

# **Challenges facing Teaching and Learning of English Language in Public Secondary Schools in Enugu State Nigeria**

## **Abstract**

*English language is the official language in Nigeria. The teaching and learning of English is important for Nigerian students especially at the secondary school level. However, several factors have led to mass failure of the subject by students at this level. This study sought to examine the challenges to effective teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in Enugu state. The specific objectives included identifying the government factors; student based factors; teachers' related factors and school administration/management based factors that contribute to the challenges. The study adopted survey research method and hundred questionnaires were used. Data were analysed with the use of descriptive statistics (percentages and mean). Respondents agreed that government based challenges included heavy workload and curriculum ( $\bar{x}$ =2.9) and do not provide sufficient learning materials ( $\bar{x}$ =2.6). The students based challenges included anxiety and fear for the subject ( $\bar{x}$ =2.7) and scarce English practice ( $\bar{x}$ =2.7). Teachers based challenges were not good qualification ( $\bar{x}$ =2.9) and lack of adequate teaching methods and instructional materials ( $\bar{x}$ =2.8). The school administration based factors included poor planning of learning structures ( $\bar{x}$ =2.9) and provision of malfunctioning or inappropriate curriculum ( $\bar{x}$ =2.9). Government is recommended to provide less workload, relevant curriculum, sufficient learning materials and adequate training for the teachers among others.*

**Keywords: Teaching; Nigeria; Secondary, English**

## **Introduction**

Globally, English is a very important language, which is highly used in many aspects of social, economic, education and politics. The English language has been the common language of the world for decades (Mahu, 2012). Teaching and learning English is very important in schools because of its usefulness. It is estimated that there are 380 million native speakers and 300 million that utilize English as a second language and an additional 100 million who use it as a foreign language (Mahu, 2012). English is seen as a lingua franca of the world languages and this case has emphasized the importance of teaching and learning of English language in schools all over the world (Solak & Bayar, 2015). Owolabi & Nnaji (2013) stated that, English is an irresistible language as far as development is concerned because "for any nation particularly in the 3rd world to be relevant and derive the maximum benefit from the opportunities that abound in every area of human need, for personal advancement and national development, English is a sine qua non". English language is highly used in many countries including African countries. English language is originally the language of the Angles, which is later adopted as the language of classroom, government, business and commerce, education, mass media, literature and internal as well as external communication in Nigeria and most African countries (Fatiloro, 2015).

In Africa, English language is very useful for education, business, job performance, communications and many other uses. It helps foreigners and Africans to interact successfully both for learning, business and entertainment within African countries. In the case of an emigration, when you move to a different country or region, learning English will help you to communicate and integrate with the local community (Mahu, 2012). Modiano (2009) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the fact that today English learners are not learning the language so that they may be able to communicate with native speakers, but are learning it because it will be essential to them in the future in relation to work, education as well as in social activities. The widespread introduction of languages in schools has been described by Johnstone (2009), as “possibly the world's biggest policy development in education”, with English being the language most commonly introduced (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014). It is important to teach English language in secondary schools in Africa. This is because, first, it is often assumed that it is better to begin learning languages early (Hu, 2007). Secondly, economic globalization has resulted in the widespread use of English and many governments believe it is essential to have an English-speaking workforce in order to compete (Enever & Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009; Hu, 2007). Thirdly, parents want their children to develop English skills to benefit from new world orders (Enever & Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009). However, teaching English, as a foreign language is a challenging task in developing countries in general (Akbari, 2015) and Africa and Nigeria in particular. The literature on teaching English to young learners has identified a number of pressing challenges. One is that English is often introduced as a compulsory subject at primary school without due consideration of who will teach it. In some countries, a severe shortage of trained primary school teachers of English is reported (Hu, 2005; Hu, 2007; Nunan, 2003; Nur, 2003). Researchers have also come to know that some participant students have faced difficulties because of lack of material on English lessons (Solak & Bayar, 2015). Researchers also recognized the importance of structure of language in English teaching and learning process (Solak & Bayar, 2015). It is difficult for the teachers who are not the native speakers to teach English hence the situation is not satisfactory, particularly in rural areas (Teevno, 2011). Hence it is necessary to understand the nature and challenges of teaching English language in secondary schools.

In Nigeria, English language is the official language and medium of instruction in schools. Nigeria is a highly diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country, comprising of nationalities that come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, with over 450 ethnic groups and languages (Nwanyanwu, 2017). English became the official language of Nigeria when all its regions were amalgamated as one political entity at the beginning of the 20th Century (Ola-Busari, 2014). The quality of English teaching and learning from this time till about the 1980s was remarkably characterized by adequate competence on the part of teachers and learners alike (Ola-Busari, 2014). Teaching and learning of English language is fundamental for secondary schools in Nigeria. English language is considered by many as the international language (Akbari, 2015). The secondary schools prepare students for university educations in Nigeria. It is a fundamental level of education that lays foundation for admission and choice of career options for students in Nigeria. Secondary school curriculum in Nigeria is designed to encourage all students to achieve their career, intellectual and social potential as well as to understand the relevance of learning in their daily lives (Ahmadi & Lukman, 2015). English and the use of English are compulsory in entrance examinations for all candidates seeking admissions into the universities (Oribabor, 2014). For students of engineering, medicine, accounting, and economics as well as other formal disciplines in the university, English language is compulsory as a pre-requisite for entering into

the university (Oribabor, 2014). Most organizations, industries and parastatals have gone digital and Nigerians are active participants in this digital world because of their knowledge of English language (Njoku, 2017). Literacy in English language is very important to all round human development in Nigeria and anyone who wishes to be relevant in the Nigerian policy as well as the global world should learn English by all means (Njoku, 2017). There has however been a gradual decline in the quality of English teaching and learning in the last 30 years, and the situation has deteriorated so much that it has become a major national concern, especially with the failure rate recorded in the last decade in English and other subjects in the Secondary School Certificate Examination (Ola-Busari, 2014). Due to its importance it is needed to examine the reasons for the decrease in standard of teaching and learning.

A critical examination of the level of teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in Nigeria shows that it has not been effectively taught in secondary schools. Nigerian students continue to fail English language in the secondary school certificate examinations. Results of candidates who sat for both the West African Examinations Council's (WAEC's) and National Examinations Council's (NECO's) Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in recent times show that most school leavers performed poorly in English (Evue, 2013). English Language is extremely badly taught in Nigerian schools as evidenced by the poor examination results (Nwanyanwu, 2017). The 2018 senior school certificate examination result showed that 68,002, representing 21.61%, failed English Language (Daily Post, 2018). The ineffective teaching of English language in Secondary schools has led to students' poor performance in public and private examinations. In the view of the worrisome mass failure, this study sought to investigate the possible causes of the poor teaching and learning of English language in the schools. Given the state of English as a language of instruction in schools and as Nigeria's official language, it is natural to express concern over these observable deficiencies among school leavers (Evue, 2013). Despite the general awareness that many students or pupils do not perform well in English Language examinations, adequate efforts are not made to curb the trend (Acheoah & Adeoye, 2015). Regardless of all the problems encountered in teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria and Enugu State, little research (Eze, 2011) has been conducted on this problem in Enugu State. Hence this study built on the study of Eze (2011) and sought to answer the following research questions: are government, teachers, school administration and students factors contributing to inadequate teaching and learning of English language in the schools? Consequently, this study sought to ascertain the challenges facing the teaching and learning of English language in public secondary schools in Enugu State. The study specifically sought to identify government factors that contribute to inadequate teaching and learning of English language in the schools; identify student based factors that contribute to challenges of teaching and learning of English language; assess teachers' related factors that affect teaching and learning of English language and ascertain school administration/management based factors that contribute to the challenges.

## **Methodology**

The study was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria. The State is bounded in the northeast by Ebonyi State, on the north by Benue and Kogi States and to the west by Anambra State from which it was carved out in 1991 and in the south it borders with Abia State (Ogbonna and Agwu, 2013). Administratively, Enugu State is divided into 19 Local Government Areas including Isi-Uzo LGA. All public secondary schools in Isi-Uzo LGA constituted the population for this

study. Multistage sampling method was used to select the sample for the study. A summary of this sampling is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Population and Sample selection**

State	LGA	Community	Selected schools	No of School administrators	No teachers	No of students	Total sample
Enugu	<i>Isi-Uzo</i>	<i>Neke</i>	1	5	5	10	20
		<i>Mbu</i>	1	5	5	10	20
		<i>Ikem</i>	1	5	5	10	20
		<i>Eha-amufu</i>	1	5	5	10	20
		<i>Umualor</i>	1	5	5	10	20
Total	1	5	5	25	25	50	100

Source: Field survey

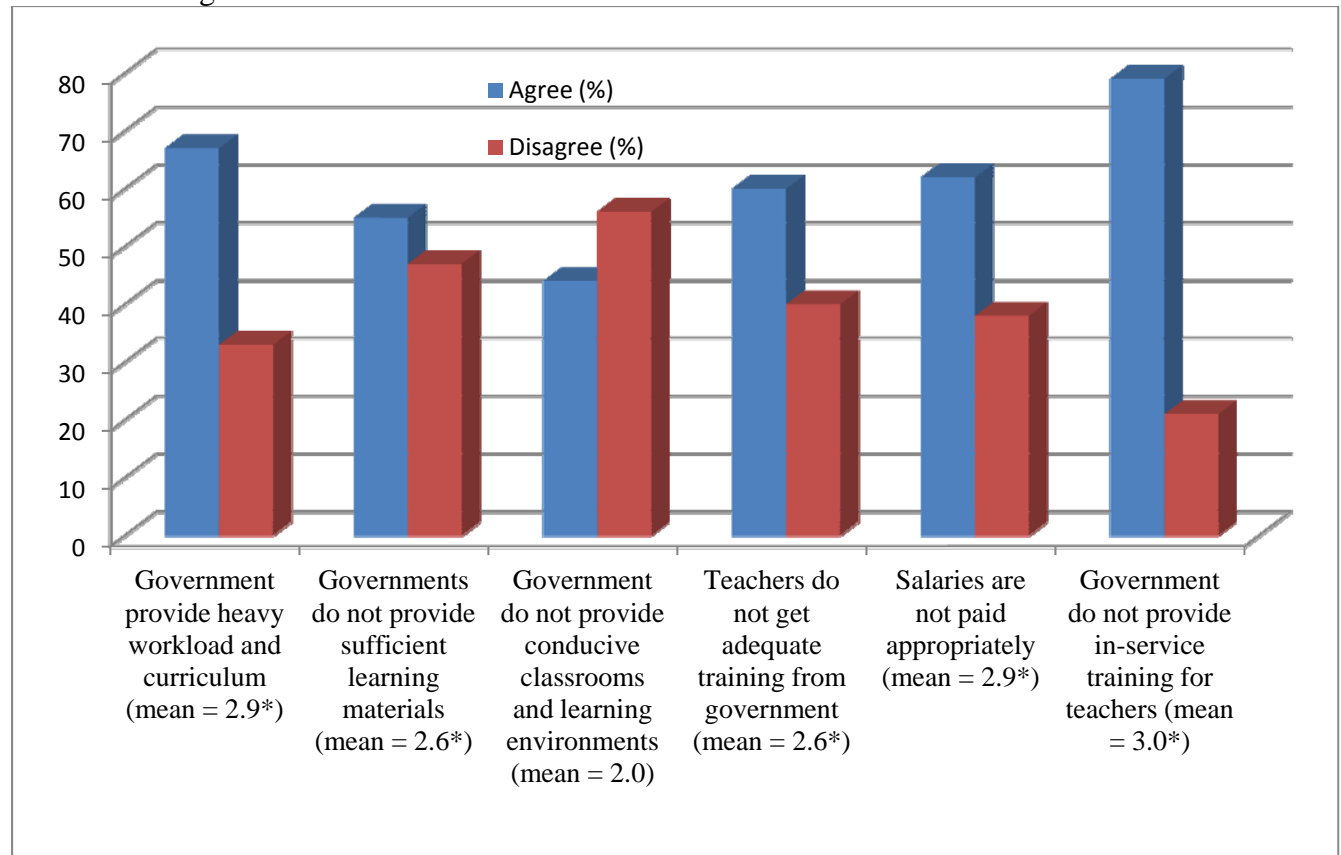
In the first stage, Isi-Uzo Local government area (LGA) of the State was selected out of the 19 LGAs in the State. In the second stage, five communities (Neke, Mbu, Ikem, Eha-amufu, Umualor) that made up the LGA were selected. In the third stage, one government (public) secondary school was purposively selected from each LGA making a total of five schools for the study based on their performance in English language senior certificate exams. In the last stage, 20 respondents including students, teachers and school administrators were selected from each school making a total of 100 respondents for this study. Senior secondary school students that were in the exam classes were selected in order to get adequate information regarding their experience of learning English in the school. English teachers were selected because of their involvement in teaching the subject. School administrators that are involved in allocation of teachers, management of facilities and timetables for English learning were selected for the study.

The study adopted survey research method because it focuses on opinions, attitude, motivation and perceptions. Hundred questionnaires were administered to school administrators, teachers and students (twenty questionnaires were administered to five English teachers, five administrative staff and 10 students in each school). Hence hundred completed questionnaire were used for the study. The instrument was validated by specialists in the field of education. It was also pre-tested in order to include missing information and improve reliability. The approvals for collection of primary data from each school were obtained from the school Principal. The questionnaire was divided into four sections based on the objectives of the study. Possible teachers-related factors; students-related factors; government-related factors and school administrative factors were listed for the respondent to select on a four point Likert-type scale of strongly agree (4), agree(3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). Data were analysed with the use of descriptive statistics (percentage and mean) in SPSS. Mean responses of 2.5 and above were accepted as the contributing factors while responses with mean scores below 2.5 were rejected.

## Results and Discussions

### Government based challenges to effective teaching and learning of English Language

Information in figure 1 show that the respondents agreed the non-provision of in-service training for teachers, the heavy workload and curriculum, inappropriate salaries as main government related challenges.



**Figure 1: Government based challenges**

Source: Field survey; \*Government related challenges in the study area

Result shows that teachers need in-service trainings from the government in order to provide better quality of teaching for the students. This agrees with Nwanyanwu (2017) that regular workshops will give teachers of English the opportunities to meet, discuss and practice with colleagues and help them develop professional awareness, which is required to make personal decisions in helping learners improve in their classrooms. According to Njoku (2017) teachers need to be exposed to current trends in language teaching, and they should also be exposed to all body of knowledge, skills and resources that would enable them teach effectively the English language in our schools. Findings also show that government do not provide adequate teaching materials (e.g.: text books, tape recorders, flannel boards, interactive/magic boards, and language laboratories, etc., - Njoku, 2017). Results also show that government don't pay the teachers 'salaries appropriately and hence limit the presentation and implementation of content of the curriculum (Ali and Ajibola, 2015). For instance, Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) embarked upon five weeks strike to demand for Teachers' Salaries Structure. Further, the government

needs to provide less workload, relevant curriculum, sufficient learning materials and adequate training for the teachers.

### **Student based challenges to effective teaching and learning of English language**

Entries in Table 2 show the major students based challenges included that students: do not practice the use of English; have anxiety and fear for the subject and have lack of interest and self-confidence among others.

**Table 2: Students based challenges**

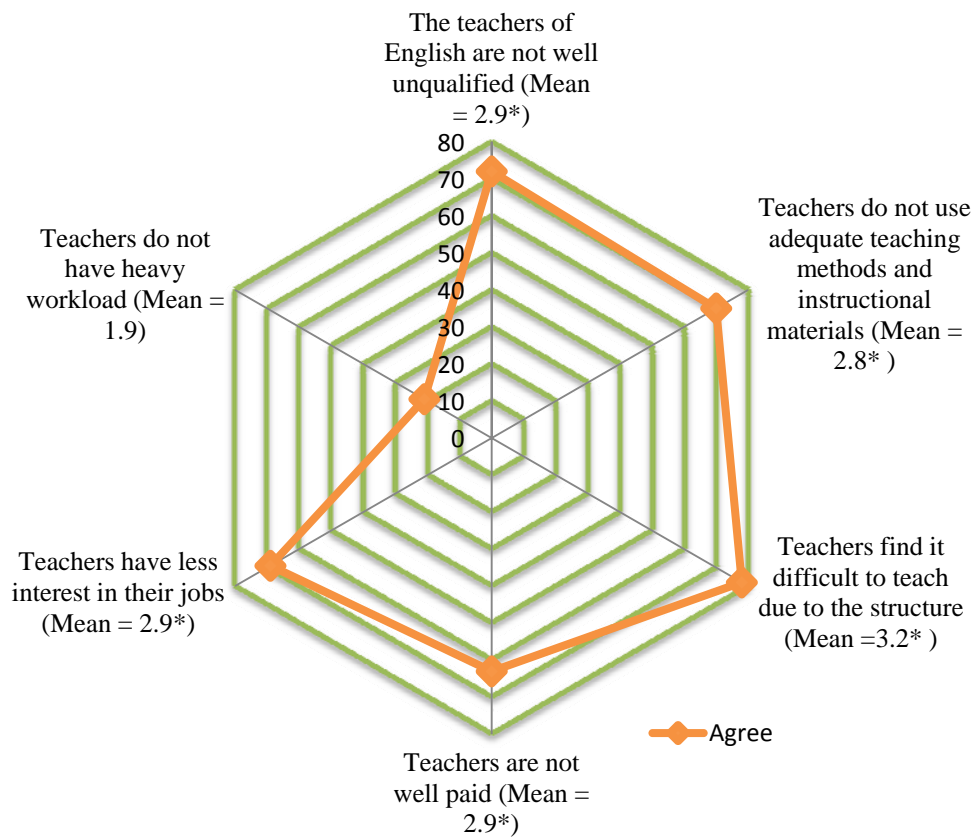
<b>Students-related factors</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>		<b>Mean (x)</b>
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	
Students have anxiety and fear for the subject	65	35	2.7*
There is less motivation for English lessons	56	44	2.4
Students do not practice use of English	65	35	2.7*
Students family background do not motivate them	65	35	2.7*
Irregular to classes/Absenteeism by students	63	37	2.6*
Lack of interest and self-confidence by students	65	35	2.7*

Source: Field survey; \*student related challenges in the study area

This agrees with Nwanyanwu (2017) that English is different from these indigenous languages, because English can only be learnt in schools in the classrooms where it is taught as a subject. The majority of learners of English in Nigeria hardly practise English after school or even outside the classrooms. Learners quickly revert to their mother tongues once they escape the classrooms (Nwanyanwu, 2017) or, in the case of Nigeria, to pidgin which now has the unofficial status of lingua franca for most Nigerian students in Secondary Schools, especially in the cities; as they hang out with their peer group. It also agrees with Fatiloro (2015) that English language learners experience mother tongue interference phenomenon when he transfers the acquired skills in his native or indigenous language to his second language. Further, most students are not interested in learning the language and do not listen to their teacher and, even if they learn something they will forget it quickly, because they are tired of its repetition (Muhammad, Ya'u, Aliyu & Hassan, 2018). These imply that for effective teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools, students need to reduce their fear and anxiety, become highly motivated to learn English and practice the use of the language on their own.

### **Teachers based challenges to effective teaching and learning of English Language**

Data in Figure 2 shows that in respondents' opinion, teachers: were not well qualified, do not use adequate teaching methods and instructional materials and find it difficult to teach due to the structure among others.



**Figure 2: Radar showing Teachers based challenges to effective teaching and learning of English Language**

Nwanyanwu (2017) states that most English teachers lack or have no basic skill teaching practice, sufficient exposure and mastery of the structure of English language; moreover, have low levels of personal language proficiency and lack of understanding of second language pedagogy. Findings show that teachers find it difficult to teach due to the structure. This is in line with Muhammad *et al*, (2018), for whom teachers should be trained keeping in view the changes made in the curriculum, as well as more creative exercises based on four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) should be included in the text book of English. The curriculum making - at the development, design, implementation or reformation' level needs the inputs of critical stakeholders (Ali & Ajibola, 2015). Findings imply that teachers should be adequately prepared and continuously trained especially on how to use different teaching methods and structures for teaching and learning of English language.

### **School Administration based challenges effective teaching and learning of English Language**

Table 3 shows the school administration factors that challenge an effective teaching and learning of English language in the secondary schools. Therefore, school administrators provide poor planning of learning structures as well as malfunctioning or inappropriate curriculum, give heavy workload to teachers, and recruit insufficient number of qualified teachers, among others.

**Table 3: School administration based challenges**

School administration factors	Percentage (%)		Mean (x)
	Agree	Disagree	
Poor planning of learning structures	65	35	2.9*
Provide malfunctioning or inappropriate curriculum	82	18	2.9*
High availability of appropriate materials	33	67	2.3
Poor infrastructures and facilities	67	33	2.7*
Administrators give heavy workload to teachers	67	33	2.7*
Insufficient number of qualified teachers	63	38	2.8*

This finding corroborates Muhammad *et al.*, (2018) that state the administrators should try to motivate teachers by providing appropriate curriculum. For Ali and Ajibola (2015) curriculum development should involve massive advocacy and sensitization of teachers, students, parents and school administrators and supervisors who are the end-users of the new curriculum for its effective implementation. Findings also show that provision of poor infrastructure affects the teaching and learning of the subject. Muhammad *et al.*, (2018) suggest that they should try to provide required facilities in the schools, and professional assistance to the teachers. The implications of these findings include that for effective teaching and learning of English language, the school administration need to properly plan the learning structures, provide appropriate curriculum, reduce workload for the teachers and recruit sufficient number of qualified teachers among others.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study recognised the need to look at the reasons for failure and ineffective teaching of English Language in secondary schools in Enugu State Nigeria. This arises from the need to provide information on various challenges that need to be tackled for more effective teaching and learning of English. This study concludes that government, students, teachers and school administration based factors contribute to challenges to effective teaching and learning of English language in the State. Heavy workload and curriculum, insufficient learning materials, students' anxiety and fear and lack of teachers' qualification and the inadequate teaching methods and instructional materials were identified as the main barriers on this matter. School administration should re-think about structures and curriculum planning.

Some limitations of this study include the limited access to funding and time to cover a more representative sample size. However, the study was able to use the available resources to get enough information to cover the research objectives. The use of other statistical techniques were



limited in the study which resulted to the use of descriptive statistics only, hence the study recommends that in order to address this limitation, further studies on the reasons and solutions to these constraints can be carried out in the area. It also recommends that in order to control the students' anxiety or fear, the schools' guidance and counselling unit should help to advice and motivate the students to reduce their fear for the subject. It also recommends that the schools can consider soliciting for the support of parents and guardians in order to reduce students' fear for the subject. This study also recommends research and use of more complex statistics such as multiple regression analyses to determine which predictors have more impact. It also recommends the need for continuous monitoring of the teaching and learning processes.

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