecting parity management in academic streaming of students at FSTC, Tungbo, Bayelsa State, Nigeria reveal substantial challenges rooted in resource distribution. Insufficient laboratory equipment and textbooks not reflecting the current global demand for scientific knowledge in middle schools such as FSTC, Tungbo emerge as major barriers, corroborating existing research that highlights educational inequities in lower-income settings. Also, this study aligns with calls for improved resource management in Unity Colleges, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms. In addition, the significant impact of pupil-teacher ratios on soft skills and individual support reaffirms the necessity to adhere to national policies on class sizes. Notably, the ambiguity surrounding the federal character principle complicates efforts at unity, indicating a need for deeper dialogue by stakeholders in Unity Colleges in Nigeria on the contemporary approach to the management of parity.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. To address the issue of resource distribution for effective academic streaming, it is essential for federal and state education authorities to conduct a comprehensive audit of resource allocation in academic institutions, particularly focusing on Unity Colleges, and implement a transparent plan to make contemporary instructional materials available and accessible to teachers and students.
2. In order to manage class sizes for effective academic streaming, Unity Colleges administrators and policymakers in education should enforce the national policy on pupil-teacher ratios by hiring additional educators and optimizing classroom sizes to maintain a maximum ratio of 1:40s.
3. The school administrator should liaise with the state education board to implement teacher training programmes that address classroom challenges in this 21st century, benefiting students needing individualized support and enhancing teachers' educational effectiveness

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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