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Curriculum Design and Student Social Engagement in Human Kinetics Programmes: Empirical Evidence from Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study examined how curriculum design shapes students' social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities. Human Kinetics spanning physical education, sport science, health promotion, and recreation depends on hands-on learning, teamwork, and active participation. However, many programmes are facing concerns about falling student engagement, limited peer collaboration, and curricula that are not fully aligned with current teaching methods or social realities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study drew evidence from undergraduate students and academic staff in selected public and private universities offering Human Kinetics. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires that assessed curriculum coherence, practical orientation, and dimensions of social engagement such as peer interaction, teamwork, participation during practical sessions, and involvement in co-curricular activities. Qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to better understand students' day-to-day learning experiences and the social climate created by the curriculum. Findings showed a clear pattern: curricula that emphasised practical coursework, collaborative learning, community-based experiences, and inclusive assessment methods were linked to stronger social engagement. Students exposed to flexible and context-relevant curricula reported better peer relationships, improved communication, and more active participation in academic and practical activities. In contrast, rigid curricula dominated by heavy theory content and lecture-focused teaching were associated with weaker interaction and reduced engagement. Institutional conditions also mattered. Large class sizes, limited facilities, low staff-student ratios, and weak support for sport and recreation often reduced the positive impact of even well-designed curricula. Overall, the study concludes that curriculum design plays a major role in shaping social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes. It recommends curriculum reforms that prioritise experiential learning, collaborative pedagogy, and community engagement to strengthen students' social development and learning outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Human Kinetics education is becoming increasingly important in Nigerian universities as the country places more emphasis on physical activity, health promotion, sport development, and human performance in a fast-changing socio-economic environment. Sitting at the intersection of education, health sciences, and sport studies, Human Kinetics programmes are designed to equip students with both strong theoretical grounding and practical competence in areas such as exercise science, biomechanics, sport psychology, physical education, and recreation management (Ogunyankinnu *et al.*, 2022; Oyeyemi, 2022). Since these programmes were formally introduced into Nigeria's university system, they have expanded in number and scope, reflecting

growing national interest in healthier lifestyles, youth development, and the professionalisation of sport and physical education (Centeio *et al.*, 2020; Ozer *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, this growth has come with persistent concerns about curriculum relevance, teaching approaches, and student engagement within the higher education context. Curriculum design is central to what students experience in any programme, shaping what they learn, how learning is organised, and the kinds of learning relationships that develop along the way. In Human Kinetics, curriculum structure influences not only course content and sequencing, but also whether students have opportunities to collaborate, interact, and learn through active participation. A well-designed curriculum can strengthen engagement by embedding experiential learning, group tasks, fieldwork, and community-focused projects that help students connect classroom knowledge to real-world practice. In contrast, curricula that are fragmented, overly theory-driven, or narrowly assessment-focused may reduce meaningful interaction and weaken students' sense of belonging in their academic communities (Poitras *et al.*, 2016; Smedegaard *et al.*, 2016). In Nigerian universities, curriculum design is often shaped by accreditation requirements, institutional traditions, and resource limitations, all of which can influence both teaching practices and student experiences.

Concerns about student social engagement are also growing within Nigerian higher education, especially because social engagement is closely linked to retention, academic success, wellbeing, and holistic development. Social engagement includes peer interaction, collaborative learning, participation in practical sessions, involvement in co-curricular activities, and a sense of connection to university life. For Human Kinetics students, this dimension is particularly important because the discipline is naturally interactive and practice-oriented (Greenspan *et al.*, 2019; Vaquero-Solís *et al.*, 2020). Teamwork, peer coaching, practical demonstrations, and shared physical activities can strengthen social bonds while improving learning outcomes. However, rising class sizes, limited facilities, rigid curriculum structures, and a greater reliance on lecture-based delivery may be weakening these engagement pathways in many Nigerian institutions.

Nigeria's university system is also undergoing major changes, including increased enrolment, technological shifts, and growing pressure to produce employable graduates. Within this environment, declining student engagement, social isolation, and reduced participation in campus life have become important concerns, especially in professionally oriented programmes. For Human Kinetics students, poor social engagement may limit the development of interpersonal, leadership, and teamwork skills that are essential for careers in education, sport, health, and recreation. Understanding how curriculum design shapes social engagement is therefore critical for improving programme quality and strengthening student outcomes (Rafferty *et al.*, 2016; Rose & Soundy, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this study examines the relationship between curriculum design and student social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities. By providing empirical evidence on how curriculum structure, learning activities, and instructional practices influence

students' social experiences, the study aims to support curriculum reforms that foster more interactive, engaging, and socially supportive learning environments within Human Kinetics education (Ajayi & Akanji, 2022; Isa, 2022).

2. Methodology

This study used a descriptive, cross-sectional mixed-methods design to examine how curriculum design relates to students' social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities. A mixed-methods approach was chosen because it makes it possible to combine measurable evidence from students' responses with richer explanations from academic staff and programme coordinators. In doing so, the study provides a fuller picture of how curriculum structures are experienced by students and how institutional realities shape engagement across different university settings. The study was guided by relevant empirical and conceptual literature in Human Kinetics, curriculum studies, and student engagement to ensure that the design and procedures were consistent with established scholarship. The study population included undergraduate students studying Human Kinetics and academic staff involved in teaching and curriculum delivery in selected Nigerian universities. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used. First, universities were selected to reflect different ownership types and institutional contexts. Next, participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in curriculum implementation or their lived experience as students within the programme. This ensured that the study captured variation across institutions while still focusing on participants who could speak meaningfully to curriculum design and engagement processes.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire captured students' perceptions of curriculum features such as course organisation, practical orientation, assessment practices, and opportunities for collaborative learning. It also measured social engagement indicators including peer interaction, teamwork, participation in practical sessions, and involvement in co-curricular activities. The interview guide was used to gather deeper insights from lecturers and programme coordinators on curriculum intentions, day-to-day implementation challenges, and institutional conditions that influence how students engage socially and academically. To strengthen quality, the instruments were reviewed by experts for clarity and relevance, and pilot-tested to improve wording and flow. Questionnaire reliability was checked using internal consistency measures.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns and test relationships between curriculum design variables and student social engagement. Qualitative interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically to identify recurring ideas, contextual influences, and explanations that helped interpret the statistical results. Findings were integrated through triangulation, improving the credibility and depth of the conclusions.

Ethical standards were maintained throughout. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and data were used strictly for academic purposes.

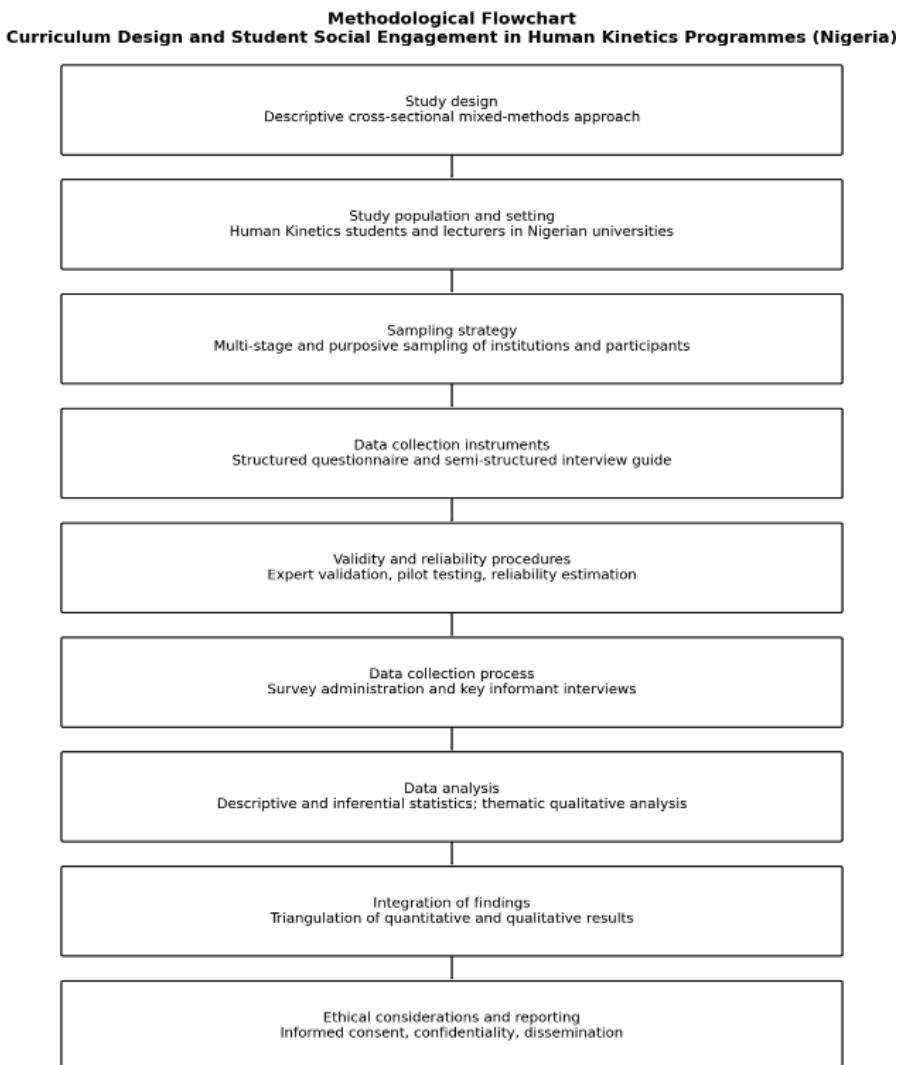


Fig 1: Flowchart of the study methodology

3. Conceptual Framework and Related Literature

The conceptual framework linking curriculum design to student social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes draws from learning theories that treat education as social, practical, and meaning-making in real contexts. Human Kinetics is naturally hands-on and interaction-driven: students learn not only by reading or listening, but by moving, practising skills, observing performance, giving feedback, and working with others. Because of this, the way a curriculum is structured and the teaching and assessment strategies it promotes can either create rich opportunities for collaboration and belonging or, conversely, produce learning environments where students feel isolated and disengaged (Adeleke & Baidoo, 2022; Isa, 2022; Oyeyemi, 2022). To understand these pathways, it is helpful to rely on theories that explain learning as something that happens through participation, shared experiences, and guided interaction, supported by evidence showing that curriculum choices can shape students' relationships, involvement, and commitment to their programmes (Amholt *et al.*, 2020; Cilar *et al.*, 2020). Social constructivist theory offers a strong lens for explaining why curriculum design matters for engagement. From this viewpoint, learning is not simply an individual mental process; it is built through interaction, dialogue, and shared activity. Students develop understanding as they collaborate, compare ideas, negotiate meaning, and reflect together. In

Human Kinetics, where practical application is central, social constructivism draws attention to peer-to-peer learning, group-based tasks, and structured guidance from instructors. When curricula intentionally include cooperative practical sessions, peer assessment, small-group problem solving, and reflective discussions, students are more likely to participate actively and feel socially connected than when instruction is largely lecture-based and individualised (Safieh, 2019; Sommer & Mmari, 2015).

Experiential learning theory strengthens this explanation by emphasizing learning as a cycle of doing, reflecting, thinking, and trying again. This fits Human Kinetics closely because students often learn through direct physical experience, performance feedback, and continuous improvement. Practical laboratories, coaching simulations, field placements, and service-learning activities do more than improve skill mastery; they also create shared experiences that naturally build communication, trust, and peer relationships. Over time, these shared learning moments can foster a stronger sense of identity and belonging within the programme, supporting social engagement alongside academic development (Walker-Stevenson, 2017; Xu *et al.*, 2020).

Collaborative learning theory further clarifies how curricula can strengthen engagement when they are designed around purposeful student interaction. Collaborative learning

involves structured teamwork where students share responsibilities, solve problems together, and work toward common goals. In higher education, this approach is associated with stronger participation, peer support, and social integration, especially in applied and professional disciplines (Chung, Kim, & Lee, 2018; Keogh *et al.*, 2018). In Human Kinetics, collaboration is often expressed through

team sports, group coaching tasks, joint research projects, and peer-led practice sessions. Importantly, evidence suggests that when collaboration is deliberately built into curriculum requirements rather than left to chance students tend to report stronger social ties, deeper involvement, and greater satisfaction with their learning experience.

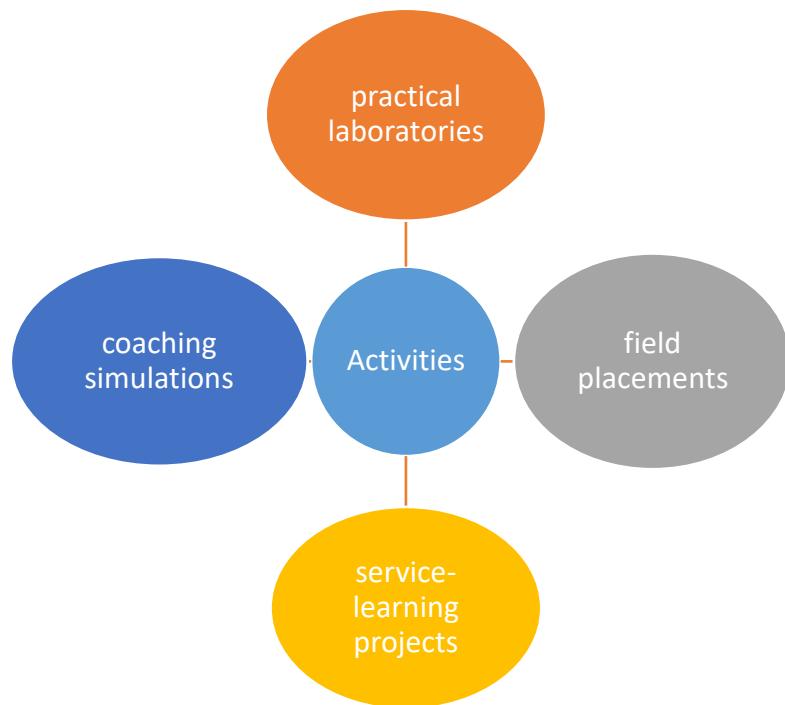


Fig 2: Learning activities that enhance both academic understanding and social interaction.

Student engagement theory adds another useful lens for understanding why curriculum design matters. Engagement is often described as multi-dimensional, covering what students do (behavioural engagement), how they feel and connect (emotional engagement), and how they participate with others (social engagement). Social engagement, in particular, speaks to students' involvement in peer networks, group learning, and co-curricular activities that help them feel that they belong and are valued members of the university community. Across higher education research, stronger social engagement is consistently associated with better academic outcomes, higher retention, and healthier personal development (Pradhan, Wynter, & Fisher, 2015; Yakubu & Salisu, 2018). In Human Kinetics programmes, curriculum design can either strengthen or weaken this form of engagement because it determines how often students work together, practise together, and learn through shared experiences.

Evidence from sport science, physical education, and related fields supports these links. Studies across different university settings show that curricula with well-structured practical sessions, laboratory activities, and field-based learning tend to generate more peer interaction than programmes that are largely theory-focused. Students in practice-rich programmes often report stronger social relationships, more opportunities for teamwork, and improved communication skills because learning regularly happens through shared tasks,

demonstrations, and feedback. In contrast, curricula that concentrate heavily on content delivery and examination performance may unintentionally limit meaningful interaction, leaving students less connected to peers and less involved in the learning process. This is especially significant in Human Kinetics, where the discipline's identity is built around applied learning and social participation; when theory dominates, the programme can lose the practical and relational elements that make learning engaging (Fantaye *et al.*, 2020; Ivanova *et al.*, 2020).

Studies focused on African and Nigerian higher education contexts add important realities that can shape how curriculum designs play out in practice. Many Nigerian universities have experienced rapid growth in student enrolment without equivalent expansion in staffing or learning infrastructure. As a result, class sizes are often large, and lecture-based delivery becomes the default approach even in programmes that require practical engagement. Research suggests that these pressures reduce opportunities for interaction, feedback, and collaborative learning, which in turn weakens student engagement. In Human Kinetics programmes, limited facilities, equipment shortages, and restricted access to sports and laboratory spaces can further reduce hands-on and group-based learning activities, making it harder for students to build the social connections that support both learning and professional development.



Fig 3: Students enrolled in programmes with integrated practical components report.

Even with the challenges facing many Nigerian universities, there is growing evidence that purposeful curriculum design can still produce strong engagement outcomes. Where Human Kinetics programmes intentionally build in experiential and collaborative components such as practical laboratories, group coaching sessions, intramural sports, and community-based physical activity projects students tend to participate more actively and interact more meaningfully with peers. Service-learning is especially promising. When students work with schools, sports clubs, or community health programmes, they not only gain practical competence, but also develop social responsibility, teamwork skills, and a clearer professional identity. Just as importantly, these shared experiences strengthen peer relationships and create a stronger sense of community among students. These findings support the view that curriculum design remains a powerful lever for improving social engagement, even in resource-limited settings (Forrester *et al.*, 2018; Lall *et al.*, 2019).

Teaching approaches also shape how curriculum structures translate into engagement. Studies consistently show that learner-centred strategies such as problem-based learning, peer teaching, cooperative practice, and reflective activities create more interaction than teacher-centred methods. In Human Kinetics, pedagogies that require students to analyse movement, practise skills together, offer peer feedback, and participate in co-designed learning tasks promote both deeper understanding and stronger social connection. In contrast, command-style instruction, rigid classroom control, and assessment approaches that do not allow discussion or teamwork can reduce students' participation, positioning them as passive recipients rather than active contributors to a learning community (Mugendawala & Muijs, 2020; Salifu *et al.*, 2019).

Assessment practices are another critical part of the picture. When assessment includes group projects, practical demonstrations, and collaborative problem-solving tasks, students have clear reasons to interact, support each other, and learn together. However, assessment systems dominated by individual written examinations can unintentionally discourage collaboration and foster competition rather than cooperation. The literature suggests that when assessment is aligned with experiential and collaborative curriculum goals, students' engagement tends to be stronger because the learning environment becomes more coherent and socially supportive.

Taken together, both theory and evidence point to a clear conclusion: curriculum design, pedagogy, and social engagement are tightly connected in Human Kinetics programmes. Social constructivism, experiential learning, collaborative learning, and student engagement theory all emphasize that learning becomes more meaningful when it is socially grounded and actively experienced. Empirical findings, including those from Nigerian universities, show that curricula rich in practical, collaborative, and community-oriented activities are more likely to generate stronger social engagement, even within difficult institutional conditions

(Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Kiberu, Mars, & Scott, 2017).

Synthesizing these insights supports a framework in which curriculum design influences student social engagement through the deliberate inclusion of experiential learning opportunities, structured collaboration, and learner-centred teaching and assessment. In practical terms, this framework highlights the importance of aligning curriculum goals, teaching methods, and assessment practices so that students encounter consistent opportunities to interact, practise, reflect, and learn together. It also informs the present study by framing social engagement as an outcome shaped not only by individual motivation, but by the curricular and pedagogical environment within which Human Kinetics students learn in Nigerian universities.

4. Context of Human Kinetics Programmes in Nigerian Universities

Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities operate within a unique mix of educational traditions, institutional realities, and socio-cultural expectations that shape what these programmes set out to achieve and how they are delivered. As a discipline, Human Kinetics in Nigeria is closely connected to physical education, sport science, health promotion, and recreation. This positioning reflects national interests in youth development, physical fitness, sport growth, and the professional preparation of graduates for schools, sports organisations, fitness and wellness services, and community health initiatives. In practical terms, most programmes are designed to produce graduates who have a solid grounding in theory, strong practical competence, and the professional skills needed for teaching, coaching, fitness instruction, sport administration, and health promotion work. Because of this dual identity academic and applied Human Kinetics curricula are expected to balance scientific foundations with hands-on learning and socially interactive experiences that build teamwork and communication alongside technical expertise (Akuma, 2017; Nketsia, Saloviita, & Gyimah, 2016).

Across Nigerian universities, programme objectives typically focus on developing physical competence, effective pedagogy, and a broad understanding of human movement that draws on biological, psychological, and socio-cultural perspectives. At the undergraduate level, the emphasis is often on preparing students for professional practice especially teaching and related roles by combining coursework in movement science with practical training and field experiences. At the postgraduate level, objectives tend to shift towards research capability, advanced professional practice, and deeper specialization in areas such as sport psychology, exercise physiology, biomechanics, and sport management. Even with these shared directions, the way objectives are expressed and prioritised can differ across institutions (Burgers, 2017; Harerimana & Mtshali, 2018).

In some universities, Human Kinetics is clearly presented as a multidisciplinary field that integrates education, health, and sport science, encouraging a wider view of career pathways

and learning outcomes. In others, the programme remains closer to a traditional physical education model, where teacher preparation is the dominant focus and broader human movement studies receive less emphasis. These differences matter because they shape curriculum structure what courses are included, how they are sequenced, how much practical work is embedded, and the kinds of learning activities students are exposed to. Ultimately, variations in programme objectives influence how learning experiences are designed and the extent to which students encounter opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and social engagement during their training.

Curriculum standards for Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities are shaped largely by national regulation, especially the National Universities Commission (NUC) guidelines. The Benchmark Minimum Academic

Standards (BMAS) serve as a national reference point for what should be taught, how courses should be sequenced, the credit load expected, and the learning outcomes students should achieve. The idea is to promote consistency and maintain quality across universities, while still leaving room for departments to reflect local realities and institutional strengths. In most cases, the BMAS-driven curriculum covers key foundations such as anatomy and physiology, biomechanics, exercise physiology, sport psychology, measurement and evaluation, teaching methods, coaching, and practical sport participation. On paper, this structure supports a healthy balance between theory and practice, but what students experience in reality often depends on how well each institution can implement these standards and the teaching choices lecturers make in day-to-day delivery (Gallicchio, Cooke, & Ring, 2017; Jing, 2016).

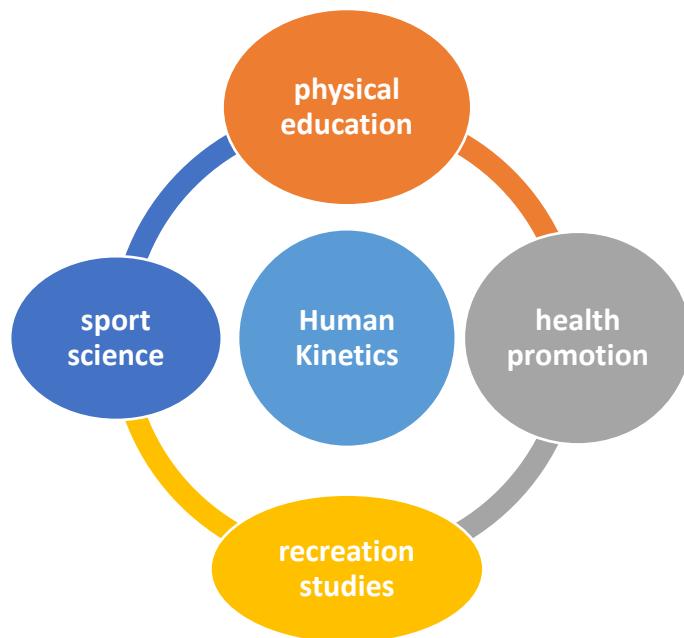


Fig 4: Courses aligned with Human Kinetics in Nigeria

Even where universities follow the same national template, the learning experience can look very different from one institution to another. Federal, state, and private universities vary widely in funding, facilities, staffing levels, and administrative support. Better resourced federal and many private universities are more likely to provide functional sports facilities, laboratory spaces, adequate equipment, and manageable class sizes that support practical teaching and interactive learning. In contrast, many state universities operate under persistent funding constraints, rising enrolments, and limited infrastructure, which can make it difficult to run practical sessions effectively or sustain collaborative activities. In these environments, students may receive the same course titles and credits on paper, but far fewer opportunities for hands-on learning, teamwork, and meaningful social participation (Alexander, 2018; Husband, 2018).

Faculty capacity is another major factor that shapes curriculum implementation. Some departments have lecturers with strong training in sport science, pedagogy, and human movement studies, including international exposure and active professional networks that encourage modern teaching approaches. In other settings, staffing shortages, heavy workloads, and limited professional development

opportunities reduce innovation and make teaching more dependent on lectures and routine assessments. As a result, two students studying under the same BMAS framework can still encounter very different classroom cultures one interactive and practice-rich, another largely theory-driven and exam-focused simply because of differences in staff capacity and teaching orientation (Baker, 2019; Predoiu *et al.*, 2020).

The wider organisation of teaching and learning in Nigerian universities also influences Human Kinetics education. Large lecture halls, rigid timetables, and centralised assessment systems often encourage content coverage and end-of-semester examinations. While these structures may be efficient for large student populations, they can unintentionally reduce interaction, feedback, and the small-group learning that supports both competence and belonging. This is particularly important for Human Kinetics, where learning is supposed to include practical demonstrations, teamwork, peer coaching, and shared physical experiences. Many programmes still run practical classes, field activities, and sports sessions, but the quality and frequency of these experiences can be uneven across courses and institutions, depending on time allocation, space, equipment, and staff commitment (Hernández-Mendo *et al.*, 2020; Maher, 2020).

Beyond institutional factors, socio-cultural expectations also shape how students engage with Human Kinetics as a field. In some communities, sport and physical activity are valued mainly for entertainment or recreation, rather than as serious academic and professional pathways. This can influence how families, peers, and even students themselves view Human Kinetics, sometimes treating it as less prestigious than other programmes. Where students enter the programme as a second choice, motivation and confidence can be affected, which may reduce active participation in practical learning and campus sport culture (Brinthaupt & Pennington, 2019; Vezzosi, 2017).

Gender norms also affect student experience and social engagement. Although female enrolment has increased, cultural expectations about femininity and physical activity can still shape how comfortable women feel in practical classes, team sports, and physically demanding activities. Male students may dominate certain sports spaces and leadership roles, while female students may face subtle discouragement, limited peer support, or fewer chances to participate fully. In this context, curriculum delivery matters: teaching strategies and assessment designs that actively promote inclusion, shared leadership, and respectful participation can help reduce gendered barriers and support healthier peer interaction (Fasina, 2019; Mekonnen, Animaw, & Seyum, 2018).

Language and communication patterns add another layer. English is the official language of instruction, but many students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In practical sessions and group work, students often switch into local languages to build rapport and coordinate tasks, which can strengthen peer bonding. However, it can also unintentionally exclude students who are less fluent in those local languages, especially in mixed-ethnicity classes. This makes inclusive communication practices important, particularly in teamwork-driven learning where social integration is part of the educational goal.

Finally, the socio-economic conditions surrounding Nigerian higher education shape how much time and energy students can devote to social and co-curricular engagement. Financial pressures, limited accommodation, long commuting distances, and competing responsibilities can reduce participation in sports clubs, group training, or campus-based activities that typically strengthen peer networks. Still, many students create informal support systems through peer-led training groups, recreational games, and student-run sport activities, which often serve as alternative spaces for belonging and identity formation within Human Kinetics programmes (Abayomi *et al.*, 2020; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2019).

Taken together, Human Kinetics education in Nigerian universities reflects a shared national curriculum structure, but its quality and social outcomes are shaped by real differences in institutional resources, staffing capacity, pedagogical choices, and socio-cultural expectations. Understanding this context is essential for interpreting evidence on curriculum design and student social engagement and for identifying realistic ways to strengthen programmes through more inclusive, interactive, and context-responsive curriculum implementation.

5. Curriculum Design Features in Human Kinetics Programmes

Curriculum design is central to how Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities shape students' learning

experiences, professional preparation, and social engagement. As a discipline built around movement, practice, and interaction, Human Kinetics requires curricula that do more than transmit knowledge; they must deliberately connect scientific understanding with hands-on activity and opportunities for collaboration. How courses are structured, delivered, and assessed influences not only what students learn, but also how they interact with peers, relate to lecturers, and develop a sense of belonging within their academic community (Adedoyin, 2017; Pathak *et al.*, 2017).

Most Human Kinetics programmes in Nigeria follow a modular structure guided by national benchmarks, with courses arranged progressively across four years. Early courses usually introduce foundational sciences and core concepts, while later stages focus on specialized areas such as biomechanics, exercise physiology, sport psychology, coaching, and measurement and evaluation. In theory, this progression supports intellectual growth and professional competence (Munthali *et al.*, 2018; Okolosi, 2020). In practice, however, courses are sometimes treated as isolated units, with limited connection between theory and application. When this happens, students may struggle to link ideas across courses, reducing opportunities for shared problem-solving and collaborative learning that naturally encourage social engagement.

Practical orientation is one of the most defining features of Human Kinetics curricula. Practical classes, laboratories, coaching sessions, and sports activities provide natural spaces for teamwork, peer learning, and experiential engagement. While most Nigerian programmes include these components, their quality and frequency vary widely. Large class sizes, limited facilities, and restricted instructional time often mean that practical sessions are overcrowded, irregular, or replaced with theoretical teaching (Jimoh, 2016; Suleiman *et al.*, 2018). When practical exposure is reduced, students lose valuable opportunities to learn together through shared physical activity, weakening both skill development and social connection.

Assessment practices further shape engagement patterns. Many programmes still rely heavily on written examinations, reflecting long-standing traditions in Nigerian higher education. While exams are useful for assessing theoretical understanding, overdependence on them can sideline collaboration and practical competence. Research shows that when assessment is largely individual and exam-based, students are less likely to work together or engage socially (Chukwurah, Nwadiani, & Ngwoke, 2018; Momoh, 2017). In contrast, assessments that include group projects, practical demonstrations, peer assessment, and reflective portfolios encourage interaction, shared responsibility, and dialogue. In Human Kinetics, such assessment approaches align more closely with the applied nature of the discipline and strengthen social engagement alongside learning.

Alignment with professional and societal needs is another key curriculum feature. Human Kinetics graduates are expected to work in teaching, coaching, fitness, sport administration, and community health. Teaching practice, internships, and industrial training are meant to bridge theory and practice, helping students develop professional identity and social skills. In Nigeria, teaching practice is well established, especially in education-focused programmes, and often promotes collaboration among student teachers, mentors, and peers (Adebayo, 2018; Deemua & Nwankwo, 2018). However, where these experiences are poorly

supervised or treated as routine requirements, their potential to enhance engagement is reduced.

Curricula that respond to broader societal challenges such as low physical activity levels, youth unemployment, and public health concerns also tend to foster stronger engagement. Community-based projects, service-learning, and outreach activities connect students to real-world contexts and encourage teamwork and civic responsibility. Although some Nigerian programmes have introduced such initiatives, they are often uneven and dependent on individual lecturers rather than being fully embedded in curriculum design (Abdulraheem & Ibraheem, 2019; Okebukola, 2017).

National regulation through the NUC's Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards provides consistency but can also limit flexibility if applied rigidly. Universities with more resources and autonomy can adapt curricula, introduce interdisciplinary content, and diversify assessment, while others adhere strictly to minimum requirements due to capacity constraints (Abubakar, 2020; Ekuri & Akameze, 2016). Scheduling and sequencing decisions also matter: poorly coordinated timetables can fragment learning and reduce sustained interaction, whereas integrated or block scheduling of practical courses can strengthen peer relationships and group cohesion (Abayomi *et al.*, 2020; Esan & Adewunmi, 2018).

Ultimately, curriculum design in Human Kinetics programmes reflects an ongoing tension between aspiration and constraint. Course structure, practical orientation, assessment methods, and alignment with professional and societal needs all influence whether programmes create interactive, collaborative, and socially engaging learning environments. While national standards offer a foundation, meaningful engagement depends on how curricula are enacted within specific institutional contexts. By intentionally integrating theory and practice, diversifying assessment, and recognizing social engagement as a core educational outcome, Nigerian universities can enhance the quality, relevance, and impact of Human Kinetics education for both students and society.

6. Patterns of Student Social Engagement

Student social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities is shaped by the hands-on nature of the discipline, the structures of the institutions in which it is taught, and wider socio-cultural influences within higher education. In this context, social engagement refers to how students interact with peers and lecturers, work together in practical and laboratory settings, participate in teams, and involve themselves in co-curricular and extracurricular activities related to Human Kinetics. Looking closely at these patterns helps explain how curriculum design is experienced in everyday student life and how engagement supports or sometimes limits learning, professional identity development, and overall growth (Addimando, 2019; Yada & Savolainen, 2017).

Peer interaction is at the heart of social engagement in Human Kinetics. Because learning often involves movement, performance, and applied tasks, students regularly interact during practical classes, sports sessions, and demonstrations. In many Nigerian universities, practical lessons in sports skills, coaching, fitness training, and teaching methods are the main spaces where students communicate, observe each other, exchange feedback, and learn together. These shared experiences help students build peer networks and develop a

sense of belonging within their programme (Muwonge, Zavuga, & Kabenge, 2015; Wilhelmsen & Sørensen, 2017). However, the depth of interaction depends on factors such as class size, timetabling, and access to facilities. In overcrowded classes, only a small number of students may actively participate, while others remain on the margins.

Teamwork is another defining feature of engagement in Human Kinetics education. Many learning activities require students to work in groups to perform drills, plan lessons, assess fitness, or organise sporting events. These team-based tasks help students develop cooperation, communication, and shared responsibility skills that are essential in teaching, coaching, and sport management. While teamwork often develops naturally in practical settings, it is stronger and more inclusive when it is clearly structured, with defined roles and shared goals. Without such guidance, participation can become uneven, with confident or dominant students taking the lead while others contribute less.

Practical sessions tend to generate the highest levels of participation and enthusiasm. Students generally see these classes as more relevant and enjoyable than lectures because they involve active, embodied learning. When facilities, equipment, and time are adequate, practical sessions become lively spaces for collaboration and peer learning. When resources are limited, however, participation may be restricted to demonstrations by a few students, reducing wider engagement.

Beyond formal classes, peer collaboration continues through study groups, informal practice sessions, and shared preparation for assessments. Co-curricular involvement such as sports teams, fitness clubs, and departmental associations also plays a major role in strengthening social ties, especially where formal curriculum opportunities are limited. Gender dynamics, teaching styles, and departmental culture further shape who participates, how students interact, and how inclusive engagement feels.

Overall, social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes reflects both the strengths of an applied discipline and the constraints of the Nigerian university context. While the field offers rich opportunities for interaction and collaboration, these are not always evenly realised. Intentional curriculum design, inclusive pedagogy, and supportive institutional cultures are therefore essential for turning the interactive potential of Human Kinetics into meaningful, shared learning experiences that support academic success and professional development.

7. Relationship Between Curriculum Design and Student Social Engagement

The relationship between curriculum design and student social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities is complex and shaped by multiple interacting factors. Empirical evidence from Nigerian higher education shows that curriculum design is not a neutral framework but an active force that influences how students interact, collaborate, and develop a sense of belonging within their programmes. Variations in course structure, practical orientation, assessment strategies, and alignment with professional practice consistently shape engagement patterns and mediate learning quality and student outcomes (Akpan, Awe, & Idowu, 2019; Ogundipe *et al.*, 2019).

Findings indicate that programmes with well-integrated curricula where theoretical content is clearly linked to practical and applied components tend to record higher levels

of peer interaction and collaboration. Students in such programmes report stronger engagement during practical sessions, greater willingness to work in teams, and more frequent informal academic interactions beyond the classroom. In contrast, fragmented curricula with weak theory-practice integration are associated with lower engagement, as learning becomes individualised and examination-driven. This pattern is particularly evident in lecture-dominated courses where opportunities for dialogue and shared problem-solving are limited (Awe & Akpan, 2017; Isa, 2019).

Practical orientation emerges as one of the strongest predictors of social engagement. Courses that include regular, well-structured practical sessions foster higher participation, teamwork, and peer support. In Human Kinetics programmes, practical classes in coaching, sports skills, fitness training, and teaching methods create natural spaces for interaction, communication, and feedback. Students consistently report that these experiences strengthen peer relationships and reinforce their identification with the programme. Conversely, when practical components are reduced due to large class sizes, limited facilities, or scheduling constraints, engagement declines and learning becomes more passive (Ajayi & Akanji, 2021; Ejibenam *et al.*, 2021; Osabuohien, Omotara, & Watt, 2021).

Assessment practices further shape engagement patterns. Evidence shows that assessment strategies emphasising group projects, practical demonstrations, and collaborative tasks are positively associated with stronger social engagement. Students assessed through team-based activities report greater interaction, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability skills critical for professional practice (Akanji & Ajayi, 2022; Francis Onotole *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, heavy reliance on individual written examinations tends to reinforce competitive and isolated learning behaviours, limiting collaboration and reducing motivation for peer engagement.

Institutional conditions significantly moderate the curriculum-engagement relationship. Disparities across federal, state, and private universities reflect differences in funding, infrastructure, staffing, and governance. Well-resourced institutions are more likely to implement curricula with strong practical components, smaller class sizes, and diverse assessment strategies, creating favourable conditions for engagement (Awe, 2021; Halliday, 2021; Isa, 2021; Jimoh & Owolabi, 2021). Under-resourced universities, however, face constraints that weaken curriculum enactment despite formal emphasis on experiential learning.

Faculty pedagogical orientation also plays a critical role. Lecturers who adopt learner-centred, facilitative approaches are more successful in translating curriculum design into engaging learning experiences. Those relying on directive or authoritarian methods tend to limit interaction, regardless of curriculum intentions, highlighting the importance of pedagogical enactment alongside design (Adeshina, 2021; Isa, Johnbull, & Ovenseri, 2021; Wegner, Omine, & Vincent, 2021).

Student perspectives emphasise the value of interaction, real-world application, and shared practical experiences, while lecturers and administrators point to institutional constraints and regulatory pressures (Ajayi & Akanji, 2022; John & Oyeyemi, 2022; Osabuohien, 2022). Overall, the evidence shows that effective social engagement emerges from alignment between curriculum design, teaching practice, and

institutional context, rather than curriculum content alone (Ajayi & Akanji, 2022; Isa, 2022).

8. Conclusion and Implications for Policy and Practice

This study examined how curriculum design relates to students' social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes in Nigerian universities, offering empirical insight into how curricular structures, teaching practices, and institutional conditions shape students' social experiences and learning outcomes. Overall, the findings show that curriculum design is a strong driver of social engagement especially through practical orientation, opportunities for teamwork, assessment approaches, and the extent to which learning activities connect with professional and societal realities. Where programmes deliberately link theory to practice, promote experiential and collaborative learning, and create structured spaces for interaction, students report stronger peer collaboration, higher participation in practical sessions, and greater involvement in co-curricular activities. In contrast, fragmented, theory-heavy, and examination-driven curricula often reduce meaningful interaction and weaken students' sense of belonging within their academic communities.

The study also has limitations that should be noted. Data were drawn from selected universities and may not fully represent the full diversity of Nigerian higher education contexts. Differences in region, institutional mission, and resource levels could affect how widely these findings apply. In addition, because social engagement was measured partly through self-reports, responses may reflect personal expectations or experiences and may introduce some bias. Finally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to make strong causal claims or track how engagement changes over time. Future studies using longitudinal approaches, wider institutional coverage, and mixed-method designs could provide deeper and more generalizable evidence on how curriculum and engagement evolve across students' academic journeys.

Despite these constraints, the findings point clearly to areas for curriculum improvement in Human Kinetics programmes. Social engagement should be treated as a core learning outcome not something left to chance. This requires strengthening practical components so that laboratories, sports activities, and field experiences are well-resourced and intentionally connected to theoretical coursework. Assessment should also be broadened to include group projects, practical demonstrations, peer assessment, and reflective tasks that reward collaboration and shared learning. Programmes will likely become more engaging when curriculum content is aligned with professional and societal needs through internships, community-based learning, and service-learning opportunities that connect students to real-world practice and collective responsibility.

For educators, the study highlights the importance of teaching practices that actively stimulate engagement. Lecturers should be supported to use learner-centred and facilitative approaches that promote dialogue, teamwork, and peer feedback. Regular professional development in experiential and collaborative learning strategies is especially important in settings with large class sizes and limited resources. Educators also remain central to building inclusive learning environments where participation is equitable across gender and ability groups, strengthening cohesion and reducing exclusion during practical and group-based activities.

Administrators play a key enabling role in making

engagement-oriented curriculum reform realistic. Institutional leadership should prioritise investment in facilities, equipment, and adequate staffing to support practical and interactive learning. Attention to timetabling and class-size management is also essential so that practical sessions function as meaningful spaces for participation rather than symbolic requirements. Stronger coordination between departments, student associations, and external partners can also help integrate co-curricular activities with formal learning, expanding engagement opportunities beyond the classroom.

For policymakers, the findings suggest the need to shift from compliance-focused curriculum standards to frameworks that prioritise quality, relevance, and student engagement. Regulatory bodies can maintain quality assurance while giving institutions more flexibility to innovate in curriculum design. Social engagement should be recognised as a marker of educational quality and graduate employability, particularly for applied disciplines such as Human Kinetics. Collaboration among education authorities, universities, and professional bodies can further support curricula that respond to national priorities in health promotion, education, youth development, and sport.

In sum, strengthening student social engagement in Human Kinetics programmes requires coordinated action across curriculum design, pedagogy, institutional support, and policy direction. When engagement is embedded intentionally into curriculum reform and when educators and institutions are equipped to deliver experiential and interactive learning Nigerian universities can improve both the quality and relevance of Human Kinetics education. Beyond enhancing students' academic and social experiences, such reforms can help produce graduates with stronger collaborative skills, leadership capacity, and readiness to contribute meaningfully to society.

9. References

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