

Between policy mandate and institutional autonomy: A collaborative reflective analysis of CCMAS implementation in a Nigerian public university

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

The introduction of the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) marks a major policy shift in the governance of undergraduate education in Nigeria, which redefines the balance between regulatory control by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and institutional curriculum autonomy offered by relevant enabling laws. While implementation commenced across many universities in 2023, variations in institutional timelines reveal the complex realities of policy enactment within higher education systems. This paper presents a collaborative reflective analysis of the early-stage implementation of CCMAS in a Nigerian public university—the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, that began formal rollout in October 2025—almost two years after the latest timeline for kick-off. The paper critically examines how policy mandates are translated, mediated, and adapted within Obafemi Awolowo University's institutional contexts. Specifically, the study intended to determine immediate and remote factors that are responsible for and or shape Obafemi Awolowo University's delayed implementation of the CCMAS two years after its commencement across Universities. It also sought to situate the delayed implementation within the perceived friction between the policy mandate of NUC as a regulatory agency for universities and the debated institutional autonomy of universities to determine their own programmes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This present study is conceptually anchored in policy enactment theory and the micropolitics of educational reform. Policy enactment theory explains that policies are translated and interpreted by different policy makers or actors in different contexts (Lawrent, 2021). Hay (2025) proposed a new conceptual framework for policy enactment that used the sensemaking theory and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to demonstrate the multiple layers of policy enactment. Micropolitics of educational reform highlights that informal power dynamics and negotiations among stakeholders in a school system dictate the success or otherwise of formal policy mandates. When combined these two frameworks explicates that given that policies are understood differently by various stakeholders, the informal relational dynamics among these stakeholders could account for higher variability in the successful implementation of policies.

METHOD

This research which is qualitative in nature employs collaborative reflection (Jiang & Zheng, 2021). The process as adapted involved three intentionally scheduled meetings with the object of reflecting on the process of implementing the CCMAS in OAU. The first meeting involved reflections and reflective note-taking of factors that influenced delayed implementation of the CCMAS in OAU. The second meeting involved further reflections and the mapping of emanating factors to key stakeholders. The third and final meeting entailed thematic framing of the emanating factors vis-a-vis policy enactment theory and the micropolitics of educational reform. The collaborative reflection is between two academics who are in their early career stages having completed their doctoral trainings in 2019 (AOK) and 2023 (OOS) respectively. Both collaborators are in the teacher and curriculum studies field though with different background fields. AOK is in the science education field with bias in Biology education while OOS is in the Humanities/Business Education field with bias in Accounting and Entrepreneurship Education. Hence, the authors' positionality include being contextual developers who align the initial curricula released by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to their institution's (Obafemi Awolowo University) peculiarities as well as implementers of developed curricula for teacher education and curriculum studies. The validity of the reflections were checked against existing literature on curriculum development and implementation in higher education.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The reflective analysis revealed that implementation of CCMAS in OAU is a negotiated process shaped by institutional culture, governance structures, and professional identities. The analysis surfaces key thematic concerns, including tensions between compliance and autonomy, institutional readiness, procedural and bureaucratic layering, stakeholder sense-making, and emergent pedagogical and administrative challenges. Delayed implementation was thus positioned not as inertia but as an instance of institutional interpretation and strategic adaptation. The diagrammatic representation of the authors' reflections is as presented in Figure 1. The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature such as Gerwel et al (2025), Machitidze & Bakhtadze (2023) and Pritchard, et al (2021).

WHY CCMAS IMPLEMENTATION IS DELAYED IN OAU: A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

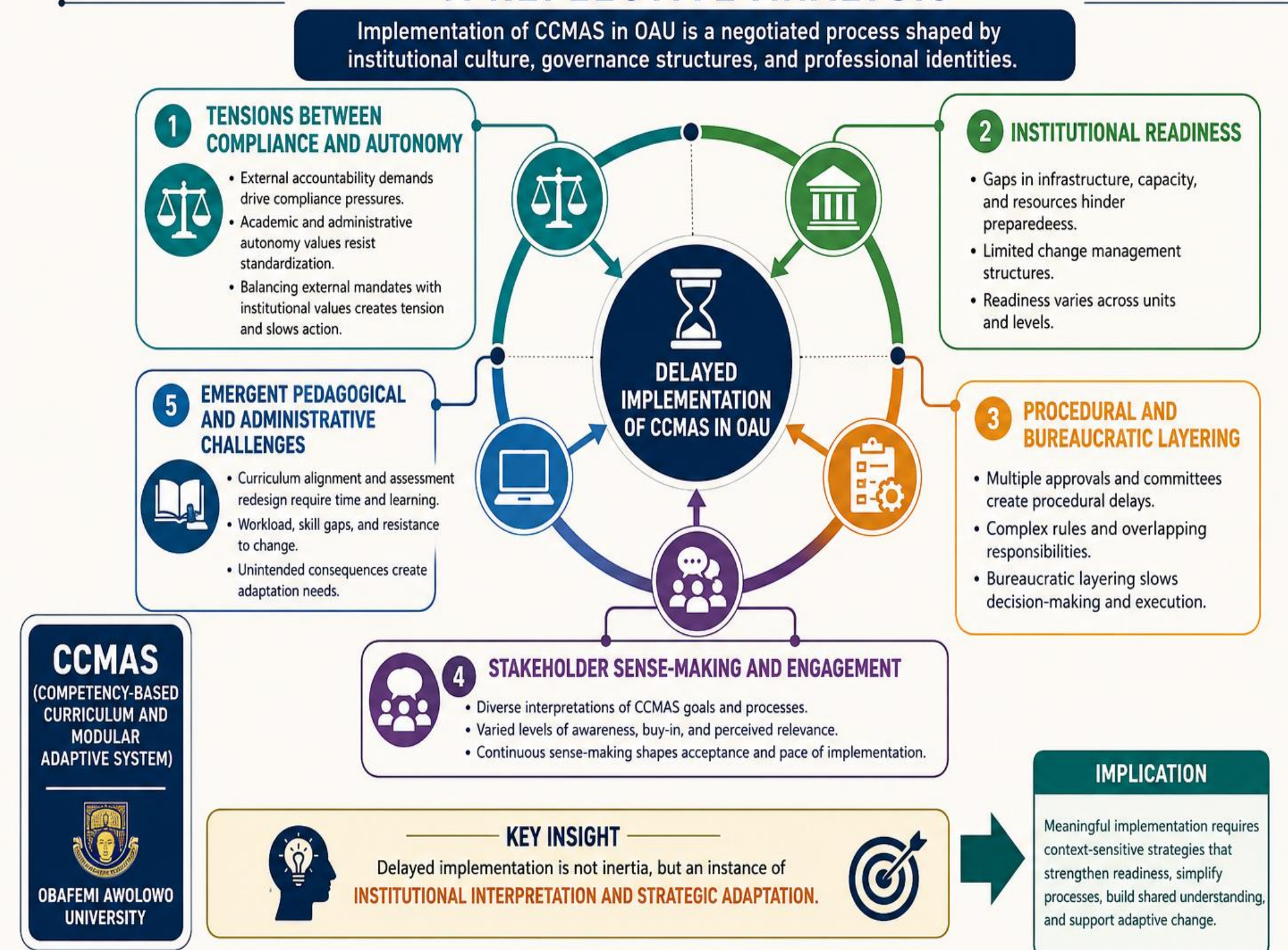


Figure 1: Reflective analysis of factors responsible for delayed implementation of Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) at Obafemi Awolowo University as rendered by ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com/c/6a2c4413-c370-83ea-a4ce-229d85d220e1>)

CONCLUSION

The research contributes to theoretical conversations on policy translation, organisational change, and curriculum governance in higher education. It further illuminates how reform is enacted through situated practices and negotiated meanings, offering insider-informed insights into the dynamics of large-scale curriculum transformation in resource-constrained and tradition-oriented university settings. Also, the findings further establishes Oyetoro & Kareem's (2022) assertion that there is need for a sense of commitment towards formulated policies by stakeholders.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

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