



Assessment of the Implementation of English Language Curriculum in Junior Secondary Schools in Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study critically assessed the implementation of English language curriculum in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State, Nigeria, focusing on key aspects of curriculum delivery and educational quality. The research employed a descriptive design, encompassing a comprehensive examination of 293 teachers from 104 public junior secondary schools. The study investigated three primary dimensions: teachers' qualifications, teaching methods, and student-teacher ratio. Through descriptive statistical analysis, the research revealed significant insights into the current state of English language education in the region. Regarding teacher qualification, findings indicated that 35.1% of teachers holds National Certificate in Education (NCE), with 26.3% possessing B.Ed and 22.2% holding BSc. (Ed) certificates. Notably, advanced qualifications such as M.Ed were minimal, suggesting limited professional development opportunities. Teaching methods demonstrated diverse pedagogical approaches, with universal adoption of demonstration and question-and-answer methods. Reading aloud (95.6%) and discussion (73.7%) were prominently used, while drill and practice techniques were least employed. A critical finding was the deviation from recommended student-teacher ratios, with classes exceeding the prescribed 1:35 benchmark. This overcrowding potentially compromises instructional effectiveness and individual student engagement. The study recommends comprehensive professional development programs, targeted teaching method training, and strategic resource allocation to address systemic challenges. The research provides valuable insights into improving English language curriculum implementation and educational quality in Nigerian junior secondary schools AND underscore the need for holistic interventions to enhance linguistic competence and support broader educational development objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a process of acquiring knowledge. Bellingham (2007) in Sarti & Agu ed (2018) see education as any process, formal or informal, that helps develop potentialities of human beings, including their knowledge, capabilities, behaviour patterns and values. In a similar context, education can be seen as a developmental process provided by a school or other institutions that are organised mainly for instruction and learning. Education can be summed up as the aggregate of all the processes by which an individual and society in general develops abilities, attitudes and values for good development. Sarti & Agu Ed (2018). The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013) describes education as an instrument for effective national developments.

Education at the secondary school level comes between the primary school and the tertiary institution. Secondary education is responsible for the development of the young during their adolescence, the most rapid phase of their physical, mental and emotional growth. It is at this very education level, particularly in its first cycle, where values and attitudes formed at primary school level are more firmly ingrained alongside the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Samuel, 2015) quoted in Avaa C.C et al (2023). The desire to achieve the aforementioned goals prompted the introduction of more subjects into the secondary schools among which is English language.

Communication is one of the most important aspects of man's existence: since man is not self-sufficient, his dependence on others for food, clothing, shelter and others is possible through communication. Language is a means of communication. For a languages to be a good means of communication for a particular group of people, that language should be common to almost all persons in that community. Nigeria as a multi-ethnic country has many languages. This obviously hinders communication. Eko (1987). This is why the proper implementation of English Language curriculum especially at the junior secondary school is important. English language is to a greater extent, an instrument of love, peace, unity and a socializing instrument.

English language plays clearly identifiable roles in Nigeria. These can be seen in education, science and technology, inter-ethnic communication, trade, governance, the mass media, international communication and national literature. Proficiency in English language is required for any progress in education in Nigeria. That is why right from the last three years of primary education English language is the medium of instruction in the Nigeria school system. Okpara (2015). English for Junior Secondary Schools is carefully written for students at the junior secondary classes. It extensively covers the new NERDC curriculum of both the junior WAEC and NECO curriculum. Students are taken through the rudiments of

5 basic parts of English Language Comprehension, Literature, Grammar, Oral English, and Writing.

This paper presents a critical assessment of the English language curricula for Junior Secondary School (JSS). The JSS curriculum is designed for the first three years of secondary education. It serves as a follow-up to the JSS curriculum and as a preparation for tertiary education. The national English language curriculum is designed principally for learners, teachers and writers of instructional materials. An examination of the structure of the curricula is followed by an evaluation of their content (vocabulary development, grammatical structures, spoken English, listening and reading comprehension, writing, and literature). While the curricula are definite improvements on previous efforts, there is still much room for improvement, especially with respect to the development of linguistic and communicative competence. Also, guidance should be provided to teachers with respect to the categories of Nigerian English that are acceptable for academic purposes, and there should be a proper integration of the various teaching skills.

Curriculum implementation is the practical application of an innovation. The implementation phase of a syllabus is the most critical stage in curricular change. The success of a curriculum will be determined by teachers, who are frequently "the agents in the implementation process". In any country, the quality of education cannot be greater than the quality of the teachers. Teachers' quality is a key determinant of student achievement, since research has demonstrated that the outcome of students' performance is based on teacher quality (Otis, 2014). Beauchamp (1975) observed that incorporating teachers in curriculum preparation improves curriculum implementation.

Obeta (2014) explained that curriculum involves all the processes taken to ensure that as individual learner is passing through the school, the school is also passing through the learner. Professionally speaking, Tanner and Tanner (1975), cited by Okoro (2015) see curriculum as planned and guided learning experience and intended learning outcome, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience under the auspices of the school, for the learners' continuous and wilful growth in personal social competence. Curriculum also involves all the experiences a student garners in school under the tutelage of a teacher. It is the total learning activities or educative experiences which an educational institution offers, through its education programmes designed to meet specific objectives.

Onwuka. (2014) posits that curriculum is a total experience with which the school deals with, in educating the young people. Also, Mkpa (2013) sees curriculum as a vehicle through which the school strives towards the achievement of educational goals; be it those of the national, local government or even the community schools. The content of English Language for example, at all levels of education consists of the four language skills which include reading, writing, speaking and

listening. These skills consist of vocabulary and comprehension, summary, grammar, oral English, lexis and structure, essay and letter writing. It is based on this content that different schemes and topics for different classes are developed (Wordu & Damgbor, 2020).

English Language is one of the core subjects in Nigeria secondary school curriculum. Kedcity (2010) reveals that the aim of English Language curriculum is to (i) broaden and deepen the language competence of students through basic education, (ii) develop the students' interest and confidence in the studying of English Language and also gain mastery of the subject matter; (iii) expand the students' knowledge on the understanding of various cultures in which English Language is anchored; (iv) develop and prepare students for advance studies, other skills, for combating the changing knowledge based on technology, entrepreneurship, etc. The rationales for learning English Language; is that of English Language being a Language of global communication. Language generally, helps individuals in developing right values and attitudes, establishes and maintains relationships with people, increases their understanding of different cultures, as well as widens their world views.

Akogwu (2018) further opines that English Language is a Language of international business, trade and professional communication. It plays an important role in fostering learners abilities needed for life-long learning, creativity, problem-solving, innovation as well as adjusting to the frequent /unpredictable changes and demands a society gives. In addition, English Language creates a world for leisure and entertainment for learners. Thus, mastery of the English language becomes critical for learners in Nigeria, particularly in Zone B of Benue State, because it opens up new opportunities for intellectual development, social development, cultural understanding, educational attainment, career advancement, and individual personal fulfilment. Amuzo (2017) discovered that the quality and quantity of teachers have a significant impact on implementing the curriculum in Nigerian schools, particularly at the secondary level.

Public concern has long existed about children's low performance in external English exams. Reports of widespread failure in the country's primary and junior secondary tests have been linked to its weak foundation. The frequent revelation of substandard Basic Education Certificate (BECE) results have sparked widespread interest and inquiry into the issue. The causes of low performance are blamed on parents, teachers, students and governmental causes, focusing on the educational methodologies teachers use, as stated in Otis (2014).

The guidelines for the implementation of English language curriculum in secondary schools as contained in National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) is established under some content areas among which are; teaching method, teacher-pupil ratio, infrastructure, teachers' qualification, instructional materials, monitoring/supervision, guidance and counselling, library, strategic planning, students/students transition,

curriculum, certification, quality assurance, assessment of learning achievement, community empowerment, publications, statistics/education management information system, procurement of goods and procurement of works among a host of others. However, of interest to the researchers among the content areas of quality implementation of English language curriculum in Junior secondary schools as specified in the guideline are; teachers' qualification, teaching method, teacher-student ratio, instructional materials and monitoring/supervision.

The involvement of qualified teachers in the implementation of the English language curriculum in junior secondary schools cannot be overemphasized. In the NPE (2004) implementation guideline, the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) is prescribed as the minimum qualification for teaching. It is not an over statement to say that teaching is a profession of the experts and therefore should not be left in the hands of non-qualified and half-baked teachers. The teacher is the major instrument in the implementation of any curriculum not only English language as a subject. The teachers therefore should be knowledgeable enough to understand the subject matter and the best way of implementing the curriculum. Nearly, all issues, whether related to goals, learning, achievement, organization of programme or performance of the educational system involves comprehensive analysis of the roles of teachers, their behaviour, performances, remuneration, incentives, skills and how they are used by the system. The teacher is the main determinant of quality education, but if he/she is apathetic, uncommitted, uninspired, lazy, unmotivated, immoral or anti-social, the whole nation will be doomed (Aneke, 2015).

Teachers-students' ratio in class is another vital consideration in the NPE (2004) implementation guideline. It is stipulated in the guideline that, for UBE, the teacher-students' ratio should be:

1. 1:25 in a class, for Primary Education
2. 1:35 in a class for Junior Secondary and
3. 1:40 in a class for Senior Secondary respectively.

With this prescription, students' enrolment for the programme can be better monitored. For the secondary schools as a concern for this study, it can be noted that, a class with more than 35 students attached to a teacher will be considered overpopulated and vice versa.

In order to successfully implement the English language curriculum, it is also prescribed that the provision of adequate instructional materials for effective teaching and learning process should be ensured. Instructional materials refer to materials that are used to facilitate teaching and learning. Despite teaching this subject in junior secondary school, there is a high exam failure rate. This is a cause for concern and a call to action. Time of exposure, model exposure to, practice or usage opportunities, interference, code-mixing, and

multilingualism are some issues the learners must deal with. Can this be linked to a failure to execute the English curriculum properly? As a result, the researcher wishes to analyze the implementation of the English language curriculum in junior secondary schools in Benue State's Zone B Educational Zone. The researchers think that the study's findings will assist the following groups: classroom teachers, the government, curriculum planners, and future researchers.

Objectives

Specifically, the study Sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the qualification of English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State.
2. To assess the teaching methods used by English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State.
3. Ascertain the teacher-students' ratio in English language classes in Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State.

Research Questions:

The study sought answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the qualifications of English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State?
2. What are the teaching methods used by English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State?
3. What is the teacher-students' ratio in English language classes in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population for the study comprised 293 teachers from 104 public Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B Educational Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. Since the

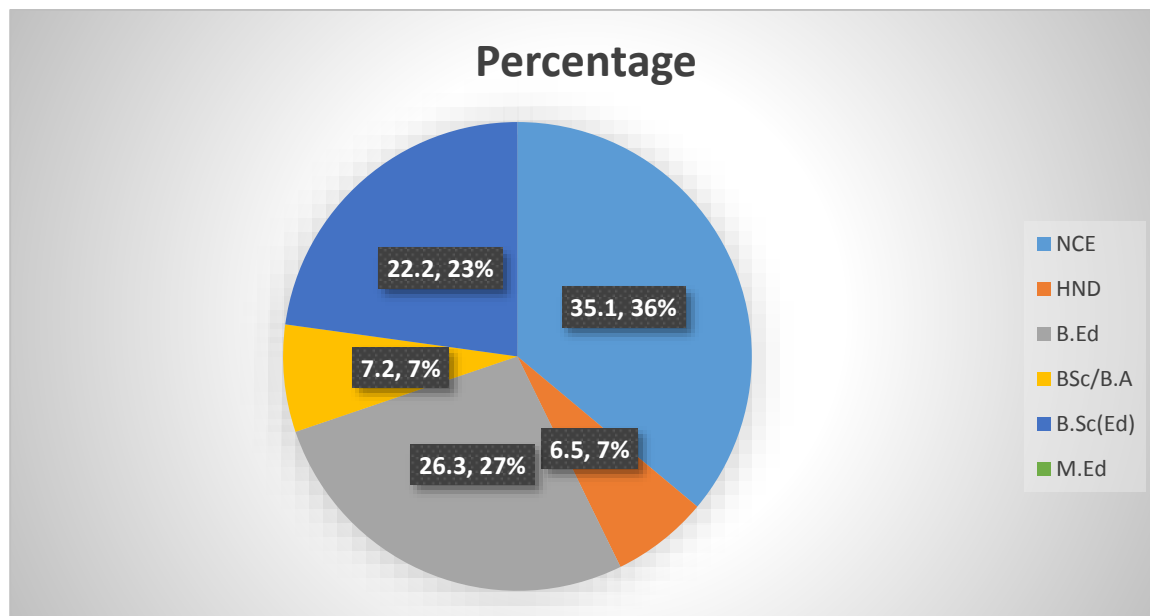
population was not large, no sampling was employed. Hence, the entire population of teachers and schools were used. Two adopted instruments – a questionnaire and a checklist adopted from the UBE minimum guideline for implementation of English Language were used for data collection. The questionnaire was titled 'Teacher Qualification and Teaching Method Questionnaire (TQTMQ)' and was divided into two clusters: A and B focusing on research question 1 and 2 while the checklist focused on eliciting data to answer research question 3. Since the instruments were standards for implementation adopted from the Universal Basic Education minimum guideline for the implementation of English Language, they were only subjected to face validation by an expert. The data for the study was collected by the researchers with the aid of four (4) research assistants. The Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of Frequency Counts and Percentages to answer the research questions raised for the study. Histogram and Pie Chart were used to represent the data analyzed.

RESULTS

Research Questions 1: What are the qualifications of English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State?

Table 1: Frequency Counts and Percentages of the Qualifications of English Language Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) Zone B of Benue State.

S/N	Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	NCE	103	35.1
2	OND	0	0.0
3	HND	19	6.5
4	B.Ed	77	26.3
5	BSc/B.A	21	7.2
6	BSc. (Ed).	65	22.2
7	M.Ed	8	2.7
8	MA	0	0.0
9	PhD	0	0.0
	Total	293	100



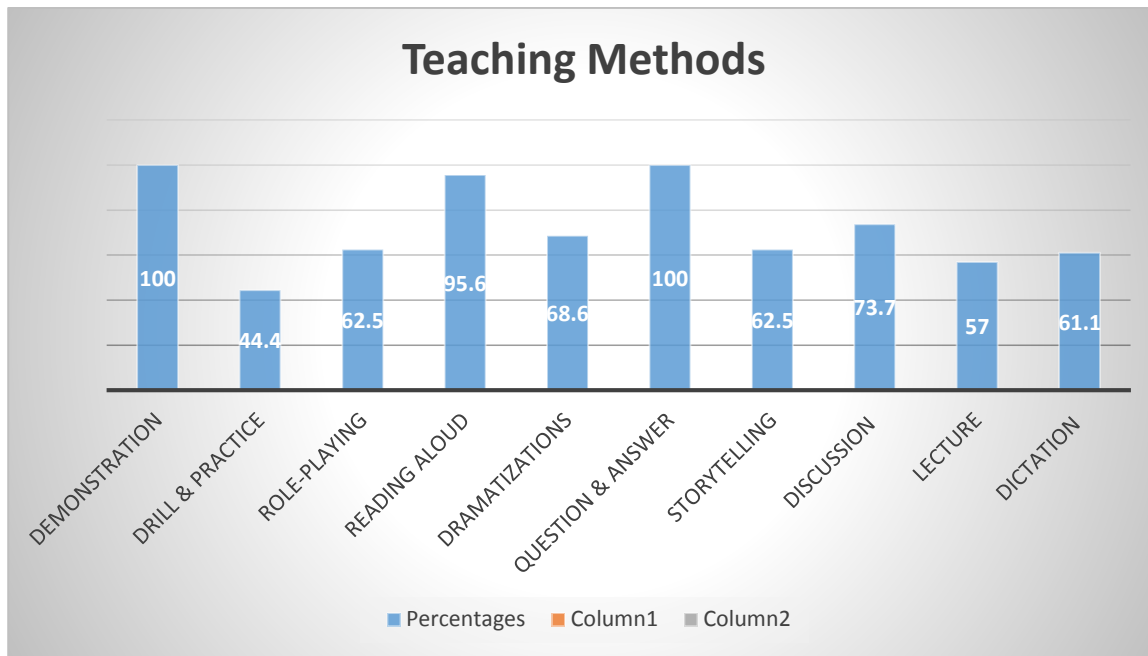
The data presented in Table 1 highlights the qualifications of English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools within Zone B of Benue State. A total of 293 teachers were assessed, with the majority (35.1%) holders of NCE (National Certificate in Education), indicating that a significant proportion have foundational teaching qualifications. This is followed by 26.3% possessing a B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) and 22.2% holders of BSc. (Ed), showing a considerable number of teachers with degrees focused on education.

However, advanced qualifications such as M.Ed (2.7%) and no instances of MA or PhD qualifications suggest limited postgraduate specialization. The absence of OND, MA, and PhD holders highlights gaps in higher academic advancement among teachers in the zone.

Research Questions 2: What are the teaching methods used by English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State?

Table 2: Frequency count and percentages of Teaching Methods used by English Language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State

S/N	Teaching Methods	Used	% Used	Not Used	% Not Used	Remark
1	Demonstration	293	100.0	0	0.0	Used
2	Drill and Practice	130	44.4	163	55.6	Not Used
3	Role-Playing	183	62.5	110	37.5	Used
4	Reading Aloud	280	95.6	19	4.6	Used
5	Dramatizations	201	68.6	92	31.4	Used
6	Questions and answer	293	100.0	0	0.0	Used
7	Storytelling	183	62.5	110	37.5	Used
8	Discussion	216	73.7	77	26.3	Used
9	Lecture	167	57.0	126	43.0	Used
10	Dictation	179	61.1	114	38.9	Used



The data in Table 2 indicates the teaching methods utilized by English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State. Demonstration and the Question-and-Answer methods are universally used, with 100% adoption. Reading Aloud (95.6%) and Discussion (73.7%) are also highly employed, reflecting their popularity for engaging students. Methods such as Role-Playing (62.5%), Storytelling (62.5%), Dramatizations (68.6%), and

Dictation (61.1%) show moderate usage, while Drill and Practice is the least used (44.4%), indicating limited emphasis on repetitive practice. The Lecture method (57.0%) suggests a moderate reliance on teacher-centered instruction.

Research Question 3: What is the teacher-students' ratio in English language classes in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State?

Table 3: Students-Teacher Ratio Adopted for by English Language in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State

S/N	Students-Teacher Ratio	Min. Required	Adopted	Remark
1	Below 35	1:35	X	Not Adopted
2	1:35	1:35	X	Not Adopted
3	Above 1:35	1:35	✓	Adopted

The data in Table 3 reveals that the recommended student-teacher ratio of 1:35 for teaching English language in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State is not being implemented. Instead, the actual ratio adopted exceeds this benchmark, as indicated by the remark "Adopted" under the category Above 1:35. This deviation from the minimum requirement suggests an overcrowded classroom environment, which may impede effective teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings on the qualifications of English language teachers in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) in Zone B of Benue State align with existing literature emphasizing

the critical role of teacher qualifications in ensuring the effective implementation of curricula. According to Darling-Hammond (2000), teachers with higher qualifications and specialized training in education exhibit greater mastery of subject content and pedagogy, leading to improved student outcomes. However, the predominance of NCE holders in this study suggests that many teachers possess only the minimum teaching qualification, which may limit their ability to deliver the curriculum comprehensively. Amadi (2019) asserts that the lack of postgraduate qualifications among teachers, particularly in a subject as critical as English, undermines the goal of developing linguistic competence and critical thinking skills in students. This raises concerns about the preparedness of educators to meet the demands of contemporary educational frameworks and the dynamic needs of learners. Moreover, Mkpa (2013) highlights that

continuous professional development and advanced academic exposure are vital for teachers to adapt to evolving instructional practices and effectively implement curriculum objectives. The limited representation of postgraduate qualifications among the teachers in Zone B suggests a need for targeted interventions to enhance their professional growth and capacity.

The study's findings regarding the teaching methods employed by English language teachers reveal a mixed approach, with a combination of traditional and student-centered strategies. This is consistent with the literature, which underscores the importance of diverse instructional strategies to address varying learner needs and promote active engagement. For instance, Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism emphasizes the role of interactive and participatory teaching methods, such as discussion, storytelling, and role-playing, in fostering deeper comprehension and language acquisition. These methods provide opportunities for learners to construct meaning collaboratively, bridging their prior knowledge with new content. However, the limited use of drill and practice highlights a potential gap in reinforcing foundational skills, which scholars like Ellis (2015) argue is crucial for language mastery, especially in multilingual contexts like Nigeria. The reliance on teacher-centered approaches, such as lectures, may reflect the influence of systemic challenges, including large class sizes and limited instructional resources, which constrain teachers' ability to implement more engaging, student-focused methods (Afolabi, 2021).

The findings regarding the teacher-student ratio underscore significant challenges in meeting the recommended standards for classroom size, as outlined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). Research by Blatchford et al. (2011) demonstrates that overcrowded classrooms hinder individualized instruction and limit opportunities for meaningful interaction between teachers and students. This directly affects the quality of language instruction, as teachers struggle to provide adequate attention and feedback to learners in large classes. In the context of English language teaching, the implications are even more profound, given the subject's emphasis on interactive skills such as speaking, listening, and writing. The findings resonate with Obanya (2014), who notes that high student-teacher ratios in Nigerian schools contribute to surface-level learning, where students often memorize content without achieving deep understanding or practical language proficiency. The persistent issue of overcrowded classrooms in Zone B reflects systemic inefficiencies in resource allocation and teacher recruitment, which have long been identified as barriers to achieving the goals of universal basic education (UBE) in Nigeria (Ogunyemi, 2020). Taken together, the findings of this study highlight systemic challenges that undermine the effective implementation of the English language curriculum in junior secondary schools. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including enhancing teacher qualifications,

promoting professional development, adopting innovative and student-centered teaching strategies, and reducing class sizes to create more conducive learning environments. Such efforts are critical to ensuring that students in Zone B, and across Nigeria, acquire the linguistic competence and communication skills necessary for their personal, academic, and professional success.

CONCLUSION

The study provides a comprehensive examination of English language curriculum implementation in Junior Secondary Schools in Zone B of Benue State, revealing significant challenges that impact educational quality and effectiveness. The investigation uncovered critical insights into teacher qualifications, pedagogical approaches, and classroom dynamics, highlighting systemic limitations in English language education. Teachers demonstrated varied but potentially inadequate instructional strategies, with a predominant reliance on traditional teaching methods that may not fully engage students or promote comprehensive language development. The research exposed notable gaps in teacher qualifications, suggesting a need for enhanced professional development and advanced training programs to improve pedagogical expertise. Classroom conditions, particularly the overcrowded learning environments that exceed recommended student-teacher ratios, present substantial barriers to effective language instruction and individual student attention. These findings underscore the complex challenges facing English language education in the region, pointing to the urgent necessity of multifaceted interventions that address teacher training, instructional methodologies, and resource allocation. The study's implications extend beyond immediate educational concerns, suggesting that addressing these systemic issues is crucial for developing students' linguistic competence, supporting national communication goals, and ultimately contributing to broader educational and societal development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Provision of a comprehensive professional development program that supports teachers in pursuing advanced academic qualifications beyond the current NCE level, including sponsored postgraduate studies and specialized training in English language pedagogy to enhance their subject matter expertise and instructional capabilities.
2. Introduction of targeted training workshops focusing on diversifying teaching methods, particularly emphasizing drill and practice techniques and

interactive approaches like role-playing and storytelling, to create more engaging and comprehensive language learning experiences for students.

3. Implementation of strategic recruitment and resource allocation strategies to reduce the current overcrowded classroom ratios, ensuring that not only English language classes but all other subjects align more closely with the recommended 1:35 student-teacher ratio to enable more personalized and effective instruction.

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