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PROBLEMS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UYO URBAN

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ABSTRACT

This study titled "Problems of Learning and Teaching of English As A Second Language (ESL) In Nigeria: A Study Of Selected Secondary Schools In Uyo Urban" investigates the problems affecting both the learning and teaching of English as a second language among selected secondary schools in Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State. The study uses Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Weinreich's Interference Theory as it's theoretical lenses. Using a descriptive survey design, sixty Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students and fifteen English language teachers participated in the study. Data were collected through a structured student performance test and teacher questionnaires. Findings reveal that students exhibit significant weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading comprehension, with the poorest performance recorded in pronunciation (75% incorrect) and grammar (70% incorrect). Teachers, on their part, reported facing considerable obstacles such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, lack of training in modern ESL pedagogy, and insufficient access to language laboratories. The evidence suggests a strong interconnection between these teaching challenges and the observed learning deficiencies. The study concludes that unless these systemic issues are addressed, English language proficiency among secondary school students in Uyo Urban will continue to lag behind national expectations. Recommendations include targeted teacher training, provision of language laboratories, reduction of class sizes, and curriculum adjustments to meet local ESL needs.

Keywords: ESL, Challenges, Secondary Schools, Uyo Urban, Nigeria, Language Teaching.

Introduction

Language remains one of humanity's most essential attributes, functioning as the primary means of communication, cultural transmission, and social interaction. As Hall (1968) observes, "Language is the most important single behavior that distinguishes human beings from other animals" (p. 15). This underscores the centrality of language to human existence. Edem (2005, p.14) maintains that "one of the most important roles of human language is its role as a means of communication and interaction between members of the society".

In Nigeria, English plays an especially crucial role. It is the official language, the lingua franca bridging hundreds of ethnic languages, and the principal medium of instruction in schools. (Edem 2016, Edem 2018). Bamgbose (1971) emphasizes that "English in Nigeria is not merely

a foreign language; it is the language of prestige, power, and upward social mobility" (p. 35). This makes its mastery a matter of both academic necessity and socio-economic advancement.

However, unlike in countries where English is the first language, Nigerian students acquire it as a second language (L2) after their first language (L1), often an indigenous tongue. Awoniyi (1974) notes that "the mother tongue forms the natural and easy means for a child's intellectual, emotional, social, and linguistic development" (p. 14), but warns that it can also interfere with the acquisition of a second language. This interference according to Edem (2015, a) manifests in pronunciation errors, grammatical inconsistencies, and inappropriate lexical transfers.

The challenge is further compounded in regions such as Uyo Urban, where Ibibio is the dominant local language and is used in daily communication both at home and in informal social settings (see Edem 2015a and Enang and Edem 2022 for details). This linguistic environment limits students' exposure to English outside the classroom. Edem (2015 a) points out that "exposure to the target language beyond the classroom walls is a critical factor in achieving proficiency" (p. 7), and that learners deprived of such exposure tend to struggle with fluency and comprehension.

The importance of English is reinforced by educational policy: the Nigerian government mandates a credit pass in English Language for admission into tertiary institutions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Despite this, performance in public examinations such as WAEC and NECO remains unsatisfactory. Olukpe (1981) laments that "many Nigerian secondary school students are unable to construct simple, grammatically correct sentences, a situation that reflects poorly on the nation's language education policies" (p. 4). Given this context, (Edem 2016 and Edem 2018) agree that the teaching and learning of English as a second language in Nigerian secondary schools should be seen as a matter of urgent academic concern. The challenges are not merely learner-based; they are systemic, rooted in teacher preparation, classroom conditions, and resource availability. This study builds on previous works such as Edem (2015a and Enang and Edem 2022) by broadening the focus from phonological interference to a comprehensive analysis of both learner and teacher challenges in ESL acquisition.

The centrality of English in Nigeria's educational framework cannot be overstated. As the official language and primary medium of instruction, it serves as the gateway to academic advancement, socio-economic participation, and national integration. According to Bamgbose (1971), "The English language is entrenched in Nigeria's educational, political, and socio-economic structures, to the extent that competence in English is often equated with intelligence and social status" (p. 35).

This reality makes proficiency in English a prerequisite for success in virtually all academic and professional domains. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) clearly stipulates in the National Policy on Education that "the medium of instruction in the senior years of primary school and throughout secondary and tertiary education shall be the English language" (p. 18). Furthermore, a credit pass in English is mandatory for admission into universities and other higher institutions.

Yet, despite this high stake, the performance of secondary school students in English Language remains troublingly low. WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports from the last decade consistently indicate high failure rates in English, with weaknesses spanning grammar, vocabulary usage, comprehension, and summary writing. For instance, in its 2022 report, WAEC noted that "candidates exhibited poor mastery of the rules of grammar, lack of adequate vocabulary, and inability to comprehend and interpret given passages correctly" (p. 2).

The problem is multifaceted. At the learner's level, the majority of Nigerian students acquire English as a second language, following the acquisition of their mother tongue. This means their learning process is influenced by what Weinreich (1963 and Edem 2015b) see language interference as a phenomenon whereby a speaker applies the linguistic rules of their first language to a second language, often resulting in structural and phonological errors. In Uyo Urban, Ibibio language dominates social communication, particularly in informal settings such as homes, markets, and peer interactions. While this strengthens cultural identity, it inadvertently limits the daily practical use of English. Awoniyi (1974) asserts that "language thrives in use; without sufficient opportunities for use, acquisition stagnates" (p. 14).

At the teaching level, the situation is equally concerning. Many English teachers in public secondary schools contend with large class sizes, often exceeding 50 students, making individual attention nearly impossible. In addition, access to modern teaching aids such as audio-visual equipment, interactive software, and functional language laboratories is limited. As Aboderin (1987) observes, "without the tools and materials that facilitate meaningful language learning, teaching becomes an exercise in rote memorization rather than skill acquisition" (p. 18).

Another dimension is the curriculum and pedagogical approach. The Nigerian English curriculum at secondary level often emphasizes passing examinations over communicative competence. This exam-oriented approach prioritizes grammatical drills and written exercises at the expense of speaking and listening skills, resulting in what Edem (2015 a) describes as "students who can pass written tests but cannot engage in sustained oral communication in English" (p. 11). This interplay of learner-related and teacher-related problems creates a cyclical pattern: poor foundational skills lead to classroom difficulties, which in turn reduce student motivation, further worsening performance. Olukpe (1981) warns that "unless systemic and pedagogical reforms are undertaken, the gap between desired proficiency levels and actual performance will continue to widen" (p. 6).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the acknowledged importance of English as Nigeria's official language and its role as the primary medium of instruction in schools, proficiency levels among secondary school students remain alarmingly low. In Uyo Urban, the problem is twofold: students struggle to achieve communicative competence in English, and teachers face numerous obstacles in delivering effective instruction.

Students performance data from national examinations such as West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) consistently reflect weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. WAEC Chief Examiners'

reports over the years have underscored this concern, noting persistent grammatical errors, poor vocabulary development, and limited comprehension skills (WAEC, 2022, p. 2).

The teaching context is similarly problematic. Teachers are often undertrained in modern ESL pedagogy, lack access to essential instructional resources, and are constrained by overcrowded classrooms. This situation leads to an overreliance on teacher-centered, examination-oriented methods that do little or nothing to improve students' practical communication skills. If these challenges are not systematically addressed, the gap between national language education goals and actual students' performance will continue to widen, undermining both academic achievements and broader socio-economic opportunities for students in Uyo Urban.

It is against this backdrop that the present study was conceived, to examine in detail the specific problems that hinder the effective teaching and learning of English as a second language in Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State and to propose targeted, practical solutions that address both ends of the teaching-learning process.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the major problems affecting the teaching and learning of English as a second language in ESL selected secondary schools in Uyo Urban. Specifically, the study aims to:

i. Identify the specific linguistic challenges faced by students in learning English.
ii. Investigate the pedagogical and resource-related constraints experienced by teachers.
iii. Explore the relationship between teaching challenges and students performances in English.
iv. Recommend practical solutions to improve English language teaching and learning in Uyo Urban, and its environs.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for several stakeholders, which include but are not limited to: Students who by identifying and addressing learning difficulties, the study can help improve language proficiency, which is essential for academic and career advancement. Teachers who will benefit greatly from the insights into effective teaching strategies and resource needs will enhance pedagogical effectiveness. Educational Authorities, whom the findings will inform policy decisions on curriculum design, teacher training, and resource allocation. Researchers to whom the study contributes to the growing body of literature on ESL acquisition in African contexts, particularly in urban Nigeria. Bamgbose (1971) aptly notes that "the health of a nation's language policy can be measured by the proficiency of its citizens in the official language" (p. 40). By improving ESL outcomes, this study indirectly supports national development goals.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on selected secondary schools in Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State, involving Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students and selected English language teachers. It examines both learner-related and teacher-related factors affecting English language acquisition, with emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension skills, as well as pedagogical practices and resource availability.

Several theories provide insight into the challenges of learning English as a second language. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis argues that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language input slightly above their current proficiency level, a concept he terms i+1. This has direct implications for ESL teaching in Uyo Urban: if students are not regularly exposed to comprehensible but challenging English input, their progress will stagnate.

Theoretical Framework: Input Hypothesis and Interference Theory

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

The Input Hypothesis, developed by Krashen in 1982, is one of the most influential theories in second language acquisition. At its core, Stephen Krashen, (1982, p. 21) states that "language is acquired not through conscious learning of rules, but through understanding messages, or receiving 'comprehensible input'". This comprehensible input must be slightly beyond the learner's current competence, a concept Krashen describes as i+1.

In the context of English as a second language in Uyo Urban, the Input Hypothesis is particularly relevant because students often have limited exposure to authentic, rich English input. Most of their interactions occur in Ibibio, the dominant local language, and classroom instruction is frequently examination-oriented rather than communicatively driven. Krashen (1982, p. 22) emphasizes that "if input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided". This means that without sustained exposure to meaningful English in listening, reading, and interaction, students cannot internalize correct grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation patterns. For instance, in schools lacking language laboratories, students may hear only the teacher's speech, which is sometimes itself influenced by mother tongue phonology. This limits the variety and quality of i+1 input, slowing acquisition.

Weinreich's Interference Theory

Uriel Weinreich, in his work, Languages in Contact (1963), formulated the Interference Theory to explain how features of a learner's first language (L1) affect the acquisition of a second language (L2). Uriel Weinreich, (1963, p. 1) defines interference as "instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language"

This theory identifies the transfer of phonological, lexical, and grammatical features from L1 to L2 as a major cause of persistent errors. In Uyo Urban, Ibibio's phonology and syntax are markedly different from English. For example, Ibibio lacks certain consonant clusters found in English, leading to epenthesis (the insertion of vowels) in words like school pronounced as iskul. Weinreich (1963, p. 23) notes that "phonological interference is most resistant to change and often persists even in advanced stages of bilingualism", which explains why many learners maintain a noticeable Ibibio accent in English. Grammatical interference is equally significant. Ibibio sentence structure often differs from English word order and tense marking, leading to errors such as omission of auxiliary verbs or direct translation of idiomatic expressions (Edem 2015a, 2015b).

While Krashen's Input Hypothesis explains the process of language acquisition through exposure to comprehensible input, Weinreich's Interference Theory explains the obstacles learners face when their L1 influences L2 production. In other words, Krashen focuses on what

learners need, steady, comprehensible, slightly challenging input, to develop proficiency. Weinreich focuses on what learners bring into the process, entrenched patterns from the mother tongue that shape and sometimes hinder the acquisition of correct forms in the new language.

The challenges of learning and teaching English as a second language in Uyo Urban cannot be explained by a single theoretical lens. While insufficient input explains why students struggle to acquire new forms, mother tongue interference explains why even when forms are learned, they may be systematically altered in production. Therefore, using both theories allows for a dual-focus analysis, one on the environmental and instructional factors (Krashen), and one on the linguistic and cognitive transfer factors (Weinreich). This dual approach provides a stronger basis for both diagnosing the problems and recommending interventions.

By combining these two frameworks, this study can more comprehensively account for both the lack of adequate English input in Uyo Urban schools and the strong influence of Ibibio on learner output. Krashen's theory helps to frame recommendations on enriching the quantity and quality of English exposure, while Weinreich's theory grounds the discussion of common learner errors in a clear linguistic explanation. Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning, suggesting that collaboration with more proficient speakers accelerates acquisition. However, in Uyo Urban, such opportunities are limited outside the classroom due to the dominance of Ibibio in daily communication.

Review of Related Literature

English in Nigeria

The English language occupies a unique sociolinguistic position in Nigeria. It functions simultaneously as the official language, the language of education, and the lingua franca bridging over 500 indigenous languages. Bamgbose (1971) affirms that "English in Nigeria is not merely a tool for communication; it is a gatekeeper for social mobility and access to power" (p. 35). Thus, view is collaborated by Edem, 2015a; Edem 2023 when he observes that, this dual identity, as both an imported colonial language and a national unifier, has contributed to its resilience in the Nigerian context. Its role extends beyond academia to domains such as governance, business, and media. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014), "the English language shall be the medium of instruction in the last three years of primary school and throughout secondary and tertiary education" (p. 18). This policy has entrenched English as the language of intellectual and professional advancement. However, it also places immense pressure on learners to achieve proficiency within the limited exposure time available in school environments. In regions such as Uyo Urban, where Ibibio dominates everyday interaction, students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom hampers acquisition. As Awoniyi (1974) notes, "Language thrives in habitual use, and where the second language is restricted to formal settings, its mastery will be correspondingly slow" (p. 14).

Mother Tongue Interference

Mother tongue interference remains one of the most persistent obstacles in ESL acquisition in Nigeria. Weinreich (1963) defines it as "instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (p. 1). In Uyo Urban, Ibibio phonology significantly influences English

pronunciation. For instance, the absence of certain consonant clusters in Ibibio results in the insertion of vowels when pronouncing English words e.g., school pronounced as skul. (Edem 2015b, p.11-12).

Edem (2023) observes that "pronunciation errors of this kind are not merely slips of the tongue; they are systematic and rooted in the learner's phonological system" (p. 10). Grammatical interference is also common. The structural patterns of Ibibio, particularly in sentence formation, are sometimes transferred to English, resulting in constructions that deviate from Standard English norms.

Second Language Learning and Challenges

The process of second language acquisition (SLA) is shaped by complex interactions between cognitive, social, and environmental factors. Lado (1957) defines SLA as "the process by which people develop the ability to use another language after the first language has been acquired" (p. 3). This process is influenced heavily by the learner's first language (L1), a fact underscored by the concept of language interference.

According to Enang & Edem (2022, p. 447), "The multilingual situation of Nigeria often interferes with the acquisition of English, as learners are constantly negotiating between their mother tongue and the target language." This directly addresses one of the core problems of learning English in Uyo secondary schools: interference from the mother tongue. Students frequently code-switch between Anaang, Ibibio, or other local languages, which hinders mastery of English syntax and phonology. Teachers thus face the challenge of correcting interference errors while maintaining student motivation.

Weinreich (1963) describes interference as "instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (p. 1). In the Nigerian context, this often manifests in the transfer of phonological patterns, grammatical structures, and lexical items from the mother tongue into English.

Edem (2015a), in his study of Mother tongue Interference among Ibibio learners of English, in Uyo Urban observes that "exposure to incorrect phonological models early in the learning process can fossilize into permanent pronunciation habits, making later correction extremely difficult" (p. 7). This aligns with the experience in Uyo Urban, where learners often acquire English informally from peers or untrained teachers before formal instruction begins.

Common ESL Problems in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Several studies have documented recurring problems in the learning of English as a second language in Nigeria. Olukpe (1981) laments that "many Nigerian secondary school students are unable to construct even basic grammatically correct sentences, and their written work is marred by tense inconsistencies and limited vocabulary" (p. 4). Similarly, WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports (2022) have consistently cited weaknesses in "sentence construction, spelling, and comprehension" (p. 2) and same is replicated in Edem (2015a).

Edem (2023, p. 92) submits that, "Words cannot stand in isolation, as they are related to each other in a text to produce predetermined meaning. This was achieved through the author's

careful use of cohesive devices such as reiteration, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and metonymy." This underscores the importance of cohesive devices in comprehension. Many Nigerian secondary school learners in Uyo fail to grasp these semantic relations, leading to weak reading skills and poor essay writing. The passage illustrates that one major teaching problem is the inability to transfer theoretical knowledge of vocabulary into practical, meaningful usage. Fofanwa (1975) points to poor foundational teaching at the primary level as a significant factor, stating that "students' inability to grasp basic grammatical rules in secondary school, is often traceable to inadequate exposure to correct models in the formative years" (p. 6). This observation resonates with the situation in Uyo Urban, where the influence of the home language and lack of early exposure to English combine to produce a weaker initial linguistic competence.

Teaching Approaches and Methodological Issues

Effective ESL teaching requires strategies that integrate the four core skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, within communicative contexts. Aboderin (1987) stresses that "without a deliberate emphasis on communicative competence, language instruction risks producing students who can pass written examinations but cannot use the language effectively in real-life situations" (p. 18).

Edem (2018, p. 14), sees Nigerian English as "that variety of world English learnt, spoken and written by Nigerians who are born and/or brought up within the Nigerian environment." Here, Edem highlights the localized adaptation of English ("Nigerian English"). For learners in Secondary Schools in Uyo Urban, this dual exposure, to both "Nigerian English" at home and "Standard English" in school, creates confusion and inconsistency. The nativisation process complicates the teaching task, as teachers must constantly balance intelligibility with standard norms.

Unfortunately, in many Nigerian secondary schools, the dominant approach remains the grammar-translation method, where lessons focus on rote memorization of rules and translation exercises. Hall (1968) warns that "language learning divorced from meaningful use is unlikely to produce communicative competence" (p. 102). This mismatch between teaching method and communicative needs is a key factor in poor ESL outcomes in Uyo Urban. Moreover, the absence of functional language laboratories and audio-visual aids prevents teachers from exposing students to authentic English usage. Edem (2015a) emphasizes that "pronunciation and listening comprehension cannot be mastered through textbooks alone; learners need repeated exposure to native or near-native speech models" (p. 9).

Teacher Competence and Resource Availability

The quality of ESL teaching is heavily dependent on teacher preparation and access to teaching resources. According to Mackey (1972), "The teacher's command of the language and his skill in applying suitable methodologies are decisive factors in determining the learner's success" (p. 217). In Uyo Urban, many English teachers have degrees in English but lack specialized training in ESL pedagogy.

Aboderin (1987) highlights that "the absence of in-service training opportunities results in teachers relying on outdated methods, thereby perpetuating the cycle of low proficiency among learners" (p. 21). Additionally, overcrowded classrooms, sometimes exceeding 50

students per teacher, further strain the teaching process, making individual feedback rare. Resource scarcity compounds the problem. As Edem (2015a) observes, "even the best-trained teacher will struggle to achieve results in the absence of adequate instructional materials" (p. 12). In the sampled Uyo Urban schools, teachers reported insufficient textbooks, lack of audio-visual aids, and inadequate access to internet sources.

Another view to consider is the exposure to grammar without adequate instructional interpretation. This is most common during political campaigns. As Edem (2015b, p. 5), asserts, "Clauses of reason also occur; for instance: Complacency on your part to go now to scrutinize, to monitor and to ensure an authentic, reliable, clean, trustworthy, good, effective and thorough review is an unpatriotic act." This reveals the complex sentence structures typical of Nigerian campaign texts, which can overwhelm learners of English as a second language. For secondary school students in Uyo Urban, exposure to such elaborate syntactic forms without adequate scaffolding contributes to comprehension problems, showing how the teaching of English struggles with contextual linguistic overload.

The literature reveals that the challenges of learning and teaching ESL in Nigeria, and specifically in Uyo Urban, are deeply intertwined. They span learner-related issues (interference, limited exposure, poor foundation), teacher-related factors (training gaps, large class sizes), and systemic constraints (resource shortages, outdated methodologies). These findings provide the conceptual foundation for the present study's methodology and analysis.

Research Methodology

This study employed the descriptive survey design. This design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a sample population in order to describe, analyze, and interpret prevailing conditions related to the teaching and learning of English as a second language (ESL) in Secondary Schools in Uyo Urban. As Nwana (1981) notes, "the survey design is most effective when the objective is to study existing conditions for the purpose of making decisions for improvement" (p. 57).

Population and Sampling

The population comprised all Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students and English language teachers in select Secondary Schools in Uyo Urban. According to records from the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education (2024), there are approximately 1,200 SS3 students and 45 English language teachers in the study area.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select three secondary schools within Uyo Urban. From these schools, 60 SS3 students (10 from 6 schools) and 15 English teachers were purposively selected, making a total sample of 75 participants. This approach ensured that both learners and instructors were properly represented.

Instrumentation

In this study, two instruments were used:

i. Student Performance Test (SPT): This tested students' proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension.
ii. Teacher Questionnaire on ESL Challenges (TQEC): This elicited information on resource availability, pedagogical approaches, and classroom constraints.

Data Collection Procedure and Method of Analysis

The Student Performance Test was administered to the selected students in their classrooms under examination conditions. The Teacher Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and collected after completion. Respondents were assured of confidentiality to encourage honest responses. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used to analyse the data. Results were presented in tables for clarity as shown below:

Data Presentation

Students' Performance in ESL

Table 1: Students' Performance in ESL Skills (N = 60)

Skill Areas	Number of Students with correct answers	Percentage Correct (%)	Percentage Incorrect (%)
Grammar	18	30	70
Vocabulary	24	40	60
Pronunciation	15	25	75
Comprehension	27	45	55

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork 2025

The data from table 1 reveals that the poorest performance was in pronunciation (75% incorrect), followed by grammar (70% incorrect). Vocabulary and comprehension also recorded high error rates (60% and 55% incorrect respectively).

Teachers' Reported Challenges in ESL Teaching

Table 2: Teachers' Reported Challenges (N = 15)

Challenge	Number of Teachers Reporting	Percentage (%)
Large Class Size	12	80
Inadequate Instructional Materials	11	73
Lack of Language Laboratory	10	67
Limited Training in Modern ESL Pedagogy	9	60
Exam-oriented Curriculum	8	53
Students' Low Motivation	7	47

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork 2025

Large class sizes and inadequate instructional materials emerged as the most reported constraints, affecting over 70% of the teachers.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study present a clear and troubling picture of the ESL landscape in Selected Secondary Schools in Uyo Urban. The high error rates in pronunciation and grammar confirm earlier observations by Edem (2015a) that "structural and phonological interference from the mother tongue remains one of the most stubborn barriers to ESL mastery in Nigeria" (p. 9). As an ESL researcher and observer of classroom dynamics, the researcher finds that

these pronunciation errors are not random; they are rooted in deep phonological habits shaped by the Ibibio language, which lacks certain English sounds and consonant clusters.

Again, Edem (2015a and 2015b) observes that, the grammar weaknesses, mirror the grammatical structures of the mother tongue. Students often transfer Ibibio syntactic patterns into English, resulting in sentences that may be meaningful locally but deviate from Standard English norms. For example, the tendency to omit auxiliary verbs in certain contexts is traceable to Ibibio syntax. From the teaching side, large class sizes (reported by 80% of teachers) limit the possibility of individualized feedback, which is crucial in language learning. In the researcher's observation of ESL classrooms, once class sizes exceed 40, the teacher's role becomes largely supervisory rather than facilitative. The lack of instructional materials further compounds the problem, without functional language laboratories, students' listening and pronunciation skills cannot be adequately developed.

The finding that exam-oriented curricula drive classroom practices is particularly important here. When teaching is shaped by WAEC/NECO requirements, skills like speaking and listening are sidelined because they are not directly examined. As Edem (2015a) notes, "The examination tail wags the instructional dog in Nigerian classrooms" (p. 13). One striking observation from this work is the interdependence between teacher and learner challenges. Poor resources affect teaching quality, which in turn limits learner progress. Low learner proficiency can demotivate teachers, creating a feedback loophole of underachievement. Breaking this cycle will ultimately require systemic changes, teacher retraining, resource provision, and curriculum reforms.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the problems of learning and teaching English as a second language in select Secondary Schools in Uyo Urban are both structural and pedagogical. On the learner's side, mother tongue interference, weak grammar, poor pronunciation, and limited vocabulary hinder proficiency and output. On the teaching side, large class sizes, inadequate materials, absence of language laboratories, and limited training in modern ESL pedagogy constrain instructional effectiveness. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated efforts by educational authorities, teachers, and the community. It is the view of the work that without such intervention, students will continue to leave most secondary schools without the communicative competence necessary for academic success and socio-economic mobility which endangers sustainable development in line with the quest for improved and qualitative education in the country.

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