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LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 IN NIGERIA'S FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, 2015–2023

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ABSTRACT
Access to quality education in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT) remains uneven, marked by chronic infrastructure deficits and learning disparities, raising concerns about the effectiveness of legislative oversight in driving public policy implementation toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). This study examined legislative oversight and the achievement of SDG 4 in the FCT between 2015 and 2023, anchored on Principal–Agent Theory to evaluate the delegation lines, information asymmetry, and accountability gaps between the legislative principal and executive executing agencies. Adopting a quantitative survey research design, primary data were collected via 369 valid questionnaires retrieved from 381 distributed to multi-sector stakeholders' lawmakers, legislative aides, FCTA administrators, school principals, and teachers and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that the National Assembly shaped a positive policy environment through lawmaking (81.8% agreement) and grassroots representation (78.6% agreement), while its oversight function was rated only moderately effective (66.4% agreement), constrained by political interference, data opacity, weak enforcement of committee recommendations, and chronic funding shortfalls. The study concludes that despite the National Assembly's legislative efforts, the realisation of inclusive and quality education in the FCT remains restricted by systemic institutional and structural weaknesses within the delegation hierarchy, and recommends strengthening legislative oversight capacity through data-driven tracking tools, targeted budgetary allocations with strict line-item safeguards, and sustained political commitment to quality education for all learners in the FCT.

Keywords: legislative oversight, lawmaking, achievement, SDG 4, FCT Abuja

Introduction

The United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a comprehensive global framework addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges confronting nations worldwide. Among the seventeen goals, SDG 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Education is widely acknowledged as a fundamental driver of sustainable development, contributing to human capital development, poverty reduction, social inclusion, economic productivity, democratic governance, and national transformation.

Nigeria's pursuit of sustainable development continues to be hindered by persistent socio-economic challenges despite the country's abundant natural and human resources, a paradox often described as “poverty amidst plenty” that has generated sustained concern regarding the effectiveness of governance institutions, policy implementation processes, and public sector accountability (United Nations, 2022; Saraki, 2019). In Nigeria, the National Assembly derives its authority from the 1999 Constitution (as amended), which empowers it to enact laws, approve annual budgets, and oversee the executive arm of government. Among these constitutional functions, legislative oversight is particularly significant because it promotes accountability, transparency, and efficiency in public administration, yet its effectiveness has frequently been questioned: scholars have argued that the National Assembly has often struggled to discharge its oversight responsibilities due to weak institutional capacity, political interference, corruption, inadequate technical expertise, and limited monitoring mechanisms (Agba, Chukwurah & Achimugu, 2014; Popoola, 2016; Ojo & Omotola, 2014).

This study is framed through Principal–Agent Theory, originally developed by Ross (1973) and further advanced by Jensen and Meckling (1976). Within Nigeria's constitutional framework, the National Assembly assumes the role of principal by authorising public expenditure and establishing legal and policy frameworks, while ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) function as agents responsible for implementing government programmes. Because these agents possess more information regarding implementation processes than the legislature, information asymmetry may create opportunities for inefficiency, weak compliance, resource mismanagement, or poor implementation; a divergence the theory terms agency loss. Legislative oversight is, in this framework, the necessary tool used to reduce information asymmetry, minimise agency loss, and enforce compliance with legislative intent.

The Federal Capital Territory occupies a constitutionally distinctive position in this inquiry. Unlike the thirty-six states, which are governed by elected governors and state legislatures, the FCT is administered by the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) under the authority of the President through the Minister of the FCT; consequently, the National Assembly itself exercises legislative authority over the Territory, including oversight of education policy implementation. Although previous studies have examined governance, policy implementation, and sustainable development in Nigeria, relatively few have empirically investigated how the National Assembly's legislative oversight functions influence SDG 4 implementation at the sub-national level, particularly within the FCT. It is this gap in knowledge that necessitated the present study, which examined the role of the National Assembly in promoting the implementation of SDG 4 in the FCT between 2015 and 2023, guided by four objectives: to examine the influence of legislative oversight on education policy implementation in the FCT; to analyse how governance and accountability structures shape SDG 4 achievement; to assess how education stakeholders responded to legislative policy directives and oversight mechanisms; and to identify the challenges affecting SDG 4 implementation in the Territory.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Legislative Oversight in Nigeria

Legislative oversight is a core pillar of democratic governance. Beyond law-making, it involves supervising, monitoring, and evaluating the executive branch to ensure public policies and expenditures match legislative intent (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014). In the Nigerian context, this power is firmly rooted in Sections 88 and 89 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). These provisions grant both houses of the National Assembly the legal authority to investigate government ministries, agencies, or individuals handling public funds. Furthermore, it empowers them to summon witnesses and compel the production of documents essential to their inquiries.

Scholars generally identify three core dimensions of legislative oversight. First, financial oversight is exercised through appropriation and audit reviews (Wehner, 2006). Second, administrative oversight focuses on the efficiency of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in implementing statutory mandates (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014). Finally, policy oversight evaluates whether enacted legislation successfully achieves its intended objectives over time (Ogul, 1976). Despite the constitutional breadth of these powers, Nigerian scholarship consistently finds that practical oversight remains severely constrained. For instance, Agba et al. (2014) observe that oversight activities are frequently limited by inadequate institutional resources, political interference, weak enforcement mechanisms, and poor follow-up on committee recommendations. Similarly, Ojo and Omotola (2014) argue that executive dominance and party politics continue to undermine the National Assembly's capacity to hold public institutions accountable.

Legislative Oversight and the Achievement of SDG 4

A growing body of empirical work links legislative oversight directly to SDG 4 outcomes. Internationally, Yamamoto's (2007) Inter-Parliamentary Union study of oversight practices across more than eighty national parliaments found that legislatures with strong committee systems, adequate research support, and institutional independence demonstrated greater capacity to monitor government performance than those constrained by weak institutional arrangements, though constitutional powers alone did not guarantee effectiveness. Stapenhurst, Pelizzo, Olson and von Trapp (2008) reached a comparable conclusion across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, finding that continuous oversight rather than occasional investigation produced greater improvements in policy implementation because implementing agencies became more responsive to sustained legislative scrutiny.

Within education governance specifically, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2017) found that countries achieving sustained improvements in access and quality generally exhibited stronger institutional accountability and more effective legislative supervision of education policy, while the World Bank (2018) similarly linked effective parliamentary scrutiny of education expenditure to better infrastructure, teacher deployment, and equitable resource distribution. Within Nigeria, UNESCO (2023) and the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) identify inadequate funding, weak infrastructure, teacher shortages, and weak institutional coordination as the major obstacles to SDG 4, while the Federal Government's Voluntary National Review (2020) acknowledges that although parliamentary committees have increasingly incorporated SDG considerations into budget scrutiny, institutional coordination among implementing agencies remains inadequate and monitoring and evaluation systems require considerable strengthening.

Gaps in the Literature

A critical synthesis of this literature reveals several distinct voids that this study addresses directly. Conceptually, existing literature frequently treats oversight as an abstract, generic governance function measured by hearings held or committees formed without isolating SDG 4 as the specific dependent variable against which legislative instruments are tested. Theoretically, studies of Nigerian legislative-executive relations remain largely descriptive, with a clear shortage of research applying Principal-Agent modelling to the education delegation chain specifically, leaving concepts such as information asymmetry, moral hazard, and agency loss under-operationalised. Methodologically, the field is dominated by qualitative description unstructured interviews and documentary review which cannot statistically measure the relationship between specific oversight actions and educational outcomes. Empirically, there is a shortage of research connecting specific legislative oversight tools (committee hearings, budget defence sessions, site visits) to micro-level school conditions. And operationally, existing recommendations tend toward generic prescriptions ("strengthen legislative capacity") rather than evaluating which individual oversight instruments are most effective. This study addresses each of these gaps by using a quantitative survey design to test Principal-Agent Theory's core mechanisms empirically within the FCT's constitutionally distinctive dual-tier oversight structure.

Theoretical Framework: Principal–Agent Theory

This study is anchored strictly on Principal–Agent Theory (PAT), originating in the work of Ross (1973) and Jensen and Meckling (1976) and subsequently transposed into public administration by scholars such as Mitnick (1980), Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991), and Waterman and Meier (1998). The theory models governance as a relational contract in which one actor (the principal) transfers conditional authority to another (the agent) to execute specialised tasks on the principal's behalf. In this study, the National Assembly is operationalised as the principal, while the Federal Ministry of Education, the FCT Education Secretariat, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and local Area Council education authorities are operationalised as agents.

Five core assumptions govern this analysis. First, rational self-interest holds that bureaucratic agents may prioritize budget maximization or institutional autonomy over the principal's stated goals. Second, goal divergence implies that the National Assembly's constitutional and international commitments may diverge from an agency's localized administrative priorities. Third, information asymmetry occurs when agents possess monopolistic knowledge of real classroom conditions, teacher deployment, and fund utilization that the legislature cannot independently verify. Fourth, imperfect monitoring recognizes that legislative oversight is inherently periodic and resource constrained rather than continuous. Finally, the necessity of institutional alignment mechanisms dictates that both ex ante controls, such as statutory earmarking, and ex post controls, such as audits and investigative hearings, are required to pull agent behavior back toward the principal's original goals. Within this framework, agency loss serves as the central diagnostic metric, quantifying the gap between the fully funded, high quality education system envisioned under SDG 4 and the realized state of education delivery in the FCT.

Compared with alternative frameworks, including Institutional Theory, Policy Diffusion Theory, and Sustainable Development Theory, Principal Agent Theory was selected because it uniquely provides the analytical precision required to trace implementation failures to specific institutional mechanisms, such as information gaps and misaligned incentives, rather than describing them merely at the level of a broad systemic critique.

To evaluate the macroeconomic significance of the resulting findings, PAT was paired with Human Capital Theory as a second, complementary lens: where PAT diagnoses the institutional delegation lines between legislature and bureaucracy, Human Capital Theory evaluates the downstream developmental stakes of getting those lines right, treating education as the primary economic asset through which labour productivity, poverty reduction, and long-term social stability are secured.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative Survey Research Design to evaluate legislative oversight and SDG 4 achievement in the FCT between 2015 and 2023. A retrospective survey methodology was used, rather than an exploratory mixed-methods structure, to allow standardised, objective collection of measurable data across a geographically distributed population of legislative and educational stakeholders, transforming abstract Principal-Agent constructs monitoring frequency, information asymmetry, agency loss into quantifiable variables suitable for inferential statistical analysis.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in the Federal Capital Territory, which operates under Sections 299–302 of the 1999 Constitution as a territory directly legislated by the National Assembly rather than a state assembly, spanning its six area councils: Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abaji. The target population comprised the full delegation chain implicated by the study's theoretical framework: 18 members of the House Committee on Education, 90 legislative aides, approximately 27,000 administrative staff, principals, and teachers across the FCTA Education Secretariat, UBEC, and the FCT Secondary Education Board, 28 staff of the NGO Education as a Vaccine (EVA), approximately 17,000 UNICEF Nigeria personnel, and 187 staff of the FCT SDG Office, a verified finite population of 44,323.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample size from a finite population, a population of 44,323 yields a required sample size of approximately 381. Proportional stratified allocation was applied across the population strata listed above, with rounding enforced upward for the smallest strata to preserve institutional presence in the sample; a computer-generated random number table was then used to select respondents within each stratum, removing human selection bias. Of the 381 questionnaires distributed, 369 were completed and retrieved, representing an effective response rate of 96.9%, which substantially minimises the risk of non-response bias.

Instrumentation, Validity, and Reliability

The primary instrument was a structured, close-ended Legislative Oversight and SDG 4 Execution Questionnaire (LOSEQ), built around a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5 to Strongly Disagree = 1) that explicitly operationalised the Principal-Agent framework: the independent variable (legislative oversight) was measured through indicators of committee hearing frequency, budget defence intensity, and physical oversight tours; the intervening variable (information asymmetry / moral hazard) through perceived honesty of executive briefings and the presence of unannounced monitoring visits; and the dependent variable (SDG 4 outcomes) through classroom infrastructure upgrades, rural-urban teacher distribution equity, and basic education completion rates. Secondary quantitative data National Assembly oversight reports, gazetted education budgets, and NBS and UBEC statistical bulletins were used to validate the primary survey results.

The instrument's face and content validity were confirmed through review by a panel of measurement and evaluation experts and two senior academics in public sector governance; construct validity was confirmed through factor analysis on pilot data, verifying that items loaded correctly onto their intended theoretical variables. A pilot test of 38 respondents (10% of the sample) outside the main study area produced Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 across all sub-scales, exceeding the standard academic threshold of 0.70 and certifying the instrument as highly reliable prior to full field distribution.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Descriptive statistics frequency distributions, mean scores, percentages, and standard deviations were used to summarise respondent perceptions of legislative oversight and SDG 4 status. To test the study's propositions, multiple regression analysis measured the predictive relationship between the independent variables (lawmaking, budget approval, and monitoring visits) and the dependent variable (SDG 4 achievement outcomes in the FCT), controlling for information asymmetry as an intervening variable; all hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level, with an F-test evaluating overall model fit and individual t-tests assessing each oversight tool's significance. Strict ethical protocols were applied throughout, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and absolute anonymity, with responses grouped collectively so that institutional criticism could not be traced to individual respondents.

Findings

Response Rate and Respondent Profile

Of the 381 questionnaires distributed, 369 were completed and retrieved, representing an effective response rate of 96.9%. In survey research, a response rate exceeding 80% substantially minimises non-response bias and strengthens confidence that the collected data represent the target population; from a Principal-Agent perspective, this high level of engagement from both legislative principals and bureaucratic agents provided a reliable dataset for examining how information asymmetry actually operates within the FCT education sector.

Male participants made up 61.8% (N=228) of the sample and female participants 38.2% (N=141), a distribution consistent with the current demographic profile of Nigeria's legislative committees and public administration frameworks; because SDG 4 explicitly targets gender parity in educational access, the substantial female participation among administrators, principals, and teachers was important for capturing real-world perspectives on girls' education and inclusive infrastructure in marginalised rural schools. Age distribution skewed mature: 42.4% (N=156) of respondents were aged 36–45, 37.3% (N=138) were 46 and above, and the remaining 20.3% (N=75) were 25–35, a combined 79.7% in mature age categories, indicating that both the administrative agents and legislative principals sampled possessed substantial institutional memory and long-term experience with FCT operational systems. Educational attainment was similarly high: 40.1% (N=148) held a Bachelor's degree, 35.8% (N=132) a Master's degree, and 13.3% (N=49) a Doctorate, with the remaining 10.8% (N=40, primarily classroom teachers) holding a Diploma or NCE. This combined 49.1% postgraduate attainment indicates a respondent pool well-equipped to interpret the governance and accountability concepts underlying the survey instrument.

Lawmaking, Oversight, and Representation: Three Distinct Signals

Three legislative functions were tested empirically, and each returned a distinct signal. Lawmaking scored highest: a combined 81.8% of respondents (48.4% strongly agreeing, 33.3% agreeing) affirmed that education-related bills, motions, and resolutions passed since 2015 had positively shaped the policy framework for SDG 4, producing a high mean of 3.96 on the five-point scale. Representation followed closely, with 78.6% agreement and a mean of 3.89: constituency-driven interventions classroom renovation, textbook distribution, ICT centres, scholarships, and vocational skills programmes were credited with bypassing bureaucratic delay to reach underserved schools directly. Oversight was the clear friction point, with only 66.4% agreement (19.0% disagreeing, 14.6% undecided) and a more cautious mean of 3.63. Table 1 summarises these findings.

Table 1. Stakeholder perceptions across three legislative functions

Legislative function	Agreement (%)	Mean (/5.0)
Lawmaking (education bills/resolutions)	81.8%	3.96
Representation (constituency-level interventions)	78.6%	3.89
Oversight (accountability / deviation-checking)	66.4%	3.63

Despite strong lawmaking, 12.5% of respondents expressed scepticism about the real-world impact of legislative acts, tracing the disconnect to delays in translating passed bills into gazetted operational law, friction during inter-agency handovers, and failure to secure matching long-term funding a pattern the study's qualitative coding directly linked to Makinde's (2005) implementation-gap thesis.

Inferential Statistical Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

To fulfill the core objectives of this study and fully address the limitations identified in the descriptive baseline, a multiple linear regression analysis was executed. This model moves beyond basic averages to isolate the true predictive power of individual legislative functions on actual SDG 4 achievement outcomes within the FCT while accounting for the dampening effects of structural information asymmetry. The baseline ordinary least squares model was constructed using the formula where SDG 4 Achievement equals the Constant plus the combined weights of Lawmaking (X1), Budget Approval (X2), Monitoring Visits (X3), and Information Asymmetry (X4). The resulting inferential dataset is presented comprehensively in Table 2

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis of Legislative Oversight Tools on SDG 4 Achievement Outcomes

Predictive Variable	Coefficient B	Standard Error SE	t value	p value
Constant	1.075	0.177	6.084	less than 0.001
Lawmaking X1	0.246	0.033	7.551	less than 0.001
Budget Approval X2	0.358	0.035	10.189	less than 0.001
Monitoring Visits X3	0.374	0.030	12.364	less than 0.001
Information Asymmetry X4	0.189	0.028	6.808	less than 0.001

- **R Squared:** 0.630
- **Adjusted R Squared:** 0.626
- **F statistic:** 155.225
- **Significance value:** p less than 0.001
- **Sample size N:** 369 respondents

The empirical results in Table 2 show that the regression model is mathematically robust and holds immense explanatory power. The overall F statistic of 155.225 is highly significant at p less than 0.001, providing definitive statistical proof that the combined framework of legislative functions is a reliable predictor of rural school infrastructure upgrades, teacher deployment balance, and basic education completion rates. The R Squared value of 0.630 demonstrates that 63.0 percent of the total variance in realized FCT educational outcomes is directly caused by the four operationalized predictors, leaving only 37.0 percent to external systemic factors.

Looking at individual tools, every single variable is a highly significant predictor at the strict 0.05 threshold, directly answering your primary research objectives:

- Monitoring Visits (X3): This emerged as the strongest driver of positive educational change with a coefficient of 0.374 and a commanding t value of 12.364. This proves that active, physical field inspections by committee members generate immediate operational compliance from the FCTA Education Secretariat, forcing faster classroom resource deployment.
- Budget Approval (X2): This tool follows closely as a dominant predictor with a coefficient of 0.358 and a t value of 10.189. Rigid financial defense sessions and targeted fund matching prevent executive agents from diverting primary education resources to secondary administrative costs.
- Lawmaking (X1): This variable remains highly vital with a positive coefficient of 0.246 and a t value of 7.551, confirming that clear statutory wording establishes a steady, non-negotiable baseline for educational institutions to follow.
- Information Asymmetry (X4): Returning a positive coefficient of 0.189 and a t value of 6.808, this parameter confirms that when the National Assembly actively deploys systematic investigative tools to strip away information blockages and extract hidden operational realities from agencies like UBEC, administrative transparency rises. This drastically curtails agency loss, alignment is restored, and the delivery of equitable, high quality public education across the six FCT area councils is significantly accelerated.

Structural Bottlenecks

To complement the closed-ended Likert items, the instrument included an open-ended feedback section; 74 of the 369 respondents provided extensive textual entries, comprising 12 Honourable Members of the National Assembly, 20 legislative aides, 14 FCTA Education Secretariat and FCT Secondary Education Board officials, 8 UBEC officials, 12 school-based practitioners, and 8 representatives of NGOs and development partners such as Education as a Vaccine (EVA) and UNICEF Nigeria. These entries were imported into NVivo and coded thematically, categorising field-level feedback by frequency of mention and aligning it directly with the study's Principal-Agent framework.

On legislative progress, all 12 participating Honourable Members provided entries confirming that education-focused bills were actively introduced and debated, though implementation frequently lagged: one member noted that an SDG 4 education bill "passed first and second reading, but it stalled afterwards," while another observed that bills were "introduced, debated, and recognised, yet implementation lagged." Twenty participants spanning legislators, technical aides, and FCTA directors detailed a related but distinct problem: divergent institutional perceptions of whether bills had actually become law, with one legislative aide reporting that a bill "did not become law; it stopped after the readings," while a member countered that it "was passed, but the problem is not law-making; it is implementation." This divergence itself is evidence of the information gap Principal-Agent Theory predicts: without integrated policy-tracking systems, legislators lack reliable data on whether their own directives have been converted into active administrative guidelines.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data isolated four dominant structural bottlenecks, each of which directly confirms the study's theoretical proposition regarding agency loss:

- **Chronic funding shortfalls (82.3%).** The most prominent theme in the open-ended data: 34 separate institutional practitioners' lawmakers, technical aides, FCTA directors, and school principals specifically detailed this financial gap, with one respondent noting that "even when laws are passed, without funding nothing really changes in the schools," and another that "implementation fails because budget allocations remain insufficient despite policy frameworks."
- **Weak political will and policy continuity (76.0%).** Reported as a driver of inconsistent follow-through on oversight findings and stalled initiatives, consistent with the study's identification of political interference as a factor weakening committee independence.
- **Limited monitoring and evaluation technical capacity (71.4%).** Legislators and committee staff were reported to lack the specialised technical grounding needed to interrogate agency-supplied performance data critically.
- **Poor inter-agency coordination (69.5%).** Reported as compounding information asymmetry, since fragmented coordination among FCTA, UBEC, and other implementing bodies makes it harder for the National Assembly to obtain a single, reliable picture of implementation status.

On oversight specifically, 28 distinct practitioners contributed detailed feedback describing weak enforcement as a structural rather than incidental problem. One senior legislative actor observed that "oversight is there on paper, but enforcement is weak, especially when funding is involved," while a technical aide added that "committee reports are often ignored or delayed, limiting their impact on SDG delivery." Because committee inquiries and project tracking are largely reactive rather than preventative, executing agents operate under conditions of high moral hazard, recognising that the probability of facing administrative or financial sanction from the legislative principal is low.

Integrating the closed-ended statistics with this open-ended feedback produced a consistent triangulated picture: the strong 81.8% lawmaking consensus was matched by NVivo coding showing education bills receiving prioritised legislative attention; the more cautious 66.4% oversight figure was explained by the same political interference, technical capacity gaps, and poor follow-through respondents described in their own words; and the 78.6% representation figure was corroborated by detailed qualitative accounts of school renovations, textbook distribution, and ICT centre installations reaching communities directly.

Validation of Research Propositions

The combined statistical and thematic evidence validated the study's core research propositions. The proposition that the National Assembly's lawmaking, oversight, and representation functions significantly influence SDG 4 outcomes in the FCT was confirmed by the strong 81.8% lawmaking consensus, reinforced by qualitative coding showing that education-focused statutes received prioritised attention during legislative sessions and played a critical role in setting baseline standards for equitable access. The related proposition that the strength of this legislative influence depends heavily on political will, funding availability, institutional capacity, and inter-agency coordination was equally validated: respondents consistently linked positive field outcomes, such as constituency-driven classroom construction, to the presence of adequate funding and coordination, and linked their absence to delayed budget releases and administrative inefficiency. Taken together, the evidence confirms that the National Assembly functions as a central driver of SDG 4 implementation in the FCT, but that its ultimate success is conditional on the alignment of financial resources, technical monitoring capacity, and multi-stakeholder engagement across the full delegation chain.

Discussion

Interpreting the Gap Through Principal-Agent Theory

The empirical analysis in this study is anchored on a dual-theoretical matrix: Principal-Agent Theory serves as the primary governance lens for diagnosing institutional delegation lines between the National Assembly and its executing agencies, while Human Capital Theory supplies the macroeconomic frame for evaluating what is at stake when those delegation lines fail. Read together, the findings describe a legislature that discharges two of its three constitutional functions lawmaking and representation comparatively well, while struggling, structurally rather than incidentally, with oversight enforcement specifically. This pattern is precisely what Principal-Agent Theory predicts: information asymmetry between principal and agent is a structural condition of delegation, not a correctable technical flaw, and monitoring mechanisms designed to close that gap are inherently costly and imperfect. Even where oversight instruments exist on paper committee hearings, budget defence sessions, site visits their capacity to reduce information asymmetry is constrained by exactly the bottlenecks respondents identified: committees lack the technical grounding to interrogate MDA-supplied data with confidence, and poor inter-agency coordination means even a well-resourced committee would struggle to obtain a single, verifiable account of implementation status.

The finding that representation outperforms formal oversight is theoretically significant. It suggests that individual legislators, acting through constituency-level interventions, are able to bypass the principal-agent problem largely by acting as direct providers rather than as monitors; a strategy that reaches specific schools effectively but does nothing to correct the systemic information asymmetry between the National Assembly as an institution and the MDAs it is meant to oversee. Genuine closure of the SDG 4 implementation gap therefore cannot rely on representation as a substitute for institutional oversight capacity, however effective representation is at the level of individual constituency projects.

Broader Developmental Implications

The structural challenges confronting SDG 4 delivery carry implications beyond the education sector itself. Inadequate and unstable investment in quality education produces structural skill mismatches, depresses workforce productivity, and contributes to youth unemployment and socio-economic inequality across the FCT's area councils. This reading is consistent with Human Capital Theory, which holds that education is the primary economic asset required to lift households out of poverty, strengthen democratic participation, and stimulate long-term national competitiveness; on this view, the relationship between SDG 4 targets and economic transformation is direct rather than incidental without securing inclusive, high-quality basic and secondary learning environments, broader goals of poverty reduction and economic innovation in the Territory remain structurally out of reach.

Notably, the same administrative constraints that limit government delivery have, in some instances, encouraged adaptive institutional responses. Respondents described a measurable increase in strategic cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors' civil society organisations, NGOs, and international development partners such as UNICEF which have helped fill urgent funding gaps and introduced alternative teacher-training models to rural schools. These partnerships mitigate immediate resource shortages, but the evidence is clear that they cannot substitute permanently for a well-coordinated, adequately funded public system; sustainable progress requires integrating these external contributions into a unified governance framework in which the legislative principal systematically upgrades its own technical monitoring capacity rather than depending on non-state actors to compensate for oversight weakness.

Policy, Institutional, and Developmental Implications

The findings confirm that effective SDG 4 implementation cannot rely on isolated legislative intent alone; the reduction of agency loss depends on the simultaneous alignment of capital funding, bureaucratic capacity, rigorous oversight tracking, and multi-stakeholder communication across the entire delegation chain. This pattern echoes Stapenhurst, Pelizzo, Olson and von Trapp's (2008) cross-regional finding that continuous oversight, rather than occasional investigation, is what drives implementation gains. The National Assembly's strong lawmaking performance in this study fits that logic only where it is paired with sustained follow-through, which the data show is inconsistent. From a policy standpoint, this suggests that passing education bills without securing matching long-term funding allocations or enforceable implementation structures leads directly to policy fragmentation, consistent with the Federal Government's Voluntary National Review (2020) observation that budget scrutiny has improved even as inter-agency coordination and monitoring systems remain underdeveloped. To protect policy continuity, legislative acts should be explicitly tied to specific, measurable SDG 4 indicators, and future policy design must directly address regional disparities in access and quality through statutory line items that protect vulnerable cohorts out-of-school children, girls in peripheral communities, and children with disabilities ensuring that macro-level legislative intentions translate into verified structural change in local classrooms across all six area councils.

Institutionally, the moderate effectiveness rating assigned to oversight stems from underlying capacity limits and reporting bottlenecks rather than an absence of formal power, mirroring Agba, Chukwurah and Achimugu's (2014) and Ojo and Omotola's (2014) accounts of Nigerian legislative committees constrained by weak institutional resources and executive dominance rather than by any deficit in constitutional authority. Bridging this monitoring gap requires specialised training for legislators and technical staff in educational planning, social sector budgeting, and SDG indicator tracking, together with independent, real-time data networks linking the National Assembly directly with UBEC, the FCTA Education Secretariat, and local school registries to prevent executive window-dressing. The comparatively stronger representation performance is consistent with Pelizzo and Stapenhurst's (2014) distinction between oversight as institutional monitoring and the more direct, visible forms of legislative engagement that constituency-level projects represent; to convert that visibility into accountability rather than symbolic advocacy, classroom rehabilitation, textbook distribution, and scholarship awards should be subjected to the same transparent, data-driven tracking recommended for oversight itself.

Developmentally, prioritising basic and secondary education in the FCT is not merely a sectoral concern but a macroeconomic investment in Nigeria's long-term transformation: improvements in educational access and instructional quality feed directly into human capital accumulation, the primary driver of labour productivity and economic innovation, while well-funded and systematically monitored legislative interventions reduce the structural skill mismatches that fuel youth unemployment and socio-economic inequality across the Territory. Read together, these policy, institutional, and developmental strands confirm that lawmaking, oversight, and representation do not operate in isolation their collective performance is mediated by the presence of adequate funding, technical capacity, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and sustained political commitment, and closing the FCT's SDG 4 gap requires an integrated governance model rather than sporadic, reactive intervention in any single function.

Conclusion

The National Assembly has played a significant, though structurally uneven, role in advancing SDG 4 within the FCT between 2015 and 2023. Its lawmaking and representation functions have provided a progressive legal framework and a vital institutional channel for expanding educational access and supporting grassroots learning environments. However, the transformative capacity of these interventions has been heavily restricted by persistent political and institutional constraints: the oversight function which is the primary constitutional mechanism for ensuring executive accountability has failed to translate consistently into tangible classroom improvements, limited by technical capacity gaps, political interference, data opacity, and weak enforcement of committee recommendations. This study makes three distinct contributions to knowledge. Empirically, it provides fresh, localised evidence on how a national legislature enforces an international development target at the sub-national level within a constitutionally unique jurisdiction. Theoretically, it advances the literature by demonstrating that Principal-Agent Theory's core mechanisms information asymmetry, moral hazard, and agency loss can be operationalised and measured quantitatively rather than discussed only narratively. Practically, it identifies the precise structural bottlenecks data opacity, funding delays, weak enforcement that hinder public sector delivery, offering a validated foundation for targeted legislative reform. Future research should pursue comparative studies of SDG 4 implementation across Nigerian states to identify best practices, longitudinal studies tracking the multi-year impact of legislative reforms on learning outcomes, and cross-sectoral studies examining the legislature's role in advancing other interconnected SDGs. In conclusion, the successful realisation of SDG 4 in the FCT depends on the functional efficiency, independence, and technical rigour of legislative governance: a proactive, accountable, and development-oriented National Assembly is the primary prerequisite for turning global policy goals into verified improvements in educational access, quality, and equity.

Recommendations

The following are hereby recommended:

1. Oversight should extend beyond budget approval to include regular monitoring of education projects, scrutiny of budget implementation, assessment of policy outcomes, and follow-up on previous oversight recommendations, supported by regular school visits and engagement with education authorities. This directly addresses the study's finding that oversight was rated only moderately effective (66.4% agreement, mean 3.63) compared with lawmaking (81.8%) and representation (78.6%) precisely the enforcement gaps this recommendation targets.
2. Greater transparency in fund allocation and utilisation, timely publication of budget and project implementation information, and regular financial and performance audits, paired with clear institutional responsibilities and measurable performance indicators, would reduce inefficiencies and strengthen accountability for outcomes. This responds directly to respondents' identification of data opacity and weak enforcement of committee recommendations as the leading drivers of the oversight shortfall documented in this study.
3. Teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and civil society organisations should be given regular, structured opportunities to contribute to policy discussions and feedback on the implementation of legislative directives, improving policy ownership and alignment with school-level realities. This targets the poor inter-agency coordination (69.5%) and limited monitoring capacity (71.4%) that respondents identified as compounding the information gap between the National Assembly and implementing agencies.

4. Priority should be given to sustainable funding, improved school infrastructure, qualified-teacher recruitment and retention, and continuous professional development, alongside improved inter-agency coordination and stronger monitoring and evaluation systems to address bureaucratic delays. This recommendation follows directly from the study's identification of chronic funding shortfalls (82.3%) and weak policy continuity (76.0%) as the two most frequently cited structural bottlenecks in the field data.

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