



Challenges in the Implementation of Aspirational Curriculum at the Secondary Level: A Critical Analysis Vis-A- Vis NCFSE (2023)

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Abstract: *The concept of an aspirational curriculum has gained increasing prominence in contemporary educational reforms, particularly in the context of fostering holistic development, critical thinking, and future readiness among students at the secondary level. However, the translation of aspirational curriculum frameworks from policy to classroom practice remains fraught with multiple challenges. This study critically examines the barriers to effective implementation of aspirational curriculum in secondary education. Using a mixed method research design, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis across selected secondary schools. The findings reveal that systemic constraints such as inadequate teacher preparedness, limited professional development opportunities, and lack of contextualized teaching-learning resources significantly hinder implementation. Additionally, rigid examination systems, infrastructural disparities, and administrative overload further restrict innovative pedagogical practices envisioned under the aspirational curriculum. The study also highlights socio-cultural factors, including resistance to change and varying stakeholder expectations, as critical impediments. Despite these challenges, instances of adaptive strategies adopted by teachers demonstrate potential pathways for successful implementation. The paper argues for a multi-pronged approach involving capacity building, policy alignment, resource augmentation, and continuous support mechanisms to bridge the gap between curricular intent and classroom realities. The present study contributes to the discourse on different curriculum reform by providing actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers aiming to realize the transformative goals of aspirational curriculum at the secondary level.*

Key Words: *Aspirational Curriculum, Secondary Education, Curriculum Implementation, Educational Reform, Pedagogical Challenges, Learning Outcomes, Change Management in Education, National Curriculum*

1. INTRODUCTION:

“Teaching not just what students need to know today, but what they need to become tomorrow.”

The rapid transformation of global educational paradigms in the 21st century has a paradigm shift from traditional content-oriented instruction to make more dynamic, competency-based, and learner-centred approaches. Within this evolving framework of education system, the concept of an aspirational curriculum has emerged as a crucial component of educational reform, particularly at the secondary level. An aspirational curriculum refers to a forward-looking, learner-centred educational framework designed to inspire students to achieve their highest potential while preparing them for future societal, economic, and global challenges. It goes beyond traditional content delivery and focuses on developing competencies, values, and ambitions that enable students to envision and pursue meaningful life goals. An aspirational curriculum is designed to align educational experiences with students' future goals and aspirations, societal needs, and global competencies, thereby fostering holistic development, critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. It emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the development of different life skills, ethical values, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for navigating complex and uncertain futures (Ganie, 2022). At the secondary stage, education plays a crucial role in shaping students' identities, career pathways, and long-term aspirations among them. However, for the successful implementation of such a curriculum is contingent upon multiple interrelated factors,



including teacher preparedness, institutional support, socio-economic context, and policy coherence. Despite the progressive vision embedded in aspirational curriculum frameworks, there exists a substantial gap between policy formulation and classroom practice. Most of the studies indicate that while curriculum reforms often emphasize innovation and inclusivity, their practical realization is hindered by structural and systemic challenges (Nafisah et al., 2025). Moreover, students' aspirations themselves are influenced by diverse socio-cultural factors, which may either facilitate or constrain the intended outcomes of the curriculum (Ganie, 2022). Furthermore, the significance of the study is reinforced by constitutional and policy directives that prioritize Challenges in the Implementation of Aspirational Curriculum at the Secondary Level. Major policy initiatives such as the National Education Policy 2020, National Knowledge Commission, and Secondary Education Commission emphasize strengthening and implementation of Aspirational Curriculum at all levels (Chimombo, 2022).

In developing contexts, particularly in diverse educational landscapes, the implementation of aspirational curriculum becomes even more complex and critical due to disparities in resources, infrastructure, and access to quality education (Ministry of Education, 2023). Consequently, it becomes imperative to critically examine the challenges that impede the effective execution of such curricula. This study, therefore, seeks to analyse the multifaceted barriers associated with the implementation of aspirational curriculum at the secondary level, with a focus on pedagogical, institutional, and socio-cultural dimensions (Ganie, 2022).

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

2.1 CONCEPT OF ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM:

The concept of aspirational curriculum is rooted in the idea of aligning education with students' future goals and societal needs and aspirations. However, lack of clarity in defining competencies and aspirations creates conceptual ambiguity. Most of the studies indicate that curriculum frameworks often lack a unified understanding of competencies, leading to inconsistencies in implementation (Hughes & Barrie, 2010).

2.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM:

The present study holds considerable significance for different stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. For policymakers, it offers critical insights into the practical challenges of implementing curriculum reforms, thereby informing the development of more effective and context-sensitive policies (Chimombo, 2022). For educators, the study provides a deeper understanding of the barriers they face in adopting innovative pedagogical practices and highlights potential strategies for overcoming these challenges. Furthermore, for researchers the study contributes to the growing body of literature on curricular studies by exploring the intersection of aspirations and implementation. Moreover, for students, the overall findings of this study have the potential to enhance learning experiences by promoting more inclusive and engaging educational practices (McPhail, 2016).

2.3 CHALLENGES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM

2.3.1 PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES:

Effective implementation of aspirational curriculum requires innovative pedagogical practices such as experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, and interdisciplinary teaching. However, teachers often lack the necessary skills and training to adopt such approaches. Research highlights that limited teacher innovation and insufficient pedagogical knowledge are major barriers (Nafisah et al., 2025). Additionally, traditional teaching methods continue to dominate classrooms, restricting the development of critical thinking and creativity.

2.3.2 INSTITUTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS:

Institutional factors such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching-learning materials, and overcrowded classrooms significantly affect curriculum implementation. Studies conducted in secondary schools reveal that insufficient resources and lack of laboratories hinder effective teaching (Chimombo, 2022). Furthermore, administrative workload and policy inconsistencies create additional challenges for teachers and school leaders (Boon, 2018).

2.3.3 ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION ISSUES:

Assessment practices often remain aligned with rote learning rather than competency-based evaluation (Sinnema, & Stoll, 2020). Moreover, the mismatch between curriculum goals and assessment systems discourages teachers from adopting innovative practices. Examination pressure has been identified as a critical barrier to effective curriculum implementation (Asmau, 2023).

2.3.4 SOCIO-CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS:

Students' aspirations are influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors, including family background, community expectations, and peer influence. Research indicates that aspirations are shaped by both individual and family characteristics, such as socio-economic status and parental education (Ganie, 2022). Furthermore, in rural and



marginalized contexts, limited exposure and opportunities restrict students' aspirations, thereby affecting the implementation of aspirational curriculum (Anlimachie et al., 2023).

2.3.5 EQUITY AND ACCESS ISSUES

Educational inequalities continue to impact on curriculum delivery. Most of the studies show that curriculum experiences differ significantly across socio-economic groups, reinforcing existing disparities (Patfield et al., 2023).

3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

The present study is anchored in the pragmatism paradigm, which integrates both positivist and interpretivist approaches within a single framework. This paradigm emphasizes practical solutions and utility, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to address real educational concerns. By focusing on actionable outcomes, the study seeks to generate contextually relevant insights into Challenges in the Implementation of Aspirational Curriculum at the Secondary Level students. The significance of the study is reinforced by constitutional and policy directives that prioritize Challenges in the Implementation of Aspirational Curriculum at the Secondary Level. Major policy initiatives such as the National Education Policy 2020, National Knowledge Commission, and Secondary Education Commission emphasize strengthening and implementation of Aspirational Curriculum at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Despite the extensive body of research on curriculum reforms and educational aspirations, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific challenges related with the implementation of aspirational curriculum at the secondary level. Most existing studies tend to focus either on curriculum design or on students' aspirations in isolation, without examining the interrelationship between these two dimensions. Furthermore, there is a lack of context-specific research that captures the lived experiences of teachers and students within diverse educational settings. Most of the gap is particularly evident in developing countries, where structural inequalities and resource constraints pose unique challenges to curriculum implementation in different fields. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the barriers to implementing aspirational curriculum in secondary education.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are the major challenges in implementing aspirational curriculum at the secondary level?
2. How do pedagogical practices influence aspirational curriculum implementation at the secondary level?
3. What role do institutional and socio-cultural factors play in shaping implementation of aspirational curriculum implementation at the secondary level?
4. What strategies can enhance effective implementation of aspirational curriculum at the secondary level?

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyse the challenges in implementing aspirational curriculum at the secondary level.
2. To examine pedagogical practices, influence aspirational curriculum implementation at the secondary level.
3. To explore institutional and socio-cultural factors play in shaping implementation of aspirational curriculum implementation at the secondary level.
4. To suggest strategies for effective implementation of aspirational curriculum at the secondary level.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

• DESIGN:

Keeping in mind the objectives of the research, the researcher was adopting convergent parallel design of mixed method research to systematically investigate the various dimensions of aspirational curriculum implementation. The study design enables the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data, which providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

• POPULATION

In present study, the Population for the study was all Secondary School teachers, administrators, and students who are directly involved in the implementation of aspirational curriculum in Odisha. The Accessible Population for this study was Secondary School teachers, administrators, and students (9th Class) who are directly involved in the implementation of aspirational curriculum of South-East Zone, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

• SAMPLE

In the present study, the researcher was using purposive sampling technique on the ground that these schools have high learner enrolment possessing excellent academic track record which in turn helps to develop deeper understanding pertaining to implementation of aspirational curriculum. The sample is all the ninth-class students (secondary level



students), and the sample size is N= 390 comprising the total number of students. Moreover, sample size of secondary school teachers and administrators is N= 140, ensuring representation from diverse socio-economic and institutional contexts.

- **TOOLS**

Keeping in mind the objective of this present research, the researcher in consultation with the experts in the field of in the implementation of aspirational curriculum, decided to collect the data including questionnaire, interview schedules, observation checklists, and document analysis frameworks.

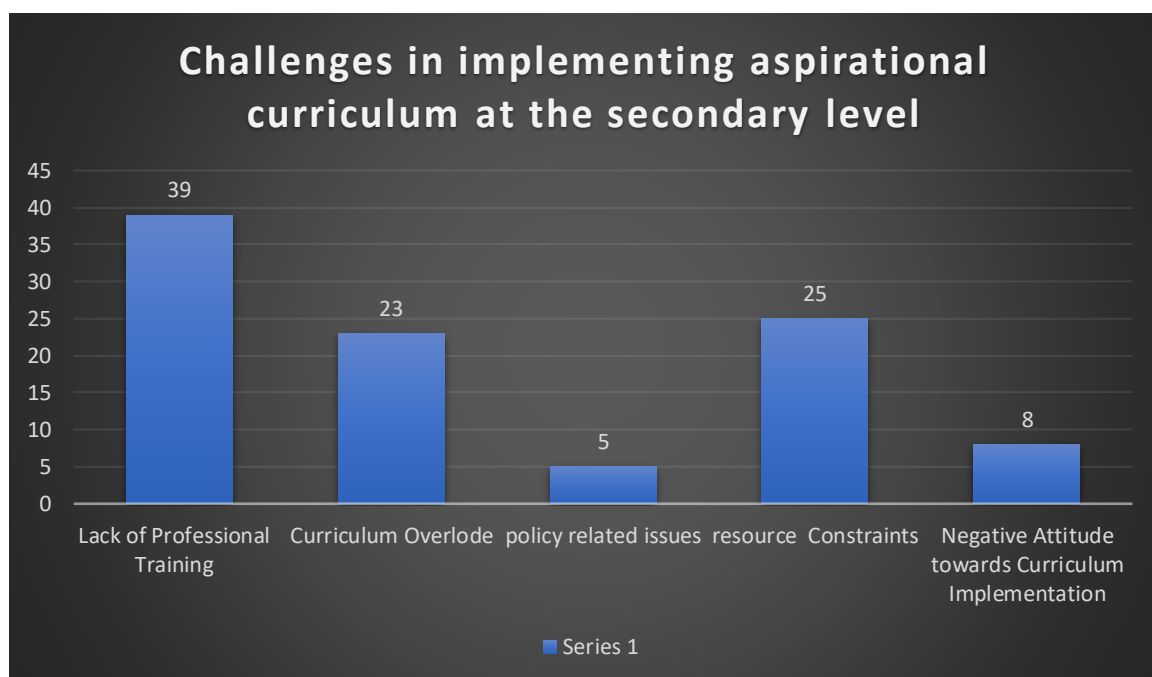
- **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The researcher reveals several critical themes that highlight the challenges of implementing aspirational curriculum at secondary school level. For the present study, the researcher is analyzing the data using frequency, percentage, and content analysis (for open ended items) techniques for the respective quantitative and qualitative data. The frequency of each response for a particular item as given by the respondents are calculated. The responses are analysed on the basis of scoring key available and thereafter the results, findings and interpretations are derived.

7. MAJOR FINDINGS:

7.1 OBJECTIVE 1: TO ANALYSE THE CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL.

The study found that the implementation of the aspirational curriculum is significantly constrained by multiple challenges. The majority of teachers reported lack of professional training, inadequate teaching-learning resources, and curriculum overload as the primary barriers. Additionally, ambiguity in policy guidelines and insufficient time for planning innovative lessons further hinder effective implementation. Furthermore, these challenges collectively limit teachers' ability to adopt competency-based and student-centered approaches.



(Figure 7.1)

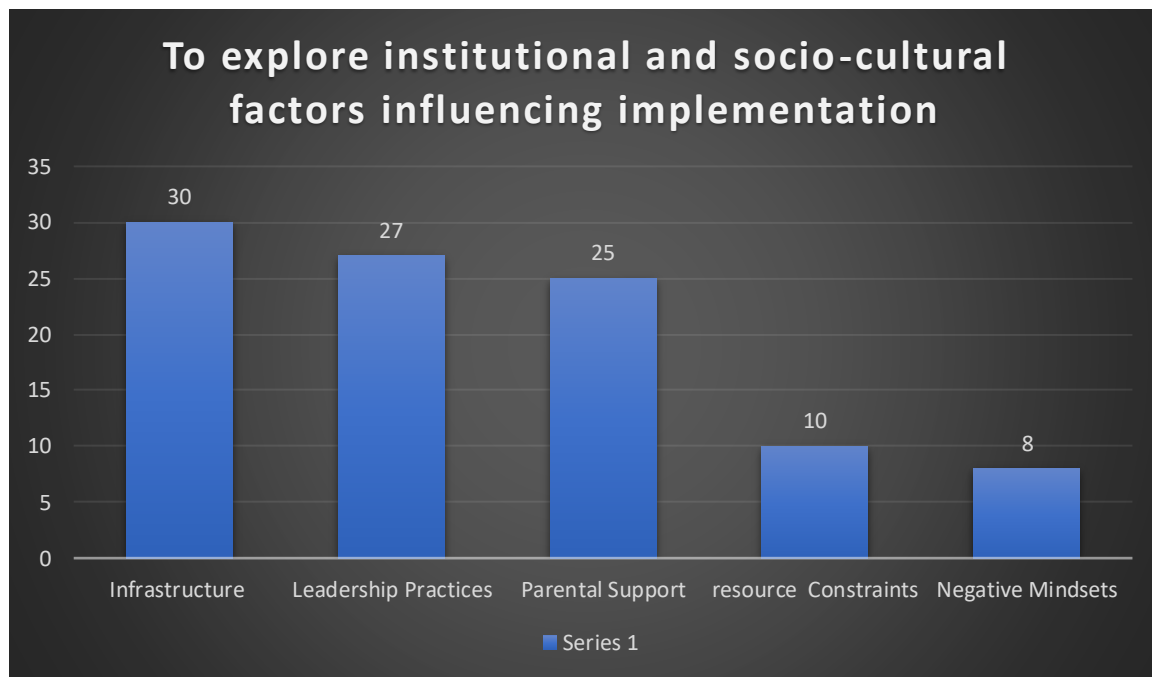
7.2 OBJECTIVE 2: TO EXAMINE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, INFLUENCE ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL.

Findings indicate that pedagogical practices/approaches play a crucial role in shaping curriculum outcomes. However, the study revealed that traditional lecture-based teaching methods still dominate classroom practices. Although some teachers attempt to integrate activity-based and experiential learning, their efforts are often limited due to lack of training and institutional support. Schools that adopted innovative pedagogies demonstrated higher student engagement and better learning outcomes.



7.3 OBJECTIVE 3: TO EXPLORE INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS PLAY IN SHAPING IMPLEMENTATION OF ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL.

The study highlights that institutional and socio-cultural contexts significantly affect curriculum implementation. Schools with adequate infrastructure, leadership support, and collaborative culture showed more effective execution of aspirational curriculum goals. Furthermore, on the socio-cultural front, parental awareness, community participation, and students' socio-economic background influenced the level of engagement and success. Additionally, lack of community support was identified as a barrier in several cases.



(Figure 7.3)

7.4 OBJECTIVE 4: TO SUGGEST STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF ASPIRATIONAL CURRICULUM AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL.

The study emphasizes the need for a holistic and collaborative approach to achieve the intended outcomes of the aspirational curriculum. Based on the findings, several strategies were identified for improving implementation. These include continuous professional development programs for teachers, integration of technology in teaching, reduction of curriculum load, and clear policy guidelines. Furthermore, strengthening institutional support systems and promoting community involvement were also found essential.

8. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS:

1. The findings of the study have very important implications for educational practice and policy.
2. There is a need to strengthen teacher training programs to equip teacher educators with the skills required for implementing innovative pedagogies.
3. Assessment systems must be reformed to align with the goals of aspirational curriculum, and efforts should be made to enhance infrastructure and resource availability.
4. Additionally, policies should focus on promoting equity and inclusivity to ensure that all students have access to quality education.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

These are listed below as suggestions for the further research-

1. Future research could explore comparative analyses of curriculum implementation across different regions and educational systems.
2. Quantitative studies could be conducted to measure the impact of aspirational curriculum on student outcomes.
3. Longitudinal research could provide insights into the long-term effects of curriculum reforms on students' aspirations and career trajectories.



4. Furthermore, the role of digital technologies in facilitating curriculum implementation warrants further investigation.

10. CONCLUSION:

The present study concludes that the implementation of aspirational curriculum at the secondary level is a complex and multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of various contextual factors. While the curriculum holds significant potential for transforming education system, its success depends on the alignment of policy, pedagogy, and practices. Addressing these identified challenges requires a holistic approach that involves capacity building for educators, resource allocation, and systemic reforms in the institutions.

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