

African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues

Volume 29 Number 3, AUGUST, 2026 Edition

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Journal of the African Society for THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF
SOCIAL ISSUES % DEPT OF Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ABEOKUTA SOUTH, OGUN STATE

Aguda, Catherine Adebisi

*Department of English,
Christland University, Abeokuta*

Okunlola, Margaret Ayooluwa

*Department of English,
Christland University, Abeokuta*

Marcus, Adebola Rosemary

*Department of English,
Christland University, Abeokuta*

ABSTRACT

Although English is Nigeria's official language of education, government, and public life, student performance in the subject remains persistently poor at the secondary school level, and the specific classroom-level challenges that produce this outcome have received limited empirical attention outside major urban centres such as Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja. Anchored in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Mercer and Littleton's dialogic framework of exploratory talk, this study addressed this gap by investigating the challenges confronting English language teachers in public secondary schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria. The study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design. Ten public secondary schools were purposively selected from the eighteen schools operating within the Local Government Area, after which five English language teachers were randomly selected from each school, yielding a total sample of 50 respondents. Data were collected using a structured, researcher-designed questionnaire administered through Google Forms, and were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. The findings revealed that all five challenge areas investigated – instructional materials and resources, class size and classroom environment, mother-tongue interference, student attitude and motivation, and teacher professional development – were significantly perceived by respondents, with an overall mean score of 4.10 on a five-point scale. Class size and classroom environment emerged as the most significant challenge (cluster mean = 4.21), with 76% of respondents reporting class sizes of 41 or more students. Limited access to professional development was the second most pressing challenge (cluster mean = 4.17), with 72% of respondents confirming they had not attended any relevant training in three years. Inadequate instructional materials, mother-tongue interference, and low student motivation were equally significant, each returning cluster means above 4.00. The study recommends urgent government investment in instructional resources, the establishment of structured, LGA-level professional development programmes, and a review of classroom allocation policies in Southwest Nigeria.

Keywords: *English language teaching, public secondary schools, mother-tongue interference, professional development*

INTRODUCTION

The English language occupies a position of considerable importance in Nigeria's educational, administrative, and socioeconomic life. As stipulated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), English serves as the primary medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary school through all levels of secondary and tertiary education, and it functions simultaneously as the language of government, law, and the dominant vehicle of interethnic communication in a country with over 500 indigenous languages. Its significance is therefore not merely academic but deeply practical; proficiency in English is widely regarded as a prerequisite for social mobility, professional advancement, and participation in national public life.

Despite this importance, the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian public secondary schools continues to face persistent and multidimensional challenges. Scholars including Adeyemi (2012) and Oluwatoyin (2015) have documented difficulties ranging from inadequate instructional resources and overcrowded classrooms to the pervasive influence of mother-tongue interference, low student motivation, and the chronic shortage of qualified English language teachers in public institutions. These difficulties matter beyond the classroom: because English is the medium through which nearly every other subject is taught and assessed, weaknesses in its teaching depress performance across the wider curriculum and constrain students' long-term academic and occupational prospects. The challenges are not unique to any single state, but they appear with particular intensity in public school environments, where funding constraints, infrastructural deficiencies, and policy inconsistencies tend to be most acute.

In Ogun State, and specifically within Abeokuta South Local Government Area, public secondary schools operate within a sociolinguistic context shaped by the dominance of the Yoruba language in everyday community life. Students who conduct virtually all their daily communication in Yoruba face significant linguistic and cognitive demands when required to learn, think, and be assessed in English, and their teachers must manage this demand alongside material scarcity and limited institutional support. Mother-tongue interference is therefore one important dimension of the wider set of challenges this study investigates, rather than its sole focus; the sections that follow examine it alongside instructional resourcing, class size, student motivation, and teacher professional development as interacting facets of the same underlying problem.

Notwithstanding the central role of English language education in Nigeria's curriculum, student performance in English at the secondary school level remains consistently below expectations. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results published annually by WAEC consistently reveal high failure rates in English Language among Nigerian candidates, with performance in Ogun State mirroring this national pattern. While multiple factors contribute to this outcome, the challenges experienced by classroom teachers are among the most immediate and directly impactful, yet they remain comparatively under-researched. Much of the existing literature on English language teaching challenges in Nigeria draws on data from urban centres such as Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja (see, for example, Adeyemi, 2012; Oluwatoyin, 2015), and, while informative, these studies do not fully reflect the sociolinguistic, material, and institutional realities of a peri-urban Local Government Area such as Abeokuta South. This scarcity of locally grounded empirical evidence constitutes the specific gap this study addresses.

This study is significant for several groups of stakeholders. For educational administrators and policy makers in Ogun State, its findings provide an empirical basis for reviewing resource allocation, teacher training programmes, and classroom management policies. For English language teachers, it offers a formal platform through which their professional challenges are documented and brought to the attention of relevant authorities. For curriculum developers and researchers, it contributes locally grounded data to a body of literature that has tended to privilege national or urban perspectives, with implications that may extend to comparable Local Government Areas across Southwest Nigeria. The study is delimited to the fifty (50) English language teachers drawn from ten public secondary schools within Abeokuta South LGA, and its findings are not intended to be generalised beyond this specific geographical and institutional context without appropriate caution.

Against this background, the broad objective of this study is to investigate the challenges confronting English language teachers in public secondary schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. identify the major challenges faced by English language teachers in public secondary schools in Abeokuta South;
2. examine the extent to which inadequate instructional materials affect the teaching of English language in these schools;
3. examine the impact of large class sizes on effective English language instruction;
4. examine the influence of mother-tongue interference on the teaching and learning of English in the study area; and
5. examine the role of teacher qualification and professional development opportunities in English language teaching outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The English language has occupied a central and often contested position in Nigeria's educational system since the colonial period, functioning simultaneously as the medium of instruction, a compulsory school subject, and the language of official national life. The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) stipulates that English shall serve as the medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary school through all levels of secondary and tertiary education, placing enormous responsibility on English language teachers, who must not only teach the subject but also support students' ability to learn other subjects through it.

This arrangement creates a persistent structural tension: national policy treats English as the taken-for-granted vehicle of all formal learning, yet it coexists uneasily with a constitutional and educational commitment to Nigeria's indigenous languages, which the National Policy on Education also designates as media of instruction in the early years of primary education. Bamgbose (1991) characterised Nigeria's language-in-education policy as ambitious in scope but chronically underfunded in implementation, a gap that falls most heavily on teachers and students in the public school system, and more recent scholarship continues to note that this contradiction between policy aspiration and classroom reality remains largely unresolved, with the relative status of English and the indigenous languages continuing to be renegotiated rather than settled. This unresolved role-relation between English and Nigeria's indigenous languages, rather than being a merely historical curiosity, directly shapes the classroom conditions examined in this study. Similarly, Adegbija (2004) argued that the functional demands placed on English in Nigeria far outpace the institutional support available to teachers; the specific constraints he identified – underfunded teacher training, inconsistent implementation across states, and inadequate monitoring of language-in-education policy – have shown little sign of resolution in the years since, a continuity that reinforced the rationale for undertaking the present study. This structural contradiction is the backdrop against which the challenges explored in this study must be understood.

These structural constraints are reflected in the literature on the various factors that hinder effective teaching of the language in Nigerian public secondary schools, which can broadly be classified as institutional, linguistic, learner-related, and teacher-related. One of the most consistently documented challenges is the scarcity of appropriate instructional materials. Yusuf's (2012) study across public secondary schools in Kwara State found that over 70% of teachers taught without a complete set of approved textbooks, often relying on outdated or photocopied materials, while Olusegun and Adeyemi (2015), surveying Ekiti State public schools, described teachers improvising lessons without access to audio-visual equipment, language laboratories, or even functional chalkboards. Okanlawon (2018) similarly noted that public secondary schools in the Ogun Central Senatorial District operated with severely depleted teaching resources, with English departments among the worst affected. This material deprivation limits the range of teaching methods available: Communicative Language Teaching, widely recommended as the most effective approach for developing genuine proficiency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), depends heavily on resources, audio materials, reading texts, role-play scenarios, that are simply unavailable in most Nigerian public school classrooms.

Classroom overcrowding compounds this problem of resourcing. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) recommends a maximum of 35 pupils per class; in practice, many public secondary school classrooms in urban and peri-urban areas, including Abeokuta South, accommodate between 50 and 80 students (Ajayi, 2013). Adeleke (2016) found a statistically significant negative relationship between class size and student performance in oral communication, reading comprehension, and essay writing in Lagos State public schools, with teachers reporting that large classes made individual feedback practically impossible and reduced opportunities for interactive activities. Obanya (2004) has argued more broadly that the failure to address classroom overcrowding represents one of the most serious and persistent failures of Nigerian education policy, with effects that are especially acute in language-intensive subjects such as English.

Nigeria's linguistic diversity, while a source of cultural wealth, presents a further challenge for instruction. In Abeokuta South, Yoruba is the dominant community language, and most students use English primarily, and often exclusively, within the school environment. Corder (1981) coined the term "language transfer" to describe the influence of a learner's first language on second-language acquisition, a phenomenon well documented in Nigerian classrooms: Owolabi (2013) found that Yoruba-speaking students in southwest Nigeria consistently substituted Yoruba vowel sounds for English vowels, omitted grammatical morphemes such as the third-person singular -s and past tense -ed, and carried Yoruba tonal patterns into their English intonation, systematic and predictable patterns rather than random errors. Beyond phonology and grammar, mother-tongue interference also manifests as code-switching, and while Adendorff (1993) argues that code-switching can serve pedagogically useful functions such as clarifying concepts and sustaining engagement, many teachers experience it primarily as a disruption to the English-only environment they are trying to create.

Motivation is a further recurring theme. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) distinction between instrumental motivation (learning a language for practical purposes) and integrative motivation (learning it to identify with its cultural community) remains useful: Nigerian public secondary school students tend to hold primarily instrumental orientations toward English, wanting to pass

WAEC rather than to develop deep communicative competence (Adeyemi, 2012; Akinbode, 2013). Akinbode (2013) found that students in Ibadan regarded English classes chiefly as examination preparation and showed little interest in reading, writing, or conversational practice, with teachers reporting frustration at students' reluctance to engage beyond the minimum required.

Finally, teachers' professional competence and access to continuing development affect instructional quality. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) has made strides in professionalising the teaching workforce, but gaps persist between teachers trained specifically in English language education and those who teach it as a secondary subject (Oluwatoyin, 2015). Omoike and Omoruyi (2016) found that fewer than 30% of English language teachers in Edo State public schools had attended any professional development activity in the preceding three years, citing cost, distance, and school management indifference; Akyeampong (2017) situates this within a broader sub-Saharan African pattern in which continuing professional development remains one of the most underfunded dimensions of public education. Without regular opportunities to update their pedagogical knowledge, teachers in Abeokuta South public schools may be ill-equipped to address the evolving linguistic needs of their students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Zoltán Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and Neil Mercer and Karen Littleton's dialogic framework of interthinking and exploratory talk. Both frameworks were selected because they speak directly to the two dimensions this study investigates that are not purely material, student motivation and classroom interaction and because each has an established record of application to second-language classrooms in resource-constrained, multilingual settings comparable to those in Abeokuta South.

Dörnyei's L2MSS (2005), building on Gardner and Lambert's (1972) integrative-instrumental distinction and the psychology of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), explains second-language motivation through three components: the Ideal L2 Self, the future self a learner imagines as a proficient English user; the Ought-to L2 Self, shaped by the expectations of parents, teachers, and society; and the L2 Learning Experience, the immediate classroom conditions that affect motivation. The finding that students show low motivation and rarely use English outside class (Item 18, mean = 4.10) suggests that many students in Abeokuta South have not developed a compelling Ideal L2 Self, a condition worsened by demotivating classroom realities – poor materials, overcrowding, and limited teacher development – captured in the L2 Learning Experience component. Dörnyei (2009) notes that this component is the most pedagogically actionable of the three, implying that improved classroom conditions could directly raise student motivation.

Mercer and Littleton's (2007) dialogic framework, building on Barnes (1976), holds that language competence develops most powerfully through structured, purposeful classroom talk – interthinking – in which learners collaboratively question, reason, and construct understanding together. This is the framework's specific relevance to the present study: it accounts not simply for whether teaching occurs but for the quality of classroom interaction that makes teaching

effective, and it therefore provides an explanatory bridge between the structural conditions this study measures (class size, resourcing, professional development) and their pedagogical consequences. Interthinking requires small classes, teachers trained in facilitating exploratory talk, and a curriculum flexible enough for open-ended communicative tasks, conditions largely absent in this study's schools, where average class sizes exceed 50 students (Table 4.5) and most teachers have had no professional development in three years (Table 4.6). The framework also reframes learners' mother-tongue use as a potential cognitive and communicative resource rather than a disruption to be suppressed, offering an alternative to the English-only enforcement that many teachers in this study struggled to maintain (Item 16, mean = 3.88).

Together, the two frameworks are complementary: Dörnyei's model explains why students' investment in learning English is currently weak, while Mercer and Littleton's explains the interactional conditions needed for that investment to translate into genuine competence. Both point to the same conclusion: that the challenges identified in this study are not merely logistical but are bound up with learner identity, classroom interaction, and teacher professional knowledge, a conclusion reflected directly in the study's recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design, appropriate for gathering factual information about the current state of a phenomenon from a defined population without manipulating any variables (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The target population comprised all English language teachers in the approximately 18 public secondary schools operating within Abeokuta South Local Government Area, according to the Ogun State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM). Ten of these schools were purposively selected to ensure representation across different parts of the LGA and across both junior and senior secondary levels, after which five English language teachers were randomly selected from each school, giving a total sample of 50 respondents, a size consistent with Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) position that a sample of 50 is statistically representative of a population of approximately 100–120.

Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire, administered through Google Forms and distributed via WhatsApp and email over eight days, which achieved a 100% response rate. The instrument comprised three sections: Section A collected demographic data across six items; Section B contained 14 structured statements on a five-point Likert scale, grouped around the five challenge areas that structure the analytical framework of the study; instructional materials, class size, mother-tongue interference, student motivation, and professional development; and Section C posed two open-ended questions. Content validity was established through review by two specialists in English language education and one educational-measurement researcher, whose observations were incorporated before administration; reliability was established through a pilot study with ten teachers in the neighbouring Abeokuta North LGA, which returned a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81, exceeding Nunnally's (1978) recommended 0.70 threshold. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency counts and percentages for Section A, and mean scores and standard deviations for Section B, computed in Microsoft Excel, with a mean of 3.00 or above on the five-point scale adopted as the decision benchmark for a significant challenge. Responses to the open-ended items in Section C were

analysed thematically to complement the quantitative findings, and interpretation throughout was informed by the L2MSS and dialogic frameworks outlined above. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was assured, and no personally identifying information was collected. The questionnaire instrument and the anonymised dataset generated from this study have been deposited in the Mendeley Data repository and are cited, with DOI, in the reference list for verification and reuse.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents and analyses the data collected from the 50 English language teachers who participated in this study. Section 4.1 presents the demographic profile of respondents, focusing on the implications of each demographic factor for the study's findings; Section 4.2 presents the analysis of the Likert-scale items grouped by thematic cluster, using mean scores and standard deviations to determine the significance of each challenge, with a mean of 3.00 or above indicating that respondents perceived the item as a significant challenge, and a mean below 3.00 indicating disagreement.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	22	44.0
Female	28	56.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 1 shows that female teachers form a clear majority of respondents (56%, compared with 44% male). This gender imbalance is consistent with the broader feminisation of teaching, particularly at the junior secondary level, and is analytically significant because it suggests that any interventions arising from this study, such as professional development scheduling or peer-support structures, should be designed with a predominantly female teaching workforce in mind.

Table.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20–29 years	8	16.0
30–39 years	19	38.0
40–49 years	17	34.0
50 years and above	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0

The concentration of respondents in the 30–39 and 40–49 age brackets (38% and 34% respectively, together 72% of the sample) indicates a predominantly mid-career workforce. This is significant because it rules out inexperience as the primary explanation for the challenges reported later in this chapter and instead points toward structural, rather than developmental, causes.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
NCE	11	22.0
B.Ed. / B.A. (Ed.)	24	48.0
B.A./B.Sc. + PGDE	9	18.0
M.Ed. / M.A.	6	12.0
Ph.D.	0	0.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 3 shows that the great majority of respondents (92%) hold at least the NCE or a first degree in education, though only 12% hold a postgraduate qualification and none hold a doctorate. This distribution is significant chiefly for what it excludes as an explanation: the challenges identified in this study cannot be attributed to widespread underqualification, since respondents largely meet or exceed the minimum standard for secondary school teaching in Nigeria.

Table 4: Years of Teaching Experience

Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 2 years	5	10.0
2–5 years	12	24.0
6–10 years	16	32.0
11–20 years	13	26.0
Above 20 years	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 4 shows a similarly experienced workforce, with 66% of respondents having taught for six years or more. As with qualification, this finding is significant chiefly by elimination: it strengthens the inference that the challenges reported in this study stem from structural and institutional conditions rather than from inexperience or high staff turnover.

Table 5: Average Class Size

Class Size	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 30 students	3	6.0
30–40 students	9	18.0
41–50 students	18	36.0
Above 50 students	20	40.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 5 is directly significant to the study's central findings: 76% of respondents reported teaching classes of 41 students or more, and 40% reported classes exceeding 50, figures that substantially exceed the UBEC-recommended maximum of 35. This demographic finding anticipates and substantiates the Likert-scale results on class size presented in Section 4.2.

Table 6: Attendance at Professional Development Activities (Last 3 Years)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	14	28.0
No	36	72.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 6 is similarly significant: 72% of respondents had not attended any English language teaching professional development activity in the preceding three years. Combined with the experience profile in Table 4.4, this indicates that even reasonably experienced teachers are operating without updated pedagogical training, a pattern that foreshadows the professional development findings discussed in Section 4.2.

Analysis of Likert-Scale Items

The following subsections present the mean scores and standard deviations for the 14 Likert-scale items in Section B, grouped into the five thematic clusters introduced in the Methodology. Each table is followed by a short discussion of what the results mean for classroom practice; readers should expect each subsection to identify which items within a cluster are most strongly endorsed and to explain the practical consequence of that pattern for English language teaching, rather than a restatement of the figures already shown in the table. Responses are scored from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Significant Challenge; Mean < 3.00 = Not a Significant Challenge.

7: Instructional Materials and Resources (Items 7–10)

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
7	There is a severe shortage of English language textbooks and teaching materials in my school.	4.32	0.71	Significant
8	My school lacks functional equipment for English instruction.	4.18	0.83	Significant
9	I regularly spend personal funds to supplement inadequate teaching materials.	3.94	0.92	Significant
10	Available curriculum materials are outdated and poorly suited to current teaching approaches.	3.76	0.88	Significant
	Cluster Mean	4.05	0.84	Significant

The cluster mean of 4.05 confirms that inadequate instructional materials significantly constrain English language teaching in these schools. The practical implication is considerable: with Item 7 recording the highest mean in the entire questionnaire (4.32) and Item 9 showing that teachers routinely fund materials personally (mean = 3.94), instruction is being sustained largely through individual teachers' informal resourcefulness rather than institutional provision, a pattern that is unsustainable and that directly limits teachers' ability to adopt resource-dependent approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching.

Table 8: Class Size and Classroom Environment (Items 11–13)

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11	Overcrowded classrooms make it very difficult to conduct effective English lessons.	4.44	0.66	Significant
12	Large class sizes prevent adequate individual attention and feedback.	4.38	0.7	Significant
13	Physical classroom conditions are unsuitable for English instruction.	3.82	0.95	Significant
	Cluster Mean	4.21	0.77	Significant

The cluster mean of 4.21, the highest of all five themes, confirms class size and classroom environment as the most acutely felt challenge. For language teaching specifically, this matters because English instruction depends on individualised feedback and interactive practice; Items 11 and 12, both above 4.30, indicate that these are precisely the activities respondents feel overcrowding prevents, directly connecting the demographic finding in Table 4.5 to the practical erosion of communicative teaching methods.

Table 9: Mother-Tongue Interference (Items 14–16)

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
14	Students' use of indigenous languages significantly disrupts English instruction.	4.02	0.87	Significant

15	Mother-tongue interference negatively affects students' spoken and written English.	4.16	0.79	Significant
16	It is very difficult to enforce the use of English in my classroom.	3.88	0.91	Significant
	Cluster Mean	4.02	0.86	Significant

With a cluster mean of 4.02, mother-tongue interference is confirmed as a significant challenge. Its implication for teaching practice is most visible in Item 15 (mean = 4.16), which concerns both spoken and written English, the two dimensions most directly assessed in WAEC; this suggests that interference is perceived not merely as a classroom irritant but as a factor directly threatening students' examination performance.

Table 10: Student Attitude and Motivation (Items 17–18)

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
17	Many students demonstrate low motivation and a negative attitude toward English.	3.96	0.89	Significant
18	Students rarely practise or use English outside the classroom.	4.1	0.82	Significant
	Cluster Mean	4.03	0.86	Significant

The cluster mean of 4.03 confirms that student attitude and motivation constitute a significant challenge. Item 18 (mean = 4.10) is particularly instructive for teaching practice, since it indicates that classroom instruction alone cannot be relied upon to build genuine competence when students have almost no exposure to English outside school hours; this has direct implications for how much can realistically be achieved within the timetabled English lesson.

Table 11: Teacher Professional Development and Institutional Support (Items 19–20)

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
19	Opportunities for professional development for English teachers are very limited in this LGA.	4.26	0.74	Significant
20	School administration and government provide inadequate support for English language teaching.	4.08	0.86	Significant
	Cluster Mean	4.17	0.8	Significant

The cluster mean of 4.17 confirms that limited professional development and institutional support are strongly perceived as significant. Its implication for teaching quality is corroborated by the demographic finding in Table 4.6, that 72% of respondents had received no relevant training in three years, indicating that classroom practice in these schools is likely to be based on

pedagogical knowledge that has not been updated to reflect current approaches to English language teaching.

Table 12: Summary of Cluster Means Across All Five Themes

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Instructional Materials and Resources	4.05	0.84	Significant
2	Class Size and Classroom Environment	4.21	0.77	Significant
3	Mother-Tongue Interference	4.02	0.86	Significant
4	Student Attitude and Motivation	4.03	0.86	Significant
5	Professional Development and Institutional Support	4.17	0.8	Significant
	Overall Mean	4.1	0.83	Significant

Table 12 summarises the overall picture: all five thematic challenge areas returned cluster means above the 3.00 decision threshold, with an overall mean of 4.10, indicating that respondents perceive each area as a serious and interconnected obstacle to effective English language teaching. Class size and classroom environment emerged as the most severely felt challenge (mean = 4.21), closely followed by limited professional development and institutional support (mean = 4.17). Taken together, English language teachers in public secondary schools in Abeokuta South LGA face significant challenges across all five dimensions investigated, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching materials, pervasive mother-tongue interference, low student motivation, and the near-absence of professional development, that collectively constitute a serious and interconnected set of obstacles to quality English language education in this context.

DISCUSSION

The finding that instructional material inadequacy constitutes a significant challenge (cluster mean = 4.05) aligns strongly with the existing literature. Yusuf (2012) and Olusegun and Adeyemi (2015) both documented severe textbook shortages in Nigerian public secondary schools, and the present study confirms that this problem persists in Abeokuta South; the particularly high mean for Item 7 (4.32) suggests that the situation in this LGA may be more acute than the national average reported in earlier studies. The finding that teachers regularly supplement school resources with personal funds (Item 9, mean = 3.94) is financially burdensome for the teachers concerned, as it indicates that the cost of material inadequacy is being transferred from the state to individuals who are themselves operating within the modest salary structures of the Nigerian public service. What makes this finding particularly damaging for learning outcomes is its relationship with pedagogical approach: as Richards and Rodgers (2014) have argued, Communicative Language Teaching, the approach most widely recommended for developing genuine English proficiency, is heavily resource-dependent, so that when teachers lack basic tools, students are exposed to a narrower, more passive learning experience that prepares them inadequately for both examinations and real-world communication.

Class size and classroom environment emerged as the single most severely felt challenge in this study, recording the highest cluster mean of all five themes (4.21). This corroborates Adeleke's (2016) finding of a significant negative relationship between class size and English language learning outcomes in Lagos State, and echoes Obanya's (2004) broader critique of Nigeria's chronic failure to address classroom overcrowding at the policy level. The demographics of this study reinforce the severity of the problem: 76% of respondents reported class sizes of 41 or more, and 40% reported classes exceeding 50 students, figures more than 40% above the UBEC-recommended maximum. The specific consequences identified by respondents – the inability to give individual feedback, the impossibility of conducting communicative and oral activities, and the general erosion of classroom management – map precisely into the pedagogical consequences identified in the literature. In a subject like English, where oral communication, interactive tasks, and written feedback are core components of effective instruction, overcrowding does not merely inconvenience teachers; it structurally prevents them from teaching the subject as it ought to be taught.

The cluster mean of 4.02 for mother-tongue interference confirms that this is a deeply felt and widely shared challenge among English language teachers in Abeokuta South. This finding resonates with Owolabi's (2013) study of Yoruba-speaking learners in southwest Nigeria, which documented systematic patterns of phonological and syntactic transfer from Yoruba into students' English. The fact that Item 15, addressing the impact of mother-tongue interference on both spoken and written English, recorded the highest mean within this cluster (4.16) suggests that teachers are most concerned about the cumulative effect of Yoruba influence on the two dimensions of English most directly assessed in WAEC examinations. It is worth noting, however, that the literature presents a more nuanced picture than the data alone might suggest: while mother-tongue interference creates genuine challenges for formal instruction, Adendorff (1993) has argued that code-switching can serve legitimate pedagogical functions when managed strategically. The challenge for teachers in Abeokuta South is therefore not simply to suppress Yoruba but to develop classroom strategies that acknowledge students' sociolinguistic realities while progressively building English competence – a level of pedagogical sophistication that is difficult to sustain without adequate professional development.

The finding that low student motivation is a significant challenge (cluster mean = 4.03) mirrors Akinbode (2013) and Adeyemi (2012), both of whom documented predominantly instrumental orientations toward English among Nigerian secondary school students. The particularly high mean for Item 18 (4.10), addressing students' failure to use English outside the classroom, points to a fundamental limitation of the school environment as the sole site of English language development: when students spend the overwhelming majority of their waking hours in a Yoruba-dominant social environment and interact with English only during formal school hours, the rate of language acquisition is inevitably slow and gains made in the classroom are difficult to consolidate. This finding suggests that interventions aimed at improving English language outcomes in Abeokuta South cannot be confined to the classroom; broader strategies, including school-level English clubs, community reading programmes, and the integration of English-language media into students' daily experience, may be necessary complements to formal instruction.

The cluster mean of 4.17 for professional development and institutional support, combined with the demographic finding that 72% of respondents had not attended any relevant training in three years, is arguably the most policy-significant finding of this study. Omoike and Omoruyi (2016) reported a comparable pattern in Edo State, and Akyeampong (2017) has identified the chronic underfunding of continuing professional development as one of the most damaging features of public education systems across sub-Saharan Africa. The present study contributes context-specific evidence from Abeokuta South's own indigenous linguistic and institutional setting to this broader pattern, underlining the urgency of the problem in this LGA specifically. Teachers who have not had access to professional development for three or more years are teaching with knowledge and skills that may no longer reflect current best practice; in a field that has evolved significantly over the past two decades, with growing emphasis on communicative competence, task-based learning, and technology-integrated instruction, this represents a real and compounding deficit that affects not just individual teachers but the thousands of students they teach.

This study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample was confined to 50 teachers across ten schools in a single Local Government Area, so the findings, while internally robust, cannot be generalised beyond Abeokuta South without further research in comparable settings. The reliance on self-reported perception data, though standard for this type of survey, may also be subject to social desirability effects, and future research could usefully triangulate these findings with classroom observation or student-level performance data.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the challenges of teaching English language in public secondary schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, drawing on data from 50 English language teachers across ten schools; the findings are unambiguous, showing that teachers in this context face a serious, multidimensional, and interconnected set of challenges spanning material inadequacy, structural overcrowding, linguistic complexity, motivational difficulties, and chronic professional isolation, none of which exists in isolation, since a teacher working with 55 students in an ill-equipped classroom, managing pervasive mother-tongue interference, and operating without professional development support for three years is not facing five separate problems but one deeply structural problem with five visible faces. The study contributes to the existing literature by generating locally grounded empirical data from a context, Abeokuta South LGA, that has been largely absent from published research on English language teaching challenges in Nigeria, giving direct, quantifiable expression to the experiences of teachers whose daily professional realities have too often been overlooked in national education policy discussions; the overall mean score of 4.10 across all challenge dimensions is not merely a statistical finding but a signal that urgent attention is needed at the level of policy, institutional management, and teacher support if English language education in this LGA is to improve in any meaningful and sustainable way.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. To the Ogun State Government and Ministry of Education: Immediate and sustained investment should be made in the provision of approved English language textbooks and instructional materials to all public secondary schools in Abeokuta South. The persistent reliance on teachers' personal resources to fill material gaps is professionally exploitative and educationally indefensible.
- ii. To the Ogun State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM): A structured and regular professional development programme for English language teachers should be established at the LGA level, with mandatory participation at least once annually. This programme should incorporate current approaches to English language teaching, including communicative language teaching, task-based instruction, and strategies for managing multilingual classrooms.
- iii. To School Principals and Administrators: Classroom allocation policies should be reviewed to reduce class sizes to levels that permit genuine interactive English language instruction. Where physical infrastructure constraints make immediate reduction impossible, schools should explore creative scheduling and streaming arrangements as interim measures.
- iv. To English Language Teachers: Teachers are encouraged to form or strengthen peer learning communities within and across schools, sharing strategies for managing mother-tongue interference, motivating students, and improvising effective instruction under resource-constrained conditions. Such communities of practice can serve as a meaningful, low-cost form of professional development.
- v. To Curriculum Developers and Researchers: Further empirical research should be conducted into the specific sociolinguistic dynamics of English language classrooms in Abeokuta South and similar LGAs in southwest Nigeria. Curriculum materials should be developed that explicitly account for the multilingual realities of Nigerian classrooms rather than assuming a monolingual instructional context.

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