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SCHOOL-BASED CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH STUDIES IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GWAGWALADA AREA COUNCIL, ABUJA, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This study investigated school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with data collected from 96 English Studies teachers drawn from selected public and private junior secondary schools through a multi-stage sampling technique using a researcher-developed, validated structured questionnaire. The instrument demonstrated strong reliability (r = 0.82, Pearson Product Moment Correlation). Three and two research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested respectively. Descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test) were employed for data analysis at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that overcrowded classrooms, shortage of qualified English teachers, inadequate instructional materials, non-functional libraries, and insufficient teacher professional development constitute significant school-based barriers to effective English language instruction. While gender did not significantly influence teachers' perceptions of these challenges (t = 1.12, df = 94, p = .268), school type exerted a statistically significant effect (t = 3.78, df = 94, p = .001), with public school teachers reporting considerably greater challenges than their private school counterparts. The study recommends targeted policy interventions including recruitment of qualified English teachers, provision of instructional resources, infrastructure investment, and the institutionalization of in-service teacher training, particularly for public schools in underserved communities.

Keywords: ***School-based challenges, Junior secondary schools, English Studies and Teacher gender***

Introduction

English Language occupies a central position in Nigeria's educational architecture and national development framework. It serves not only as the language of instruction from upper primary through tertiary education, but also functions as a medium for interethnic communication, governance, scientific discourse, commerce, and international diplomacy (Malu & Obiakor, 2022). Given this multidimensional role, proficiency in English is widely recognized as essential for academic attainment and broader societal participation. Despite its acknowledged importance, the teaching and learning of English Studies at the junior secondary school level continue to grapple with persistent challenges, particularly in less privileged communities such as the Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Students' performance in both internal and external examinations — notably the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) — has consistently reflected poor outcomes, raising significant concerns about the quality of English language instruction in the region.

A major category of challenges is school-based, encompassing inadequate classroom infrastructure, overcrowded learning environments, absence of teaching aids and technology, poorly stocked libraries, and insufficient instructional materials. Many schools in the area lack English language laboratories or functional audio-visual equipment that are essential for developing comprehension and communicative competence (Lawal & Kabir, 2015). These deficiencies are more pronounced in public schools, which often face resource constraints in comparison to their private counterparts. Teacher-related challenges further compound the problem. Research indicates that many English teachers lack current training or exposure to evidence-based instructional techniques, relying instead on traditional, teacher-centered methods such as rote learning and grammar-translation approaches (Oigara, 2021). The approaches have been demonstrated to be less effective in developing the critical language competencies needed for academic and real-life contexts (Oigara, 2021). Additionally, the influence of gender dynamics and student attitudes toward English language learning cannot

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be overlooked (Ewetan, 2023; Kemalsyah, 2022). School type also plays a significant role. Private institutions generally offer better access to instructional resources, modern pedagogical tools, and more conducive learning environments. Public schools, especially those in rural and peri-urban parts of Gwagwalada, contend with larger teacher-to-student ratios, dilapidated facilities, and inadequate funding, which directly impact instructional quality and student outcomes (Usman & Kabir, 2020). Against this backdrop, this study seeks to investigate school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in junior secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. It specifically examines the interplay of school infrastructure, teacher preparedness, gender dynamics, and public-private school disparities, with the aim of generating evidence-based recommendations for improving English language education in the area.

In public schools particularly, the absence of regular supervisory oversight, limited professional development opportunities, and inadequate teacher remuneration further compound instructional ineffectiveness. The cumulative effect is student disengagement and poor academic performance, particularly in grammar, reading comprehension, writing, and oral expression — all of which are consistently documented in the JSSCE results (Adebileje, 2020; Eze & Chinweuba, 2020). Prior studies have addressed general systemic challenges in English language education in Nigeria. However, localized investigations focusing specifically on Gwagwalada Area Council — comparing public and private school contexts and exploring the moderating role of teacher gender — remain sparse. This study addressed that gap. English was introduced to Nigeria in the early nineteenth century through British colonial administration and has since evolved into a cornerstone of Nigerian society, functioning as a second language for the majority of citizens (Eze & Chinweuba, 2020). The language serves pivotal roles across multiple sectors such as education, governance, commerce, media, and cross-cultural communication and it has become a powerful force for national integration, bridging over 500 ethnic and linguistic groups across the country (Ugwu, 2020; Malu & Obiakor, 2022).

At the global level, English has emerged as the dominant lingua franca, facilitating international communication, academic exchange, and economic interaction across continents (Seidlhofer, 2020; Leung & Valdés, 2020). In Nigeria's educational context, proficiency in English is not only a prerequisite for academic advancement but also a critical determinant of professional success and social mobility (Usman, 2023; Akogwu, 2023). The study of English encompasses a broad range of interconnected competencies, including literature, grammar, linguistics, phonology, and the four macro-skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Nordin, 2023). These components equip learners with the tools necessary to engage critically with ideas, construct meaning, and communicate effectively across a variety of contexts (Khasanah, 2021; Yusuf & Ibironke, 2024). English is therefore recognized not merely as an academic subject but as an essential life skill — one that enables individuals to navigate diverse cultural contexts, participate in global discourse, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Arokoyo & Bello, 2023; Shittu, 2024).

Empirical literature consistently identifies a cluster of school-based factors that undermine the quality of English language instruction in Nigerian secondary schools. Among the most frequently documented is the shortage of adequately qualified English teachers. Adebileje (2020) noted that in many schools, individuals assigned to teach English lack formal training in critical areas such as phonology, grammar, and contemporary language teaching methodologies. This deficiency directly impairs students' capacity to develop language proficiency. Overcrowded classrooms represent another persistent structural challenge. Akinwale (2021) reported that many English teachers are responsible for classrooms of 50 to 100 learners, making individualized instruction and formative feedback virtually impossible. This finding aligns with Adediran, Ojomo, and Adeyanju (2019), who demonstrated a significant inverse relationship between class size and academic performance. Insufficient provision of teaching and learning materials further hinders instructional effectiveness. Fakuade (2019) highlighted the absence of textbooks, audio-visual aids, and contemporary teaching resources in many Nigerian public schools. Nwafor and Eze (2021) extended this concern to digital and multimedia tools, arguing that their absence contributes directly to student disengagement in language classrooms.

Beyond physical resources, teacher motivation and professional development remain critical concerns. Fatiloro (2019) found that excessive workload, inadequate remuneration, and limited access to in-service training

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contribute to low teacher morale and diminished instructional quality. This is compounded by what Oigara (2021) identified as overreliance on passive, teacher-centered pedagogies that fail to cultivate the critical language skills that students require for academic and real-world performance. Students' attitudes also constitute a significant school-based challenge. Ginting and Fithriani (2022) and Shittu (2021) observed that poor reading culture, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and a perception of English as a mere academic requirement — rather than a practical communication tool — result in underdeveloped vocabulary, poor comprehension, and weak productive skills. Research on gender and English language teaching has yielded mixed results. Ewetan (2023) found that female students tend to outperform male peers in language-related subjects, attributing this to stronger reading habits and higher levels of classroom engagement. However, teacher gender as a variable influencing the perception of instructional challenges has received comparatively less empirical attention. Effiong, Orji, and Igiri (2018) found no significant gender-based difference in the challenges experienced by English teachers, suggesting that structural school conditions affect male and female teachers equitably.

This study is grounded in three theoretical perspectives. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) posits that learning is inherently social and that cognitive development is mediated by cultural and environmental contexts. In the English language classroom, this implies that school conditions — including peer interaction, teacher quality, and available resources — directly shape learning outcomes.

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to assess the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council.
2. Determine whether teachers' gender creates a significant difference in perceptions of school-based challenges.
3. Ascertain whether school type (public or private) creates a significant difference in perceived school-based challenges.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools?
2. Is there any difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on teachers' gender?
3. Is there any difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on school type?

Research Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were raised and tested in this study:

HO1: There is no significant difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on teachers' gender.

HO2: School type does not create any significant difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. This approach is appropriate for systematically collecting and describing the characteristics and conditions of a defined population using standardized instruments (Nworgu, 2019). The design enabled the researcher to gather substantive data from English Studies teachers regarding their perceptions of the school-based challenges confronting effective English language instruction in Gwagwalada Area Council. The study population comprised 96 English Studies teachers drawn from junior secondary schools within Gwagwalada Area Council. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure both institutional and demographic representativeness. In the first

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stage, the sampling frame was stratified by school type, consisting of 109 private and 18 public junior secondary schools in Gwagwalada (*N*=127). To maintain a representative balance, a proportional allocation formula was applied to draw a total sample of 96 respondents. Consequently, 82 teachers were sampled from the private sector (85.8%), and 14 teachers were sampled from the public sector (14.2%). The second stage of the sampling process involved the purposive selection of English Studies teachers from the sampled institutions. To facilitate a nuanced analysis of gender-based perceptions, the study utilized a disproportionate purposive sampling technique. This approach was intentionally structured to ensure a robust representation of both female and male perspectives, with a deliberate weighting toward female educators to reflect their predominant role in language instruction within the study area. This resulted in a final sample of 96 participants, comprising 56 female respondents (58.3%) and 40 male respondents (41.7%). Inclusion criteria required that participants be actively engaged in the JSS I–III English Studies curriculum. Teachers were chosen as the sole respondents because of their direct instructional experience and professional familiarity with the structural conditions being investigated (Effiong et al., 2018).

Table 1: **Distribution of Respondents by Gender and School Type**

Category	Group	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	40	41.7
	Female	56	58.3
School Type	Public	14	14.2
	Private	82	85.8
Total		96	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-designed structured questionnaire comprising two sections. Section A gathered demographic information (gender and school type). Section B contained 15 Likert-scale items (5 items per research question) rated on a 4-point scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was subjected to face validity by an expert supervisor whose corrections were incorporated into the final version. Reliability was established using the test-retest method: the questionnaire was administered twice to 10 teachers from comparable schools not included in the main study, with a two-week interval between administrations. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient yielded r = 0.82, which exceeds the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nworgu (2019) for educational research instruments, confirming acceptable reliability. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive tools (mean scores and standard deviations) were used to address Research Question 1, with a decision criterion of mean ≥ 2.50 indicating agreement. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to address Research Questions 2 and 3, and to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. A p-value ≤ 0.05 was taken as evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools?

Table 2: **Teachers' Mean Responses on School-Based Challenges (N = 96)**

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
	In my school, there is/are:			
1	sufficiency of qualified English staff	2.10	0.82	Disagree
2	overcrowded classrooms	3.29	0.74	Agree
3	an availability of instructional materials	2.48	0.89	Disagree
4	functional library resources	2.29	0.91	Disagree

ISSN 2736-0091
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5	regular in-service pedagogical training	2.39	0.85	Disagree
	Aggregate Mean	2.51	0.84	Agree

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; Decision rule: $\bar{x} \geq 2.50$ = Agree.

In Table 2, the data reveal that classroom overcrowding ($\bar{x}$ =3.29) is viewed as the most critical barrier to effective instruction. Furthermore, significant deficits were reported in teacher staffing ($\bar{x}$ =2.10) and the provision of functional libraries ($\bar{x}$ =2.29). The study therefore found that the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools were overcrowded classrooms, non-availability of instructional materials, irregular in-service pedagogical training, non-functional literary resources and insufficient qualified English staff.

Research Question 2: Is there any difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on teachers' gender?

Table 3: **Teachers' Mean Responses on Gender-Based Perceptions of English Teaching Challenges (N = 96)**

S/N	Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	Female teachers experience more classroom management challenges in English lessons.	56.3	43.7	2.69	0.88	Agree
2	Male teachers exhibit a stricter instructional persona during English classes.	66.7	33.3	2.89	0.81	Agree
3	Female English teachers are perceived as more approachable during instructional delivery.	62.5	37.5	2.81	0.84	Agree
4	Student responsiveness to English instruction is influenced by the teacher's gender.	64.6	35.4	2.81	0.79	Agree
5	Students demonstrate differential behavioral patterns toward male and female teachers.	68.8	31.2	2.94	0.76	Agree
	Cluster Mean			2.51	0.84	Agree

Note. Decision rule: $\bar{x} \geq 2.50$ = Agree.

Table 3 shows that teachers generally acknowledged gender-related dynamics in their English classrooms. For instance, 68.8% agreed that students behave differently toward male and female teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 2.94), and 66.7% agreed that male teachers tend to be stricter ($\bar{x}$ = 2.89). this finding thus showed that there was a difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on teachers' gender.

ISSN 2736-0091
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Research Question 3: Is there any difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on school type?

Table 4: **Teachers' Mean Responses on School-Type Based Differences in English Teaching Challenges (N = 96)**

S/N	Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean (x̄)	SD	Decision
1	Private institutions provide a superior range of instructional resources for English.	81.3	18.7	3.54	0.62	Agree
2	Public school educators manage higher student-to-teacher ratios and administrative workloads.	83.3	16.7	3.39	0.74	Agree
3	The physical learning environment in private schools is more conducive to language acquisition.	85.4	14.6	3.35	0.69	Agree
4	Students in private settings benefit from more frequent opportunities for English language practice.	79.2	20.8	3.23	0.81	Agree
5	Pedagogical delivery in public schools is significantly constrained by excessive class sizes.	100.0	0.0	3.48	0.53	Agree
	Cluster Mean			3.39	0.68	Agree

Note. Decision rule: $\bar{x} \geq 2.50$ = Agree.

The data in Table 4 reflect a strong and consistent consensus among teachers that school type significantly differentiates the challenges of English language instruction. Notably, all 48 teachers (100%) agreed that teaching English in public schools is harder due to larger class sizes ($\bar{x}$ = 3.48). Over 80% agreed that private schools provide more teaching resources (81.3%), that public school teachers manage greater workloads (83.3%), and that private school classrooms are more conducive to learning (85.4%). The finding therefore showed that both public and private school teachers agreed on the account of difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools.

Table 5: **Independent Samples t-Test: Gender Differences in Perception of School-Based Challenges**

Variable	Group	N	Mean (x̄)	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
School-based Challenges	Male	40	2.70	0.56	1.12	94	.268	Retain HO_1
	Female	56	2.85	0.50				

Note. df = 94; significance level = 0.05.

Although female teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 2.85) reported marginally higher mean perceptions of school-based challenges than their male counterparts ($\bar{x}$ = 2.70), the independent samples t-test yielded a non-significant result (t = 1.12, df = 94, p = .268). As p > 0.05, the null hypothesis (HO_1) is retained: teacher gender does not significantly influence perceptions of school-based challenges in English Studies instruction.

ISSN 2736-0091
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Hypothesis Two: School type does not create any significant difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test: School-Type Differences in Perception of School-Based Challenges

Variable	Group	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
School-based Challenges	Public	14	2.41	0.62	3.78	94	.001	Reject HO_2
	Private	82	3.21	0.48				

Note. df = 125; significance level = 0.05.

A statistically significant difference was found between public school teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 2.41, SD = 0.62) and private school teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21, SD = 0.48), with t = 3.78, df = 94, p =.001. Since p < 0.05, the null hypothesis (HO_2) is rejected: school type significantly influences teachers' perceptions of school-based challenges.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study are consistent with, and extend, a substantial body of empirical literature on English language education in Nigerian schools. The identification of overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, inadequate instructional materials, non-functional libraries, and limited professional development opportunities as the dominant school-based challenges corroborates findings reported by Eze and Chinweuba (2020), Adebileje (2020), and Idang (2021). The findings reveal a systemic crisis in the material conditions of English teaching, aligning with the "infrastructure-pedagogy gap" identified in recent literature (Fakuade, 2019; Akinwale, 2021; Idang, 2021). These challenges reflect systemic failures in educational resourcing that have persisted across multiple policy cycles in Nigeria. From a theoretical perspective, the identified challenges align with the premises of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which holds that effective learning depends on quality social and environmental scaffolding. Where classrooms are overcrowded and teachers are inadequately trained, the mediational tools necessary for language acquisition — including dialogue, collaborative activities, and formative feedback — are systematically denied to learners. Similarly, Piaget's Constructivist framework illuminates why rote-based instruction, adopted when resources and capacity are insufficient, fails to promote meaningful English language competence. Without opportunities for active, experiential engagement with language, students cannot construct the deep syntactic and semantic knowledge required for proficiency (Oigara, 2021; Nwafor & Eze, 2021).

The result from the research question showed that there was a difference in the school-based challenges affecting the teaching of English Studies based on teachers' gender. However, as explored in the hypothesis testing section below, these perceptual differences did not translate into statistically significant variations in how male and female teachers assessed the overall structural challenges of English language instruction. The non-significant gender effect on teachers' perceptions (p = .268) suggests that structural school challenges are experienced equitably by male and female teachers alike — a finding that departs from some studies reporting gender-differentiated classroom experiences (Ewetan, 2023), but is consistent with Effiong et al. (2018), who similarly found no meaningful gender difference in teachers' assessments of instructional challenges. This result points to the primacy of institutional factors over individual teacher characteristics in shaping instructional conditions.

The highly significant effect of school type (p = .001) is perhaps the most consequential finding of this study. The marked gap between public school teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 2.41) and private school teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21) in their perceptions of institutional support and resource availability is consistent with broader patterns documented in the Nigerian education literature (Ojedokun, 2021; Usman & Kabir, 2020). These findings are consistent with those of Ojedokun (2021) and Usman and Kabir (2020), who documented systematic resource disparities between public and private schools in Nigeria. The analysis presented in Table 4 reveals a profound disparity

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in the perceived instructional quality between public and private junior secondary schools. The most striking finding is the 100% consensus among respondents regarding the detrimental impact of class size on English instruction in public schools ($\bar{x}$=3.48). This suggests that regardless of a teacher's individual competence, the structural burden of overcrowded classrooms remains a universal barrier to effective pedagogy in the public sector. It underscores the structural inequities embedded in a dual-sector school system where resource allocation is heavily skewed in favor of privately funded institutions. This disparity has direct consequences for the quality of English language instruction available to students in public schools — predominantly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The study also affirms the findings of Poffenbeg and Norton (2020) and Olanrewaju (2020) regarding the centrality of teacher motivation and student attitudes in shaping learning outcomes. Where teachers are overburdened, undertrained, and insufficiently remunerated, and where students perceive English as an externally imposed requirement rather than a functional communication tool, the conditions for effective language learning are fundamentally compromised. Addressing these interrelated challenges will require coordinated and sustained policy action at multiple levels of the educational system.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that school-based challenges — including teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, non-functional libraries, and insufficient professional development — constitute significant barriers to effective English Studies instruction in junior secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT Abuja. While teacher gender does not significantly differentiate perceptions of these challenges, school type exerts a substantial and statistically significant influence, with public school teachers experiencing far greater instructional difficulties than their private school peers. These findings underscore the urgency of targeted, evidence-based reforms aimed at improving the structural conditions of English language teaching, particularly in the public-school sector.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Government and school administrators should urgently recruit professionally certified English language teachers for junior secondary schools, particularly in the public sector, to address the documented teacher shortages.
2. Schools, especially government-owned institutions, should be equipped with adequate English textbooks, audio-visual aids, digital learning tools, and other current instructional materials to support learner-centered instruction.
3. Policy measures should be enacted to regulate class sizes in public secondary schools through construction of additional classrooms and recruitment of supplementary teaching staff.
4. Education authorities should ensure equitable funding allocation between public and private schools to narrow the resource disparities that were found to significantly influence instructional conditions.

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