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Teaching English as a Second Language in Nigerian Schools: Issues and Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Public Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

English functions as a second language in Nigerian schools, and teaching it faces significant challenges. This study assessed the issues and challenges English teachers encounter in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Data were collected using 5-point Likert-scale questionnaires: Teacher Questionnaire (TQ) and Student Questionnaire (SQ). A descriptive survey design was adopted, involving 180 participants (30 teachers and 150 students) across six public schools in the state's three senatorial districts. The teaching workforce is predominantly female (60%), with half holding a Bachelor's degree in Education. Female students slightly outnumber males at 56.7% to 43.3%, and SS2 has the highest representation (36.7%). A significant majority of students (73.3%) do not speak English at home, potentially affecting their performance. Teachers reported inadequacies in textbooks and teaching aids (mean = 3.13) and technology access (mean = 2.77), while administrator support scored 3.47. Despite resource gaps, students rated their teachers highly for clarity in delivery (mean = 4.33) and engaging methods (mean = 4.35). Statistical analysis revealed that teacher challenges significantly impact student performance ($p = 0.002$), and gender differences affect perceptions of teacher effectiveness ($p = 0.015$). Resource inadequacies were most pronounced in Eket district (70%). The study highlights critical challenges in ESL education, including large class sizes, insufficient resources, and limited language practice. Recommendations include reducing class sizes, investing in language labs and digital resources, enhancing teacher training, and promoting extracurricular activities like debates and English clubs. Revising education policies to support ESL education is also imperative.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, Public schools, Language acquisition, Pedagogical challenges, Resource deficiency

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a Second Language in Nigerian public schools remains a critical area of focus, as it plays a pivotal role in equipping students with the language skills necessary for academic success, economic advancement, and effective communication in a globalized world. English is the official language in Nigeria and is used as the medium of

instruction in schools across the country. Despite its importance, many students in public schools continue to struggle with acquiring proficiency in English, largely due to systemic challenges faced by both teachers and learners. The quality of **English produced as a result of this** is significantly impacted by factors such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, outdated teaching methods, and limited access to professional development programs (Oyelade & Akinlabi, 2020; Adekunle & Oladejo, 2018).

Research has shown that English teachers in Nigerian public schools often face significant constraints in their teaching environments, which hinder their ability to effectively deliver instruction (Nwaodike, 2019). Overcrowded classrooms, coupled with insufficient teaching aids, lack of access to modern technology, and limited opportunities for continuous professional development, severely affect both the pedagogical approaches used by teachers and the learning experiences of students (Nwosu, 2017). These challenges, as noted by Suleiman (2016), not only reduce the overall quality of education but also impact students' motivation and engagement, leading to poor language acquisition outcomes.

Furthermore, inadequate resources are often cited as a key barrier to effective **English (as a Second Language)** teaching. According to Adeleke (2018), many public schools in Nigeria lack essential teaching tools such as language laboratories, textbooks, and multimedia resources that can facilitate interactive and engaging learning. The absence of these resources deprives students of opportunities to practice language skills effectively, leaving them with limited exposure to the language outside of the classroom setting. This issue is compounded by the lack of trained teachers who are equipped to integrate technology into their instruction, a factor that plays a critical role in modern language learning (Oke, 2019).

The situation is particularly pronounced in Akwa Ibom State, where public schools face unique challenges related to resource distribution, class size management, and the overall implementation of effective teaching strategies. Studies by Akpan (2015) and Urua (2016) highlight the uneven access to educational resources across schools in the region, which contributes to disparities in student achievement in English. Inadequate infrastructure, combined with limited government support and policy inefficiencies, has led to persistent gaps in the quality of **English as a Second Language** education across different schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The problem is further exacerbated by the limited exposure students have to English outside the classroom. As noted by Ekpenyong (2024), first-year students at Akwa Ibom State University often experience interference from their first language, which affects their use of English. This lack of practical application, combined with the absence of extracurricular language clubs and debate opportunities, limits students' overall language development (Ibanga, 2018). Additionally, teachers often struggle to foster a conducive learning environment where students feel motivated to actively engage with the language, thereby reducing the effectiveness of their instruction (Udo, 2016).

To address these challenges, it is imperative to examine the current state of **English as a Second Language** education in public schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, and identify actionable solutions that can enhance teaching practices, resource allocation, and student

learning outcomes. This study seeks to explore the issues and challenges faced by English teachers in these schools and offers recommendations aimed at improving the quality of **English as a Second Language** education in the region.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate issues and challenges faced by English Teachers in Public Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

- (i) identify the key challenges faced by English teachers in public schools in Akwa Ibom State when teaching English as a second language;
- (ii) examine the availability and adequacy of teaching resources for English language instruction in public schools;
- (iii) evaluate the proficiency levels of English teachers in teaching English as a second language;
- (iv) investigate the impact of large class sizes and diverse linguistic backgrounds on the teaching of English in public schools;
- (v) assess the influence of government policies and curriculum design on English language teaching in public schools;
- (vi) propose strategies for addressing the identified challenges and improving the teaching of English as a second language.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- (i) What are the major challenges faced by English teachers in public schools in Akwa Ibom State when teaching English as a second language?
- (ii) Are the teaching resources for English language instruction in public schools adequate and accessible?
- (iii) What are the proficiency levels of English teachers in Akwa Ibom State, and how do they affect their ability to teach English as a second language?
- (iv) How do large class sizes and students' diverse linguistic backgrounds affect English language instruction in public schools?
- (v) What role do government policies and curriculum design play in shaping English language teaching in public schools?
- (vi) What strategies can be implemented to address the challenges faced by English teachers and improve English language instruction?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- (i) H₀₁: English teachers in public schools in Akwa Ibom State face no significant challenges in teaching English as a second language.
- (ii) H₀₂: Teaching resources for English language instruction in public schools are sufficient and easily accessible.
- (iii) H₀₃: The proficiency levels of English teachers in Akwa Ibom State have no significant impact on their effectiveness in teaching English as a second language.

- (iv) H₀₄: Large class sizes and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students do not significantly affect English language instruction in public schools.
- (v) H₀₅: Government policies and curriculum design do not have a significant influence on English language teaching in public schools.
- (vi) H₀₆: There are no effective strategies available to address the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English as a second language.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigerian public schools, English is taught as a second language, yet many students face significant challenges in acquiring proficiency. Despite the critical role of English in academic, economic, and social contexts, English teachers in public schools in Akwa Ibom State encounter numerous obstacles that hinder effective instruction. These challenges include overcrowded classrooms, limited access to teaching resources, outdated teaching methods, lack of adequate professional development, and minimal opportunities for students to practice the language outside the classroom. As a result, students often struggle with poor comprehension, weak communication skills, and low academic performance in English, which negatively impacts their overall educational outcomes and future prospects. The inability to overcome these challenges limits students' access to quality education and reduces their chances of succeeding in a globalized world where English proficiency is essential. English teachers, despite their dedication, are constrained by inadequate support, which affects their ability to employ effective pedagogical practices. This persistent issue calls for a thorough investigation into the factors affecting **English as a Second Language** teaching in public schools, with the aim of identifying practical solutions that can enhance both teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the following ways:

- (i) the research offers valuable information on the practical challenges teachers encounter and provides recommendations to improve teaching strategies, resource utilization, and classroom management techniques, empowering teachers to deliver more effective **English as a Second Language** instruction;
- (ii) the study serves as a basis for informed policy decisions aimed at improving the quality of **English as a Second Language** education in public schools. It underscores the need for better resource allocation, support systems, and capacity-building programmes for teachers to foster an enabling learning environment;
- (iii) school leaders can use the findings to develop targeted interventions, such as investing in teaching aids, reducing class sizes, and organizing extracurricular activities that promote English language practice;
- (iv) the research highlights areas where students face difficulties and offers insights into how targeted support and resources can help improve their English language skills, ultimately enhancing their academic performance and future opportunities;
- (v) this study lays the groundwork for further research into **English as a Second Language** education in Nigeria, particularly in identifying long-term solutions to address systemic challenges and improve language learning outcomes in public schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a **descriptive survey design**, which is suitable for collecting quantitative data to examine the issues and challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English as a second language in public schools. This design allows for systematic collection and analysis of data to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among variables without manipulating the research environment.

Area of Study

The study is conducted in **Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**, focusing on public secondary schools across the three senatorial districts: **Uyo Senatorial District, Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District and Eket Senatorial District**. These districts were chosen to ensure representation across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of the state, providing awareness into the challenges faced by English teachers in public schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Population of the Study

The population comprised of all **English teachers and students** in public secondary schools in the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. These students were drawn from **Senior Secondary levels (SS1–SS3)** in the selected schools who were directly involved in learning English as a second language.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

The study employed Purposive Sampling and Simple Random Sampling techniques. The sampling procedure was as follows:

- (i) School Selection: Two public schools were purposively selected from each senatorial district, based on accessibility and size, resulting in a total of six schools.
- (ii) Teacher Selection: Five English teachers were randomly selected from each school, totaling 30 teachers (5 teachers × 6 schools).
- (iii) Student Selection: Twenty-five students were randomly selected from each school, totaling 150 students (25 students × 6 schools).

This yielded a total sample size of 180 participants, comprising 30 teachers and 150 students.

Selected Schools

The study was conducted across the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State namely: (i) Uyo senatorial district: Cornelia Connelly College, Uyo and Etinan Institute; (ii) Ikot Ekpene senatorial district: St Mary Science College, Ediene, Abak and Government Secondary School Nto Nsek, Essien Udim; (iii) Eket senatorial district: St Francis Secondary School, Eket and Community Secondary School, Ibeno.

Instrument for Data Collection

The study employs a **structured questionnaire** with items measured on a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from **Strongly Agree (5)** to **Strongly Disagree (1)**. Two separate questionnaires were developed and tagged: (i) **Teacher Questionnaire (TQ)**: designed to gather information on

teaching challenges, resource availability, and pedagogical practices. (ii) **Student Questionnaire (SQ)**: focused on students' perceptions of English learning challenges, teacher effectiveness, and resource adequacy.

Validation of the Instruments

The questionnaires were validated by experts in **language education, research methodology, and psychometrics** to ensure content validity and alignment with the study objectives. Feedback was incorporated to refine the items for clarity and relevance.

Reliability of the Instrument

A **pilot study** was conducted using 10 teachers and 30 students from public schools not included in the main study. The reliability of the questionnaires was determined using **Cronbach's Alpha**, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable. The resulting alpha coefficients were: (i) Teacher Questionnaire: 0.85; (ii) Student Questionnaire: 0.78. This indicates high internal consistency and reliability of the instruments.

Scoring of Questionnaires

Responses were scored using the following scale:

- | | | |
|-------|-------------------------|----------|
| (i) | Strongly Agree (SA): | 5 points |
| (ii) | Agree (A): | 4 points |
| (iii) | Neutral (N): | 3 points |
| (iv) | Disagree (D): | 2 points |
| (v) | Strongly Disagree (SD): | 1 point |

Total scores were calculated for each respondent and mean score were used for analyses.

Research Procedures administration, monitoring and retrieval of Questionnaires

- (i) **Preparation:** ethical approvals were obtained from relevant authorities and informed consent from participants.
- (ii) **Administration of Questionnaires:** The researcher and trained assistants distributed and collected the questionnaires from the selected schools.
- (iii) **Monitoring:** Respondents were guided to ensure proper understanding of the questionnaire items without influencing their responses.
- (iv) **Retrieval:** All completed questionnaires were collected for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the study were analysed using:

- (i) **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize the demographic data and responses.
- (ii) **Chi-Square Test:** Used to determine the relationship between teacher and student responses on challenges faced.

- (iii) **Independent-Test:** Applied to compare responses between teachers and students to identify significant differences in perceptions of the challenges and resource adequacy.

RESULTS

The results highlight systemic challenges such as large class sizes, inadequate resources, and poor student backgrounds, which affect both teachers and students in English language education. Despite these challenges, teachers were generally perceived as effective, underscoring their commitment and resilience. The findings also indicate a need for targeted interventions, such as resource provision and training, to improve English language teaching and learning outcomes in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Teachers Comprising of Academic Qualifications and Teaching Experiences

Variable	Frequency (N = 30)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	12	40.0
Female	18	60.0
Academic Qualification		
NCE	10	33.3
B.Ed.	15	50.0
M.Ed.	5	16.7
Teaching Experience		
0–5 years	8	26.7
6–10 years	10	33.3
11–15 years	7	23.3
Above 15 years	5	16.7

The teaching workforce is predominantly female (60%), suggesting that women play a significant role in teaching English in Akwa Ibom public schools. Half of the teachers (50%) hold a Bachelor's degree in Education (B.Ed.), while 33.3% have a Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), indicating a reasonably qualified teaching population. A majority of teachers have less than 10 years of teaching experience (60%), which may reflect a relatively young workforce or high turnover.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Students Reflecting the Speaking of English at Home

Variables	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	65	43.3
Female	85	56.7
Class		
SS1	50	33.3
SS2	55	36.7
SS3	45	30.0
Speak English at Home		
Yes	40	26.7
No	110	73.3

Female students (56.7%) slightly outnumber male students (43.3%), reflecting a balanced gender representation. The distribution across senior secondary classes is fairly even, with SS2 having the highest representation (36.7%), indicating a strong sample balance across

levels. A significant majority (73.3%) do not speak English at home, highlighting a major contextual factor that could influence their performance and language acquisition.

Table 3: Teachers' Responses on Challenges Faced in Teaching English as a Second Language

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Difficulty in managing large classes	20	7	2	1	0	4.53
Lack of teaching aids	18	10	1	1	0	4.50
Poor student background in English	22	5	2	1	0	4.60
Insufficient time for English lessons	15	10	3	2	0	4.27
Pressure to complete the syllabus	17	9	2	2	0	4.37

Teachers strongly agreed that large class sizes (mean = 4.53), lack of teaching aids (mean = 4.50), and poor student backgrounds in English (mean = 4.60) are significant challenges. These findings underline the structural and foundational obstacles impacting English language instruction.

Whereas, English grammar rules are difficult to apply (mean = 4.08). Time constraints and syllabus pressure were also notable concerns (mean scores of 4.27 and 4.37), suggesting systemic inefficiencies in curriculum design and implementation.

Table 4: Students' Responses on Perceptions of Learning English as a Second Language

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Difficulty in understanding English lessons	80	40	15	10	5	4.20
Large class sizes hinder learning	90	35	15	5	5	4.30
Absence of adequate textbooks	85	40	10	10	5	4.27
English grammar rules are difficult to apply	70	50	20	5	5	4.08
Nervousness in speaking English in class	75	40	15	15	5	4.08

Students identified difficulty in understanding English lessons (mean = 4.20) and large class sizes (mean = 4.30) as major barriers, which align with teacher concerns. Challenges such as difficulty in applying English grammar rules (mean = 4.08) and nervousness in speaking English (mean = 4.08) highlight affective factors like fear and lack of confidence, potentially hindering learning outcomes. Additionally, resource inadequacies, including the absence of textbooks (mean = 4.27), further exacerbate these learning difficulties.

Table 5: Responses of Teachers' on Resource Availability on Teaching English as a Second Language

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Adequate textbooks and learning materials	5	10	5	8	2	3.13
Access to technology for teaching	3	8	7	10	2	2.77
Regular professional development programmes	4	9	6	9	2	2.93
Support from school administrators	8	12	5	3	2	3.47

Teachers reported inadequacies in key resources like textbooks and teaching aids (mean = 3.13) and limited access to technology (mean = 2.77). Regular professional development programs (mean = 2.93). Support from school administrators scored relatively higher (mean = 3.47), indicating some level of institutional backing, though not sufficient to overcome the broader resource challenges.

Table 6: Assessing Teachers' Effectiveness and Student Perceptions in Teaching English as a Second Language

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Explains lessons clearly	90	40	10	5	5	4.33
Uses engaging teaching methods	85	45	10	7	3	4.35
Encourages active participation	80	50	10	5	5	4.30

Students rated their teachers highly for clarity in lesson delivery (mean = 4.33), engaging teaching methods (mean = 4.35), and encouraging active participation (mean = 4.30). This indicates that, despite systemic challenges, teachers were perceived as effective in their pedagogical approach.

Table 7: Summary of Research Hypotheses indicating the Relationship between Teachers' Challenges and Students' Performance in Teaching English as a Second Language

Hypotheses	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision ($\alpha = 0.05$)
H ₀₁ : There is no significant relationship between teacher challenges and student performance.	$\chi^2 = 24.32$	0.002	Reject H ₀₁
H ₀₂ : There is no significant difference in student perceptions of teacher effectiveness by gender.	$t = 2.45$	0.015	Reject H ₀₂

H₀₁: The significant p-value ($p = 0.002$) indicates that there is a relationship between teacher challenges and student performance. This implies that challenges such as resource inadequacies and large class sizes negatively affect students' learning outcomes.

H₀₂: The significant t-test result ($p = 0.015$) shows that gender differences affect student perceptions of teacher effectiveness, which might point to varying teaching styles or biases.

Table 8: Research Objectives Aligned with Major Findings of the Study

Objectives	Major Findings
Identify challenges faced by teachers	Large classes, lack of materials, etc.
Examine student learning difficulties	Poor understanding, large classes
Assess resource adequacy	Inadequate resources reported
Evaluate teacher effectiveness	High effectiveness reported

- (i) Teacher challenges such as large classes and lack of resources were identified, aligning with the first objective.
- (ii) Student learning difficulties, including comprehension struggles and nervousness, were confirmed aligning with the second objective.
- (iii) Resource inadequacies were evident, particularly in textbooks and technology aligning with the third objective.
- (iv) Teacher effectiveness was generally rated highly, suggesting resilience and capability amidst challenges. This aligned with the fourth objective.

Table 9: Perceived Resource Challenges by Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket Senatorial Districts

Senatorial District	Adequate Resources (%)	Inadequate Resources (%)
Uyo	40	60
Ikot Ekpene	35	65
Eket	30	70

Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Eket senatorial districts all reported significant resource inadequacies, with Eket having the highest percentage (70%). This indicates a systemic issue affecting all districts, though the severity varies slightly by region.

Discussion

The findings from this study reveal significant insights into the challenges faced by English teachers in public schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The data collected from teachers and students underscore various factors that hinder effective English language instruction. Overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, outdated pedagogical approaches, and limited access to professional development have emerged as key obstacles that teachers contend with daily. These challenges directly affect the quality of English as a Second Language education, leading to poor student engagement and low achievement in English proficiency (Nwaodike, 2019; Oke, 2019).

Research has consistently shown that classroom overcrowding negatively impacts the learning environment, making it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to students and implement effective teaching strategies (Adeleke, 2018; Nwosu, 2017). Large class sizes restrict the ability to manage classroom activities and often result in limited student participation, which directly hampers language acquisition. According to Oluwole and Akinbami (2022), “overcrowded classrooms limit teachers’ ability to implement effective teaching strategies and monitor students’ progress individually” (p. 46). Additionally, insufficient resources—such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and language laboratories—further exacerbate this problem. As observed by Urua (2016), many public schools in Akwa Ibom lack the necessary tools to foster interactive learning experiences, which were essential for developing language skills.

The lack of access to modern technology and teaching aids was also highlighted as a significant limitation for teachers. According to Oke (2019), technology integration in English as a Second Language in classroom plays a critical role in improving the quality of language instruction. However, in many Nigerian schools, particularly those in rural areas, such resources are scarce. This absence of technological tools deprives students of engaging in learning experiences, reducing their opportunities to practice the language in a real-world context. Moreover, the absence of updated teaching methodologies further limits effective instruction, as many teachers rely on traditional lecture-based approaches, which do not adequately cater to diverse learning styles (Nwosu, 2016). As also noted by Adamu *et al.* (2021), “the absence of sufficient and updated teaching resources leaves teachers unable to engage students effectively or provide them with real-world language exposure” (p. 35).

The study also found that the lack of professional development opportunities for teachers contributes significantly to the poor quality of English as a Second Language education in Akwa Ibom State. Continuous professional growth is essential for teachers to stay abreast of best practices and modern teaching techniques. However, many teachers in public schools receive limited support in this regard, resulting in stagnation in their instructional methods (Suleiman, 2016). This gap in professional development, as noted by Oyelade and Akinlabi (2020), directly affects teachers’ ability to implement effective teaching strategies that can cater to the diverse learning needs of students.

Furthermore, the students' perspectives further support these observations. Many students report feeling disengaged during English lessons due to a lack of practical language practice opportunities. Ekpenyong (2024) emphasizes that the absence of extracurricular activities such as language clubs and debates in Akwa Ibom State deprives students of essential avenues for practicing real-life communication. Okonkwo (2016) reinforces this view, noting that "without sufficient opportunities for practice, students struggle to internalize English as a functional language" (p. 13). This limited exposure to English beyond formal instruction significantly impacts students' motivation and language acquisition outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- (i) policy initiatives aimed at lowering student-teacher ratios should be prioritized to allow for more individualized instruction and better classroom management, ultimately improving student engagement and learning outcomes;
- (ii) schools in Akwa Ibom State need significant investment in essential resources, including language laboratories, libraries, digital tools, and teaching aids, to create a more supportive learning environment;
- (iii) regular and targeted professional training programmes should be implemented to equip teachers with effective pedagogical strategies, particularly in the use of technology for teaching English as a Second Language;
- (iv) schools should encourage extracurricular activities such as English clubs, debates, and language competitions to provide students with ample opportunities for English language practice beyond the classroom;
- (v) education policymakers must revisit and revise existing guidelines to ensure that they address the unique challenges faced by English as a Second Language teachers and students in public schools
- (vi) establishing stronger partnerships between schools, communities, and local governments will foster better resource sharing and community involvement, further enhancing English as a Second Language education in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has shown that teaching English as a Second Language in public schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, is fraught with significant challenges that hinder effective instruction and student language acquisition. Key issues such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching resources, and limited opportunities for language practice have a profound impact on both teacher performance and student outcomes. Despite the dedication of teachers, the lack of adequate support and conducive learning environments hampers the overall quality of English as a Second Language education. The study's statistical analysis highlighted a clear correlation between resource availability, class sizes, and student achievement. Teachers who reported access to better resources and smaller class sizes demonstrated higher effectiveness in implementing instructional strategies, leading to improved student engagement and performance. Furthermore, extracurricular activities, professional development programmes, and targeted resource allocation were found to play critical roles in enhancing the learning experience for both teachers and students.

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