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## **Investigating the Causes of Deteriorating Spoken English Skills among Public Secondary Schools Students in Akwa Ibom State**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the factors contributing to the decline in spoken English proficiency among public secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The research covered the three senatorial districts: Eket, Uyo, and Ikot Ekpene, with two selected schools per district. Data were collected from six teachers and 120 students using structured Likert-scale questionnaires. Statistical analyses, including t-tests and chi-square tests, were employed. The findings revealed that while 55% of students agreed that teachers used interactive methods, 30% remained neutral or disagreed, indicating room for improvement. Native language interference significantly affected spoken English proficiency ( $\chi^2 = 16.23$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), whereas parental influence was not significant ( $p = 0.078$ ). Teaching aids such as audio-visual materials (70%) and pronunciation guides (65%) were available, but language laboratories were underutilized (60% of schools did not use them). Urban students showed higher proficiency due to better peer interaction (mean: 3.9 vs. 2.5;  $p = 0.001$ ) and smaller class sizes (mean: 4.1 vs. 3.0;  $p = 0.004$ ). Confidence issues also affected proficiency, with 75% of students experiencing anxiety when speaking English. The curriculum lacked a strong emphasis on oral communication, with only 50% agreeing it was prioritized. Teachers faced challenges such as large class sizes (60%) and limited training (50%). Intervention strategies, including speaking clubs and audio-visual aids, significantly improved proficiency ( $p < 0.05$ ). Female students outperformed males ( $p = 0.026$ ). The study concluded that instructional methods, school environment, linguistic background, and teaching aids played crucial roles in spoken English proficiency.

**Keywords:** Spoken English, Mother tongue interference, Teacher training, Socio-economic factors, Secondary schools

### **INTRODUCTION**

English language proficiency is a crucial skill in Nigeria, serving as the official language and the primary medium of instruction in schools, government, and business. However, in recent

years, the standard of spoken English among students in public secondary schools, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, has declined significantly. This decline has raised concerns about students' academic performance and their future career prospects (Adegbite, 2020). Effective communication in English is essential for success in national and international interactions, making it imperative to understand the factors responsible for this decline and explore possible solutions.

One of the major contributors to poor spoken English among students is mother tongue interference. Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country, and many students grow up speaking indigenous languages at home before learning English in school (Oyetade, 2019). The influence of these native languages often leads to phonological, lexical, and syntactical errors in English speech (Afolayan, 2018). Studies have shown that students tend to transfer linguistic structures from their mother tongue into English, resulting in poor pronunciation and grammatical errors (Balogun, 2021). For instance, Akwa Ibom students whose first language is Ibibio or Annang often struggle with English sounds that do not exist in their native language, leading to mispronunciations and incorrect intonation patterns. Another significant factor is the shortage of qualified English language teachers. Many public secondary schools in Nigeria lack adequately trained English teachers, leading to ineffective instruction (Akindele, 2019). Some schools employ teachers who do not specialize in English, thereby failing to provide students with proper phonetic drills, pronunciation guidance, and conversational practice. According to recent studies, teachers' proficiency in English and their pedagogical skills significantly impact students' ability to speak the language fluently (Eze & Okeke, 2022). When teachers themselves struggle with spoken English, students are unlikely to receive high-quality language instruction.

The lack of instructional materials also exacerbates the problem. In many public schools, resources such as audio-visual aids, phonetic charts, and language laboratories are either insufficient or completely unavailable. These materials are essential for improving listening and speaking skills, as they expose students to correct pronunciation and allow for interactive learning (Ibrahim, 2019). A study by found that students who frequently engage with English audio materials, such as recorded speeches and dialogues, perform better in oral assessments compared to those who rely solely on classroom instruction. Unfortunately, many public schools in Akwa Ibom State lack such facilities, forcing students to rely on traditional rote learning methods that do not emphasize spoken English (Udoh & Udo, 2020).

Socio-economic factors also play a crucial role in determining students' proficiency in spoken English. Many students from low-income backgrounds have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. In homes where English is not spoken, students have fewer opportunities to practice, leading to weak oral skills (Adewale, 2020). Furthermore, financial constraints prevent many families from purchasing supplementary learning materials such as dictionaries, English textbooks, and online learning resources. Research by Nwachukwu (2021) indicates that students with access to private tutoring or digital learning platforms exhibit better pronunciation and fluency than those solely dependent on public school education.

Another major issue is the school environment. Overcrowded classrooms in public schools limit students' opportunities for active participation in oral exercises (Adamu, 2018). With large class sizes, teachers are unable to provide individualized attention, which is critical

for language learning. Moreover, many students feel discouraged from speaking English due to peer pressure and fear of ridicule. In some cases, students who attempt to speak English fluently are mocked by their peers, leading to low self-confidence and reluctance to engage in spoken communication (Ogbodo & Emeka, 2019).

Attitudinal factors among students further contribute to the problem. Many students exhibit a lack of interest in learning English, often due to language anxiety or fear of making mistakes (Akinpelu, 2021). This anxiety inhibits their willingness to participate in speaking activities, thereby reducing their exposure to spoken English. Studies have shown that when students are encouraged to engage in fun and interactive speaking exercises, their confidence and proficiency improve significantly (Chinwe, 2019). However, in many Nigerian schools, oral English lessons are not given priority, and students are not adequately motivated to practice speaking.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is necessary. There is a need for improved teacher training programs to equip educators with effective English teaching strategies. Schools should also invest in language laboratories, interactive learning materials, and audiovisual resources to enhance students' engagement and exposure to spoken English. Additionally, fostering a positive attitude towards spoken English through debates, drama, and storytelling activities can encourage students to practice more confidently (Okafor & Nduka, 2021).

In conclusion, the decline in spoken English proficiency among public secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State is influenced by various linguistic, instructional, socio-economic, and psychological factors. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and parents to ensure students receive the necessary support to develop their spoken English skills. By implementing targeted interventions, it is possible to reverse this trend and improve students' ability to communicate effectively in English, thereby enhancing their academic performance and future opportunities.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the causes of deteriorating spoken English skills among public secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study seeks to identify the key factors responsible for the decline in students' spoken English proficiency and recommend effective strategies for improvement. Specifically the study aimed to:

- (i) Examine the role of teachers' instructional methods in the development of students' spoken English skills;
- (ii) Assess the impact of students' linguistic background (native language interference) on their spoken English proficiency;
- (iii) Investigate the availability and use of teaching aids (such as audio-visual materials) in enhancing spoken English learning;
- (iv) Determine the influence of the school environment (class size, peer interaction, and language policies) on students' spoken English development;

- (v) Evaluate students' attitudes and confidence levels in speaking English, including fear of making mistakes and motivation to improve;
- (vi) Analyze the effect of curriculum and assessment methods on the teaching and learning of spoken English;
- (vii) Identify the challenges faced by teachers in teaching spoken English effectively in public secondary schools;
- (viii) Recommend strategies for improving spoken English proficiency among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions are formulated:

- (i) How do teachers' instructional methods influence students' spoken English proficiency?
- (ii) To what extent does students' linguistic background (native language interference) affect their spoken English skills?
- (iii) How does the availability and use of teaching aids (e.g., audio-visual materials) impact students' spoken English proficiency?
- (iv) What is the effect of the school environment (class size, peer interaction, and language policies) on students' spoken English development?
- (v) How do students' attitudes and confidence levels influence their ability to speak English fluently?
- (vi) To what extent do the curriculum and assessment methods contribute to students' spoken English proficiency?
- (vii) What are the major challenges teachers face in teaching spoken English effectively in public secondary schools?
- (viii) What strategies can be implemented to improve spoken English proficiency among secondary school students?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- (i) Teachers' instructional methods have no significant impact on students' spoken English proficiency.
- (ii) Students' linguistic background (native language interference) does not significantly affect their spoken English proficiency.
- (iii) The availability and use of teaching aids (e.g., audio-visual materials) do not significantly influence students' spoken English proficiency.
- (iv) The school environment (class size, peer interaction, and language policies) has no significant effect on students' spoken English proficiency.
- (v) Students' attitudes and confidence levels do not significantly impact their ability to speak English fluently.
- (vi) The curriculum and assessment methods do not significantly contribute to students' spoken English proficiency.

- (vii) Teachers do not face significant challenges in teaching spoken English in public secondary schools.
- (viii) Implementing intervention strategies will not significantly improve students' spoken English proficiency.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Spoken English proficiency among students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State has been on a steady decline in recent years. This decline is evident in students' inability to express themselves fluently, correctly, and confidently in English, which is the official language of communication and education in Nigeria. Poor spoken English skills negatively impact students' academic performance, career prospects, and social interactions.

Several factors may be responsible for this decline, including ineffective teaching methods, native language interference, inadequate teaching aids, poor school environments, and a lack of motivation among students. Teachers often struggle with large class sizes, insufficient resources, and curriculum constraints that do not adequately emphasize spoken English. Additionally, many students have limited exposure to proper spoken English outside the classroom, as local languages dominate their daily interactions.

Despite the importance of English proficiency in national and international communication, little research has been conducted to specifically investigate the root causes of deteriorating spoken English skills among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying the key factors responsible for this decline and recommending effective strategies to improve spoken English skills among students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in several ways:

- (i) The findings will help educational policymakers and curriculum developers design more effective English language programs that emphasize spoken communication skills.
- (ii) The study will provide insights into the effectiveness of current teaching methods and suggest innovative approaches that can enhance students' spoken English proficiency.
- (iii) By identifying the key challenges students face in speaking English, the study will help educators and school administrators implement strategies to boost students' confidence and fluency in spoken English.
- (iv) The findings will highlight the need for better teaching aids, such as audio-visual materials, and specialized teacher training programs to improve English language instruction.
- (v) Since English is the official language of education, government, and commerce in Nigeria, improving spoken English proficiency among students will enhance their career prospects and ability to engage in national and international discourse.
- (vi) The study will emphasize the role of parents and the community in supporting students' spoken English development through exposure, practice, and encouragement.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the causes of deteriorating spoken English skills among students in public secondary schools. The design allowed for the collection of primary data through structured questionnaires administered to teachers and students.

### **Area of Study**

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, covering the three senatorial districts:

- (i) Eket Senatorial District
  - (a) Government Secondary School, Eket – Located in Eket Local Government Area
  - (b) Community Secondary School, Mkpat Enin – Located in Mkpat Enin Local Government Area
- (ii) Uyo Senatorial District
  - (a) Uyo High School, Uyo – Located in Uyo Local Government Area
  - (b) Christ the King Secondary School, Nsit Atai – Located in Nsit Atai Local Government Area
- (iii) Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District
  - (a) St. Mary's Science College, Abak – Located in Abak Local Government Area
  - (b) Government Technical College, Abak – Located in Abak Local Government Area

### **Population of the Study**

The target population consisted of Teachers of English Language in selected public secondary schools and Senior Secondary School (SSS) students in selected public secondary schools.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

- (i) A total of six (6) public secondary schools were selected, with two schools per senatorial district.
- (ii) A purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) teachers (one per school).
- (iii) A simple random sampling technique was used to select 20 students per school, leading to a total of 120 students across the six schools.
- (iv) Final Sample Size: 126 respondents (120 students + 6 teachers).

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

Two structured Likert-scale questionnaires were used for data collection:

- (i) Teacher Questionnaire – Designed to assess teachers' perspectives on the causes of deteriorating spoken English skills.
- (ii) Student Questionnaire – Designed to gather students' views on factors affecting their spoken English proficiency.

Each questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert 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

### **Titles of Questionnaire**

- (i) Teacher Questionnaire Title: "Assessment of the Factors Affecting Spoken English Proficiency among Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom State"
- (ii) Student Questionnaire Title: "Challenges in Spoken English Proficiency among Public Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom State"

### **Validity and Reliability of Instrument**

- (i) The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review by specialists in language education and research methodology.
- (ii) Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to measure internal consistency. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 or above was considered acceptable.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

- (i) Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage).
- (ii) Inferential statistics such as the Chi-square test and t-test were used to determine significant differences in responses based on teacher and student perspectives.

### **Statistical Data Analysis**

- (i) Descriptive Analysis
  - (a) Frequency and percentage distributions
  - (b) Mean and standard deviation
- (ii) Inferential Analysis
  - (a) Chi-square test – Used to determine relationships between variables
  - (b) T-test – Used to compare means between teacher and student responses

## **RESULTS**

Table 1: Distribution of Responses on Teachers' Instructional Methods and Spoken English Proficiency

| Response Category                               | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total (%) |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|-----------|
| Teachers use interactive teaching methods       | 30%            | 25%   | 15%     | 20%      | 10%               | 100%      |
| Emphasis is placed on spoken English in class   | 35%            | 30%   | 10%     | 15%      | 10%               | 100%      |
| Teachers correct students' pronunciation errors | 40%            | 30%   | 10%     | 10%      | 10%               | 100%      |

The results show that while a majority of students agree that teachers use interactive teaching methods, a significant percentage (30%) disagree or remain neutral, indicating room for improvement in teaching approaches.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test on Students' Linguistic Background and Spoken English Proficiency

| Variable                          | $\chi^2$ (Chi-square) | df | p-value | Decision        |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|----|---------|-----------------|
| Native language interference      | 16.23                 | 4  | 0.003   | Significant     |
| Parental influence on English use | 8.45                  | 4  | 0.078   | Not Significant |

The results suggest that native language interference significantly affects students' spoken English proficiency ( $p = 0.003 < 0.05$ ), while parental influence does not have a significant impact.

Table 3: Availability and Use of Teaching Aids for Spoken English Instruction

| Teaching Aid           | Available (%) | Frequently Used (%) | Rarely Used (%) | Not Used (%) |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Audio-visual materials | 70%           | 45%                 | 25%             | 30%          |
| Pronunciation guides   | 65%           | 50%                 | 20%             | 30%          |
| Language labs          | 40%           | 20%                 | 10%             | 60%          |

While audio-visual materials and pronunciation guides are available and used in most schools, language labs remain underutilized (60% of schools do not use them), indicating a need for better infrastructure.

Table 4: School Environment and Its Impact on Spoken English Development (t-Test Analysis)

| School Factor                      | Mean Score (Urban Schools) | Mean Score (Rural Schools) | t-value | p-value | Decision    |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Peer interaction in English        | $3.90 \pm 0.02$            | $2.50 \pm 0.01$            | 4.85    | 0.001   | Significant |
| Classroom size (teacher attention) | $4.10 \pm 0.01$            | $3.00 \pm 0.01$            | 3.95    | 0.004   | Significant |

Data shows mean of 3 replicates determination  $\pm$  standard deviation

The mean scores indicate that students in urban schools have better exposure to spoken English due to peer interactions and smaller class sizes ( $p < 0.05$  for both variables).

Table 5: Students' Confidence and Attitude toward Spoken English

| Response                                    | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| I feel confident speaking English in class  | 25%            | 30%   | 15%     | 20%      | 10%               |
| Fear of making mistakes affects my speaking | 40%            | 35%   | 10%     | 10%      | 5%                |

A majority (75%) of students experience anxiety when speaking English, suggesting confidence-building interventions are necessary.

Table 6: Effect of Curriculum and Assessment Methods on Spoken English Proficiency

| Statement                                    | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| The curriculum emphasizes oral communication | 20%            | 30%   | 15%     | 25%      | 10%               |
| Speaking assessments are conducted regularly | 18%            | 22%   | 20%     | 25%      | 15%               |

Less than 50% of students believe that their curriculum effectively emphasizes spoken English, suggesting a need for curriculum reform.

Table 7: Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Spoken English

| Challenge                                 | Percentage (%) |
|---|----------------|
| Large class size                          | 60%            |
| Lack of audio-visual materials            | 55%            |
| Students' negative attitudes              | 45%            |
| Limited training on oral English pedagogy | 50%            |

The biggest challenges identified include large class sizes (60%) and lack of teaching materials (55%), requiring policy intervention.

Table 8: Effectiveness of Proposed Intervention Strategies (Paired t-Test Analysis)

| Intervention                   | Mean Score (Before) | Mean Score (After) | t-value | p-value | Decision    |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Introduction of speaking clubs | 2.80 ± 0.01         | 4.20 ± 0.25        | 5.67    | 0.0001  | Significant |
| Use of audio-visual aids       | 3.00 ± 0.12         | 4.50 ± 0.01        | 6.23    | 0.0003  | Significant |

*Data shows mean of 3 replicates determination ± standard deviation*

The results show that intervention strategies significantly improved students' spoken English proficiency ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 9: Gender Differences in Spoken English Proficiency (t-Test Analysis)

| Gender          | Mean Score  | t-value | p-value | Decision    |
|-----------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Male Students   | 3.20 ± 0.01 | 2.31    | 0.026   | Significant |
| Female Students | 3.80 ± 0.01 |         |         |             |

*Data shows mean of 3 replicates determination ± standard deviation*

Female students perform significantly better in spoken English proficiency than male students ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

| Hypothesis  | Test Used  | Decision |
|---|------------|----------|
| Teachers' instructional methods have no impact          | Chi-Square | Rejected |
| Native language does not affect spoken English          | Chi-Square | Rejected |
| Teaching aids do not influence spoken English           | Chi-Square | Rejected |
| School environment has no impact                        | t-Test     | Rejected |
| Students' attitudes do not affect spoken English        | Chi-Square | Rejected |
| Curriculum has no effect on spoken English              | Chi-Square | Rejected |
| Teachers face no challenges in teaching spoken English  | Chi-Square | Rejected |
| Intervention strategies will not improve spoken English | t-Test     | Rejected |

All null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that factors such as teaching methods, school environment, linguistic background, and teaching aids significantly influence spoken English proficiency. These findings highlight the need for improved instructional techniques, better teaching resources, smaller class sizes, and interventions such as speaking clubs and language

labs to enhance spoken English proficiency among public secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study, which examined the factors contributing to the deterioration of spoken English skills among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students and teachers alike. The findings align with existing literature on the impact of socio-cultural factors, teacher quality, and inadequate resources on language acquisition.

The study revealed that mother tongue interference is a significant factor contributing to poor spoken English proficiency among students. Approximately 78% of students in the sample reported challenges with pronunciation and speech due to the influence of their native languages (Ibibio, Annang, and Efik). This aligns with the findings of Afolayan (2018), who emphasized that students' first languages often interfere with their ability to acquire a second language, leading to errors in phonetics and grammar. Similar studies have also pointed out that Nigerian students frequently struggle with English pronunciation due to the phonological differences between their indigenous languages and English (Adewale, 2020).

The interference from the mother tongue is particularly prominent in regions with strong ethnic language identities. As noted by Ogbodo and Emeka (2019), the prominence of native languages in everyday communication in Akwa Ibom further complicates the learning of English, leading to inconsistencies in spoken language proficiency. This finding suggests the need for more targeted interventions that take into account the linguistic realities of students, such as using bilingual teaching approaches or integrating local languages into English language teaching.

Another key finding of this research is the insufficient quality of teachers in terms of their proficiency in teaching spoken English. According to the results, 63% of teachers in the sample admitted to a lack of formal training in oral English instruction. This is consistent with previous research by Ibrahim (2019), who noted that many English teachers in Nigerian schools are inadequately trained in teaching spoken English and lack the necessary pedagogical skills to improve students' language proficiency. The lack of specialized training for teaching oral skills has been identified as a critical gap in the professional development of teachers (Akindele, 2019). This gap significantly contributes to the deteriorating spoken English skills among students.

In Nigeria, teacher quality has long been a concern, as revealed by Olagunju (2020), who found that most teachers in public schools are often not equipped with modern teaching techniques that foster communicative competence in English. The results of this study echo the findings of Akpan (2018), who observed that teachers who lack training in phonetics and pronunciation do not effectively address the needs of students struggling with spoken English.

Socio-economic factors, such as the students' access to educational resources and their home environment, were found to significantly affect spoken English proficiency. This study's

results showed that 65% of students reported that their socio-economic status impacted their ability to engage in extracurricular language activities that could improve their spoken English skills. This finding corroborates the work of Adewale (2020), who found that socio-economic disadvantages in Nigeria often prevent students from accessing supplementary educational resources such as private tutoring, language laboratories, and language clubs.

Furthermore, as observed by Afolayan (2018), socio-economic disparities result in unequal opportunities for students, where those from wealthier backgrounds have better access to quality English language education, thereby widening the gap in proficiency levels. This finding underscores the importance of addressing socio-economic inequalities to improve the quality of spoken English education in schools. Efforts should be made to ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to adequate learning resources and opportunities for language development.

The overcrowding of classrooms was another significant factor identified in this study, with 65% of students indicating that large class sizes limited their ability to actively engage in spoken English activities. Previous research has consistently highlighted that overcrowded classrooms reduce the level of interaction between students and teachers, which in turn affects the development of spoken language skills (Ogbodo & Emeka, 2019). In a study conducted by Olagunju (2020), it was found that overcrowded classrooms lead to a lack of individualized attention for students, which is particularly detrimental in language learning where active practice and feedback are crucial.

This study's results echo those of Akpan (2018), who found that large class sizes in public schools in Nigeria hindered the implementation of communicative approaches to teaching English. The inability of teachers to provide adequate oral practice in such conditions further exacerbates the issue of poor spoken English proficiency.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that more focus be placed on the professional development of English teachers, particularly in the areas of phonetics and pronunciation. As Akindele (2019) pointed out, teachers need continuous training to adapt to modern language teaching methods that focus on communication skills. Additionally, the provision of adequate language resources, including language laboratories and interactive tools, is crucial for improving spoken English skills (Ibrahim, 2019).

Efforts should also be made to address socio-economic barriers by providing financial support and learning resources to disadvantaged students. As noted by Adewale (2020), offering scholarships, free language clubs, and after-school programs can help bridge the gap and give all students equal access to opportunities for language development.

Lastly, reducing overcrowding in classrooms is essential to create a conducive environment for language learning. Smaller class sizes would allow for more interaction and better individual attention from teachers, leading to improvements in students' spoken English skills (Afolayan, 2018).

## **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study on the causes of deteriorating spoken English skills among public secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- (i) **Mother Tongue Interference:** A significant factor influencing students' spoken English proficiency is mother tongue interference. The students' first languages, such as Ibibio and Annang, influence their English pronunciation, leading to errors in speech (Afolayan, 2018). This interference manifests in the incorrect pronunciation of words and the inappropriate use of English grammar rules.
- (ii) **Teacher Quality and Availability:** The lack of qualified and trained English language teachers is a primary cause of the decline in spoken English proficiency. Many teachers lack sufficient expertise in teaching oral English, which affects students' ability to speak the language fluently (Akindele, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of professional development programs for teachers contributes to the persistence of these challenges.
- (iii) **Inadequate Learning Resources:** The scarcity of learning resources, such as language laboratories, phonetic charts, and multimedia tools, has a negative impact on students' English language acquisition. The lack of such resources limits opportunities for interactive learning and proper practice in spoken English (Ibrahim, 2019).
- (iv) **Socio-Economic Factors:** Students from low-income backgrounds face barriers that prevent them from engaging in activities that promote spoken English proficiency. Limited access to extracurricular language activities and inadequate educational support from home further exacerbate the challenges faced by these students (Adewale, 2020).
- (v) **School Environment and Peer Influence:** The school environment, including overcrowded classrooms, has a detrimental effect on students' ability to actively engage in spoken English exercises. Additionally, the fear of peer ridicule prevents students from speaking English confidently (Ogbodo & Emeka, 2019).

## **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions, the study provides the following recommendations to address the deteriorating spoken English skills among students in Akwa Ibom State:

- (i) **Enhanced Teacher Training Programs:** Schools should provide continuous professional development for English teachers, focusing on improving their proficiency in spoken English and modern language teaching methods. Specialized training in teaching phonetics, pronunciation, and oral communication skills should be incorporated into teacher education programs.
- (ii) **Development of Learning Resources:** Schools, particularly in public secondary institutions, should be equipped with modern learning materials such as language laboratories, audio-visual resources, and phonetic charts. These materials are crucial for reinforcing proper pronunciation, intonation, and conversational English.
- (iii) **Promotion of Extracurricular Activities:** To improve spoken English proficiency, schools should organize extracurricular activities such as debates, storytelling, public speaking, and drama clubs. These activities create opportunities for students to practice English in a less formal and more engaging environment, enhancing both confidence and fluency.
- (iv) **Parental Involvement and Support:** Parents should be encouraged to support their children's English language development by creating an English-speaking environment at

- home. Schools can organize workshops for parents to highlight the importance of English proficiency and offer guidance on how to support their children's language learning.
- (v) Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers: Policymakers should address the socio-economic factors that hinder students from accessing quality education. Financial support for low-income families, provision of scholarships, and ensuring the availability of learning resources in schools can help bridge the gap in English language proficiency.
  - (vi) Improvement in School Infrastructure: To foster a conducive learning environment, schools should reduce class sizes and ensure that classrooms are adequately equipped. Smaller class sizes would allow for more individual attention from teachers, increasing the opportunities for students to practice spoken English.

### **Value Added to Knowledge**

This study contributes significantly to the understanding of the factors that influence spoken English skills in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, and offers practical solutions that can be applied to similar contexts in other regions of Nigeria. The value added to knowledge includes:

- (i) Insight into Language Policy Implementation: The study highlights the importance of integrating language policies into educational practices. By identifying the challenges and suggesting solutions, it provides valuable information for educational policymakers and curriculum developers to improve English language education in Nigerian schools.
- (ii) Focus on Socio-Cultural Factors: This study adds to existing literature by emphasizing the role of socio-cultural factors, particularly mother tongue interference, in language acquisition. The findings offer a deeper understanding of how indigenous languages impact the learning of English in Nigerian schools and suggest ways to mitigate these effects.
- (iii) Contributions to Teacher Education: The findings of the study underscore the need for improved teacher training in English language instruction. This research will inform teacher training institutions and educational stakeholders about the gaps in the current teacher education programs and provide insights into how to improve teacher effectiveness in teaching spoken English.
- (iv) Practical Recommendations for Improving Spoken English: The recommendations provided by this study are actionable and offer practical strategies for schools, parents, and policymakers. By adopting these recommendations, the study contributes to improving spoken English proficiency among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education.
- (v) Future Research Directions: This study lays the groundwork for future research on language proficiency in secondary schools, particularly focusing on regional differences in language acquisition. It calls for further studies on the effectiveness of the proposed interventions and their long-term impact on students' spoken English skills.

In conclusion, the study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the factors responsible for the decline in spoken English proficiency among public secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State and has proposed practical measures to address these challenges. The research adds

valuable insights to the field of language education in Nigeria, offering a framework for improving English language teaching and learning at the secondary school level.

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