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**ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KATSINA STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Teaching English as a second language is not as easy as some think. In this study, an attempt is made to identify the problems militating against successful teaching of English language at junior secondary schools in Katsina State, Nigeria. The problems are categorised as psychological, linguistic and pedagogical. The method used in the study is the descriptive survey design. Sixty Eight public, private and community schools across the educational zones were used, involving 210 teachers and 384 students. Two sets of questionnaires, one for teachers and the other for students were used to collect data. The data collected was analysed by means of frequency counts and percentage. Bar charts were also used for further clarity of the results obtained. The findings revealed that pedagogical problems were at the top in militating against successful teaching of English at the targetted schools. However, among the three types of schools used in the study, problems identified are more pronounced in public schools. The implecation of the findings is that, since the aural – oral skills are the backbone of the English language, a language used as the medium of instruction in all schools, the whole education system is at threat. Among the solutions offered is that Government should review upward, the current minimum teaching qualification and as an interim measure, intensify effort to provide teachers with lower qualifications the necessary linguistic background and skills for efficient teaching of the two skills. This is necessary because NCE as a teaching qualification has deteriorated beyond imagination.*

**KEYWORDS:** English teaching, junior secondary schools, problems, militating, pedagogical, linguistic, psychological.

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## INTRODUCTION

The teachers' lack of confidence as models to teach oracy arises from the fact that English sound system creates problems for most second language users. This happens because only a few of the English vowels are exactly found in the vowels of the three major Nigeria languages thus:

- i) Hausa gets seven vowels in total agreement with English and these are:
- ii) / i: /, /e /, / i /, /a/, /u/, /u:/, /ai/ and /au/;
- iii) Yoruba has six such vowels and they are: /<sup>ε</sup>/, / i /, /u /, /u:/ /a:/ and /au/;
- iv) Igbo has only three / i /, /u/, and /u:/ ( Ogunrombi,1986)

Thus, between 13 and 17 vowels pose serious difficulty for Nigerians. Vowels 10, 11 and 12 have no equivalent at all in the three major languages. Vowel number 12 / ə / called the 'schwa', the

most commonly used vowel of the English language, stands out. The schwa according to Onuigbo (2010) can replace all the twenty vowels without any loss of intelligibility. So, as Ogunrombi (1986) observes, the absence of it in the Nigerian stock of vowels and non-teaching or poor teaching of these oral language details in the schools, renders the intelligibility of the English spoken by Nigerians and reduce most teachers as inadequate models.

Apart from the problem created by the sound system of English compared with the native languages, several phonological inconsistencies abound in English language. These include those ranging from English language's evolution in the course of time, words with similar spellings but different accents, right down to those found in different systems of phonetics transcription or notation but found in existing published and internet sources. Sadiq (2010), also notes that English spelling is by no means a reliable guide to pronunciation. Owing to various historical circumstances, English spelling has come to be considerably divorced from its pronunciation. Wyld, quoted in Sadiq (2010) puts it more succinctly:

*It is inconsistent – the same letter does not always stand for the same sound, it is redundant- the spelling of many words contains letters which represent no sound at all, it is incomplete-some words contain sounds of which the spelling takes no account of and for which no letter is written. (p150)*

Gimson (1970) also believes that “the ambiguities of English spelling remain to puzzle the native user and to frustrate the foreign learner” (p.40). See also Bright and McGregor (1984: p.80), Trim (1975, p.7-45) and Yadugiri (2006, p.16)

Consequently, Umeh (1989) believes that so much English is taught, but so little is learnt. This, he hints, is owing to the difficulty of the language and its ostensibly absurd nature. He argues: “The English language is notoriously difficult to master, its pronunciation is baffling, its spelling, illogical, its grammar is a labyrinth of serious body traps” (p.2).

Other problems in the teaching of oracy is the complaint by secondary school teachers of large classes (Clifford, 2011), very few textbooks to go round the pupils (Olaofe, 2013), as well as their own lack of instructional guidelines on what to teach and how to teach it (Sani, 2001). The situation has been made worse by the increase in enrolment, occasioned by the one hundred percent transition from primary to secondary school introduced by the Nigerian government.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The National Junior Secondary School (JSS) English Studies Curriculum recognises speaking and listening skills as the bed-rock of the English language programme. This is in consonance with Obanya's, Dada's, Iheanaco's and Olowe's (2005) claim that it is the spoken language which should come first and receive greater attention in teaching and learning of English. This is because

listening is the first language skill that a child acquires which provides a foundation for all other aspects of language (reading, writing, grammar etc) and cognitive development (Azikiwe, 2007). Speech, on the other hand, is the universal means of communication. It is considered by linguists, as the primary material for study. Knowsley (2009) for instance points out that language users spend 30% of their communicating time, speaking. Iyere (2008) opines that speech is human universal. He argues that people learn to speak and process language more easily and much earlier than the skills of reading and writing.

From the foregoing discussion one might assume then that the development of the two skills gets considerable attention in teaching and learning of English. That does not however seem to be the case. It is a common knowledge that in Katsina State aural-oral skills (listening and speaking) are the most unpopular course and most avoided by teachers of English language and their students. It is also observed that the societal attitude of Katsina people to spoken English is not encouraging. There is also the influence of the dominant language (Hausa) on the learners. Consequently, the required level of performance in oral expression expected of any student who undergoes junior secondary education in Katsina state is low. This has been the general complaint of parents and other stake holders in education. This situation is capable of affecting the performance of students at the senior secondary level of education in Katsina State since the junior secondary is supposed to prepare the students for the challenges of education at the senior secondary school level. It is therefore in view of this, this study was carried out to find level of compliance of the use of activities prescribed by the 9-year English Studies Curriculum, the aural-oral component, to achieve the objectives set out by the curriculum.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. Determine the linguistic problems teachers of English in Katsina State at Post Basic Level (JSS) face in the teaching of aural-oral skills
2. To determine psychological problems teachers of English in Katsina State at Post Basic Level (JSS) face in teaching the aural-oral skills
3. To determine the pedagogical problems teachers of English in Katsina State at Post Basic Level (JSS) face in teaching the English aural-oral skills.

### **Research questions:**

1. What are the linguistic problems teachers of English in Katsina State at Post Basic Level (JSS) face in the teaching of aural-oral skills?
2. What are the psychological problems teachers of English in Katsina State at Post Basic Level (JSS) face in the teaching of aural-oral skills?
3. What are the pedagogical problems teachers of English in Katsina State at Post Basic Level (JSS) face in the teaching of aural-oral skills?

## METHODOLOGY

The research design used for the study was descriptive survey. The population comprised of 456 teachers of English and 170, 368, JSS students (MOE KATSINA STATE 2018). These figures were gotten from 318 JSS including public, community and private schools. Considering the large number of the schools, teachers and students, a sampling was done.

Sixty-eight secondary schools out of 318 representing 20% as minimum recommended by Gay 1981 for descriptive research, formed the school sample and were proportionally selected in cognisance of their types and educational zones of the state. All the teachers of English numbering 210 found in the sampled schools were used as teachers respondents. A total number of 384 students out of 170,368 formed the students respondents based on Krejchic and Morgan (1970) sample table. They were also proportionately selected in cognisance of the seven zonal Education Areas of the state.

Two sets of questionnaires, developed by the researcher for both the teachers and students were used as data collecting instruments. They were validated by senior colleagues and reliability index of 0.761 and 0.772 arrived at by using test-retest method. The scores obtained were subjected to Spearman rank order correlation test of reliability. The data obtained from both teachers and students was analysed by the use of frequency counts and percentages. The teachers' questionnaire was based on Likert scale. The percentages of these were determined through the frequency counts. The students' questionnaire required 'yes' or 'no' answer. They were also analysed by means of frequency counts and percentage.

**Research Question 1:** What problems do teachers of English at JSS level in Katsina State face in the teaching of English aural-oral skills?

In response to this question, responses of teachers was divided into three parts. This was in view of the fact that problems of teaching and learning the skills could be linguistic, psychological or pedagogical. Table 1 presents the linguistic problems as perceived by teachers.

Table 2.1 Responses of Teachers on Their Perception of Linguistic Problems in Teaching the Aural-Oral Skills.

Item	Statement	Public		Community		Private		All schools	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1.	- Lack of confidence as a model to teach aural-oral skills.	108 (83%)	22 (17%)	26 (72%)	10 (28%)	21 (70%)	09 (30%)	155 (79%)	41 (21%)
2.	Phonological inconsistencies (spelling, pronunciation etc).	105 (81%)	25 (19%)	25 (69%)	11 (31%)	20 (67%)	10 (33%)	150 (77%)	46 (23%)
3.	Mother tongue interference.	113 (87%)	17 (13%)	29 (81%)	07 (19%)	22 (73%)	08 (27%)	164 (84%)	32 (16%)
4.	Exposure to Road side English.	82 (63%)	48 (37%)	22 (61%)	14 (39%)	18 (60%)	12 (40%)	122(62%)	74(38%)
5.	Exposure to Advertising English.	85 (65%)	46 (35%)	20 (56%)	15 (42%)	19 (63%)	11 (37%)	124 (63%)	72 (37%)

It is evident from Table 2.1 that an overwhelming majority of teachers concede that the linguistic problems listed are real as the lowest number of respondents that agree with the statements is 122(62%) across the schools. This is in respect of influence of roadside English. However, the problem endorsed as one impeding the teaching of the aural-oral skills by the highest majority of respondents is that of mother tongue influence. One hundred and sixty four (84%) teachers across the schools concede to this as indicated by item 3 in the table. It is also observed that this view cuts across all the three schools.

Table 2.2 Responses of Teachers on Their Perception of Psychological Problems in Teaching the Aural-Oral Skills.

Item	Statement	Public		Community		Private		All schools	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1.	Non-challant attitude of Non-teachers of English towards learning English.	99 (76%)	01 (24%)	29 (81%)	07 (19%)	20 (67%)	10 (33%)	148 (76%)	48 (24%)
2.	Societal attitude towards English	83 (64%)	47 (36%)	22 (61%)	14 (39%)	16 (53%)	14 (47%)	121 (62%)	75 (38%)
3.	Students' lack of interest.	100 (77%)	30 (23%)	26 (72%)	10 (28%)	18 (60%)	12 (40%)	144 (73%)	52 (27%)

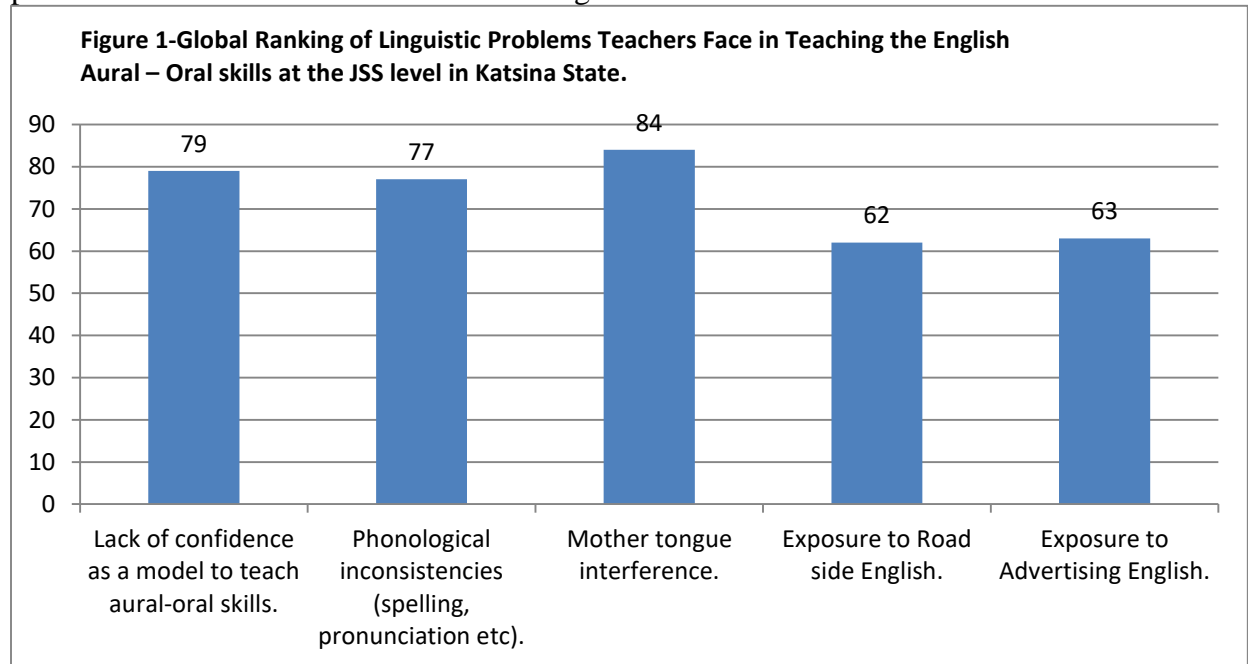
Table 2.2 consists of three indices used to elicit teachers' responses on psychological problems faced in teaching the aural-oral skills. The result reveals that a great majority of teachers across the schools agree that they face all the problems listed. However, more teachers consider non-challenging attitude of content teachers towards learning the aural-oral skills, as an impediment to their teaching. One hundred and forty eight (76%) teachers concede to this. Lack of interest on the part of the students, to which 144(73%) teachers concede also, is the next problem militating against teaching the aural-oral skills. One hundred and twenty one respondents (62%) which is the least, accept that societal bias against English, impedes teaching of the skills. It is also observed from the table, that on psychological problems, all the schools as rated by the teachers are within the same range.

Table 2.3 -Responses of Teachers on Their Perception of Pedagogical Problems Faced in Teaching the Aural-Oral Skills.

Item	Statement	Public		Community		Private		All schools	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1.	Lack of professional training	112 (86%)	18 (14%)	31 (86%)	05 (14%)	24 (80%)	06 (20%)	167 (85%)	29 (15%)
2.	Classes are too large	109 (84%)	21 (16%)	20 (56%)	16 (44%)	09 (30%)	21 (70%)	138 (70%)	58 (30%)
3.	Inadequate time allocation	104 (80%)	26 (20%)	28 (78%)	08 (22%)	24 (80%)	06 (20%)	156 (80%)	40 (20%)
4.	Poor school facilities and equipment	110 (85%)	20 (15%)	30 (83%)	06 (17%)	16 (53%)	14 (47%)	156 (80%)	40 (20%)

From Table 2.3, it is evident that an overwhelming majority of respondents attest that all the problems listed in the table constitute problems to teaching the aural-oral skills. This is considering how across the schools, 167 (85%) and 156(80%) respondents agree that lack of professional training and poor school facilities and equipment respectively, are problems faced in the teaching of the two skills. Similarly, 138(70%) and 156(80%) respondents as shown by items 2 and 3 in table 3 responded positively that large classes and inadequate time allocation to the teaching of the aural-oral skills stand as problems militating against the teaching of the skills. It is observed that the private schools have the least of respondents (53%) who agree that poor school facilities and equipment pose problems to teaching the skills.

For a clearer ranking all the problems faced by teachers in teaching the aural-oral skills are presented in the bar charts as contained in figures 1-8



Although all the linguistic problems ranked in Figure 1 above are at a very high level, the problem that more visibly stands out is that of mother tongue interference. This is followed closely, by lack of confidence on the part of the teachers to teach the aural-oral skills. Phonological inconsistencies take the third position. The influence of advertising and road side English as problems to teaching the aural-oral skills, occupy the fourth and fifth positions, respectively.

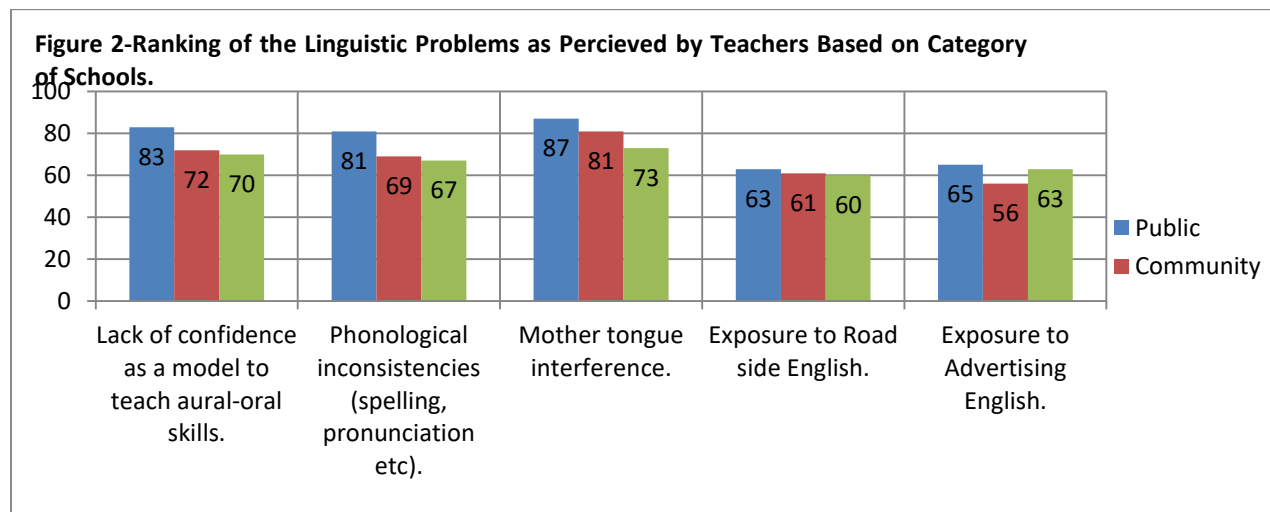


Figure 2 shows the ranking of linguistic problems as perceived by teachers based on the categories of schools involved in the study. From the figure, the highest number of teachers that endorse mother tongue interference, lack of confidence and phonological inconsistencies as problems threatening the teaching of the two skills, come from the public schools. The second and third positions in respect of these problems, are occupied by community and private schools respectively. The problems of exposure to both roadside and advertising English as shown by the figure are also more pronounced in the public schools. Community schools come next in terms of exposure to roadside English. They are last followed by the private schools. In terms of exposure to advertising English, however, the private schools take the second position while the community schools occupy the third.

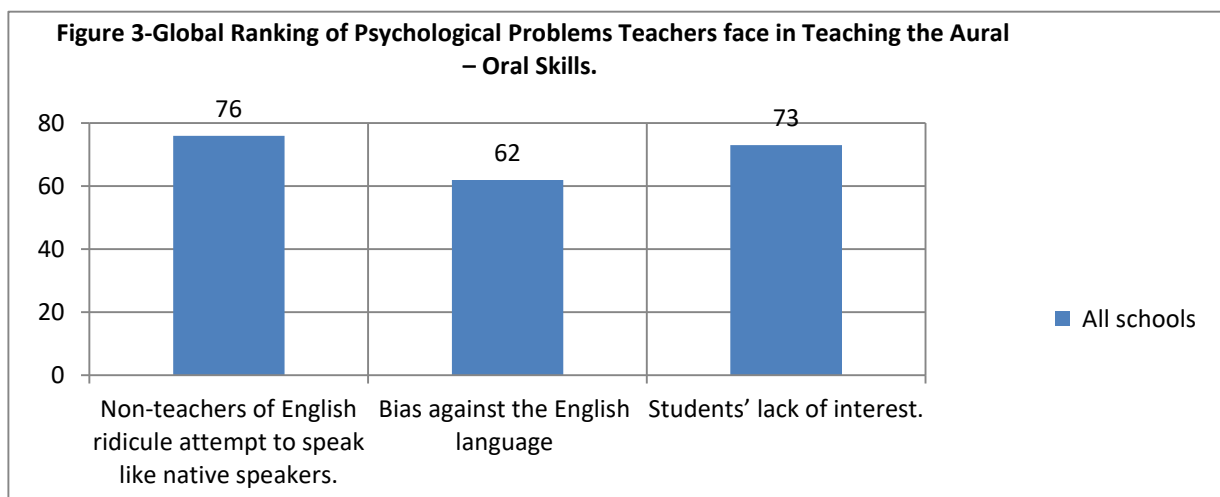


Figure 3 shows the position each of the three psychological problems occupies as perceived by teachers. Non-teachers of English non-challant attitude of attempt by students to speak like native speakers poses the most serious threat to learning the aural-oral skills. This was followed by students' lack of interest. Bias against the English language as a threat to learn the aural-oral skills occupies the last position.



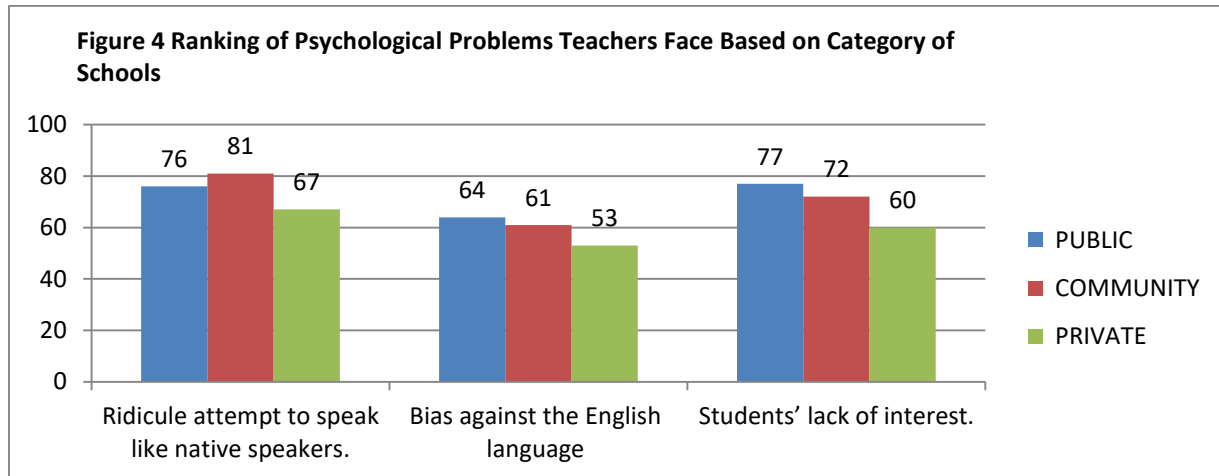


Figure 4, shows the position each category of schools occupies with respect to psychological problems faced by teachers in teaching the aural-oral skills. The community schools are threatened more by non-teachers of English, non-challant attitude towards learning aural-oral skills. The public schools take the second position while the private schools are shown to face the least threat in terms of non-challant attitudes of non-teachers of English towards learning the aural-oral skills.

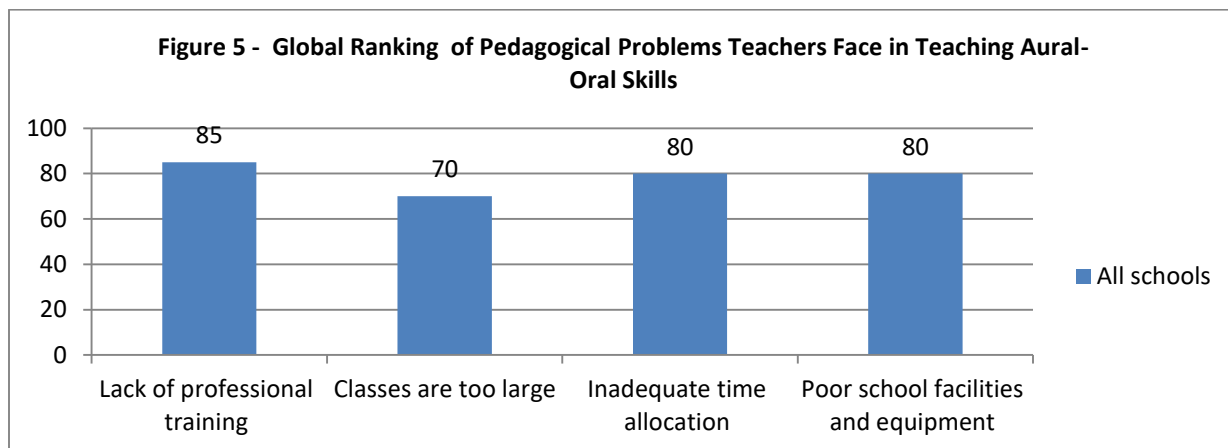


Figure 5 ranks the pedagogical problems teachers face in teaching the aural-oral skills in all the schools involved in the study. Although all the problems identified are intense, lack of professional training leads other problems endorsed by teachers. Inadequate time allotted to teaching the aural-oral skills and poor facilities and equipment, concur as the next problems threatening the teaching of the two skills. The factor of large classes as a threat to the aural-oral skills comes last.

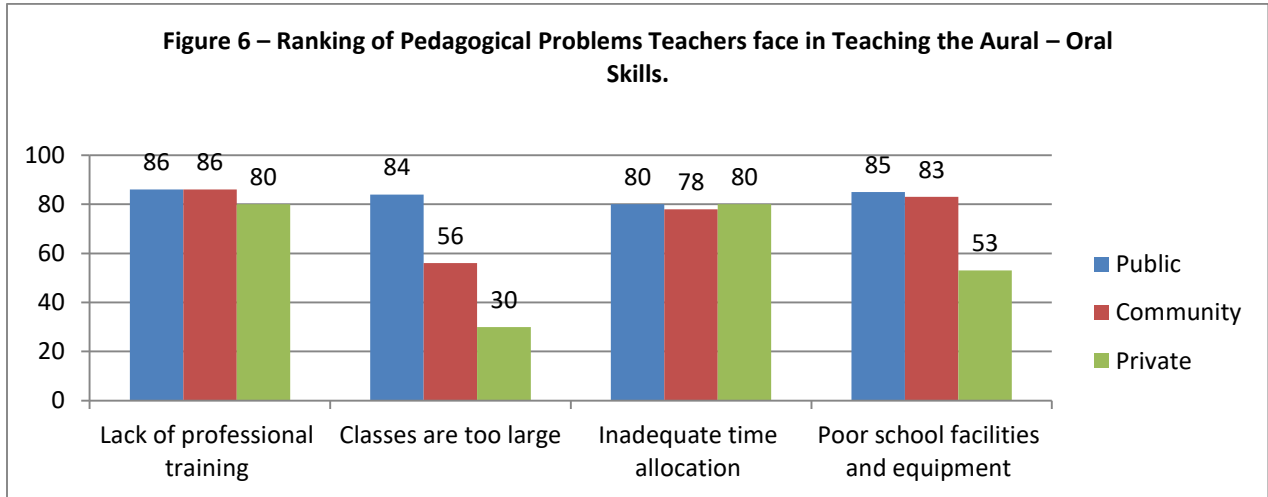


Figure 6 ranks the three categories of schools vis-à-vis the pedagogical problems teachers face in teaching the aural-oral skills. The public and community schools are on the same plane in terms of lack of professional training. In terms of the problem of large classes, the private schools have the least percentage of teachers who confirmed the problem, followed by the community schools.

The public schools experience the worst in terms of large classes.

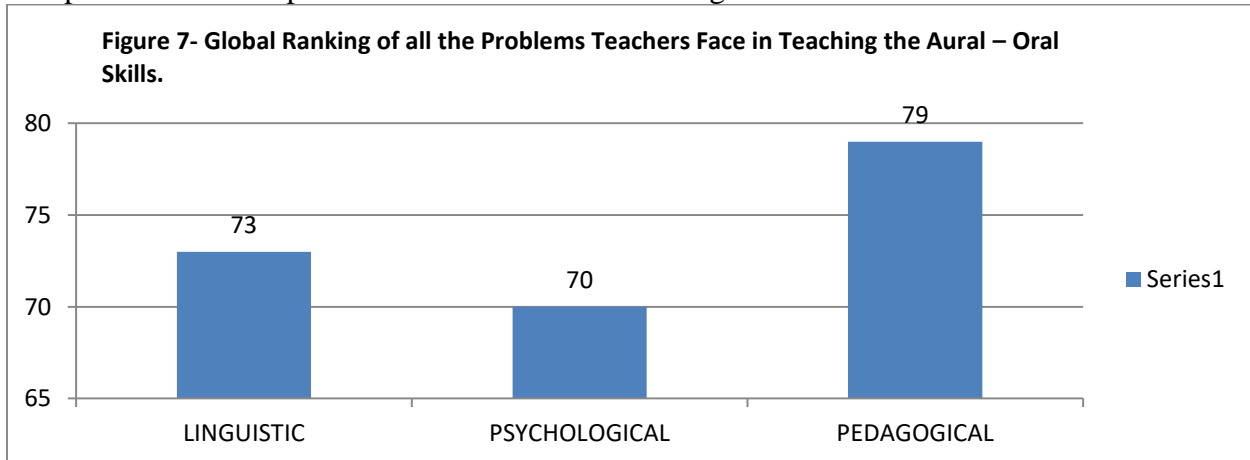


Figure 7 displays and ranks the three types of problems faced in teaching the aural – oral skills as perceived by teachers, namely linguistic, psychological and pedagogical. From the bar charts, the problem that most visibly stands out is pedagogical. It was followed by linguistic problems. Psychological problems take the last position.

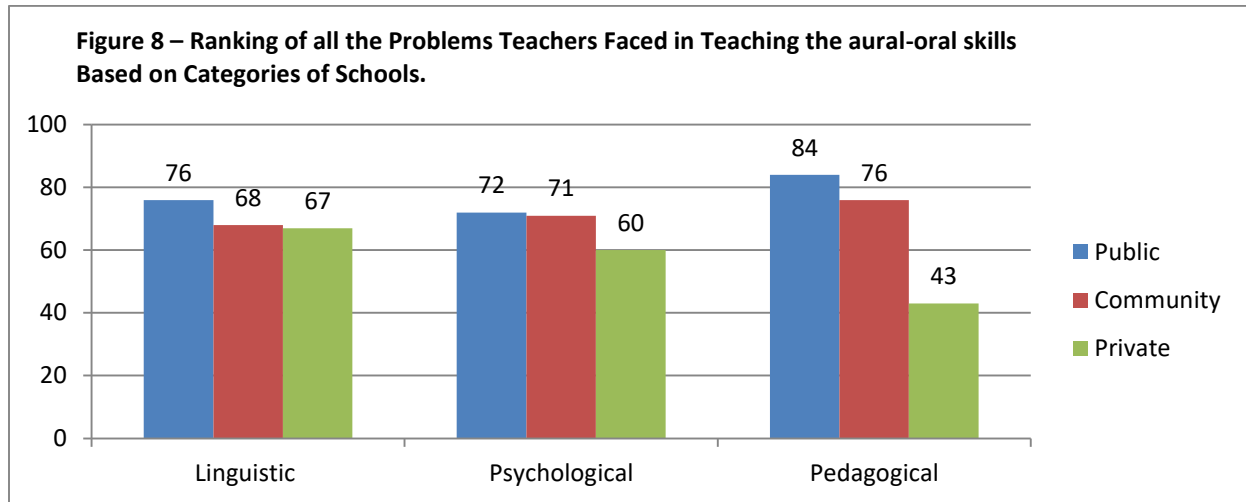


Figure 8 above, displays and ranks the three types of problems faced in teaching the aural-oral skills as perceived by teachers. From the bar chart, the public schools are threatened more by all the three types of problems followed by the community schools. The private schools, especially in terms of pedagogical problems face less threat.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings of this study revealed that pedagogical problems were at the top in militating against success in the effective implementation of the aural-oral component of the 9-year Basic Education English Studies Curriculum (see fig. 7). First, in respect of pedagogical problems is the issue of training. An overwhelming number of teachers opined that they lacked professional training to teach the aural-oral skills. This confirms William's (1990) observation, that most English classrooms were faced manned by teachers whose English imperfect and who lacked adequate was training. Effective learning of aural-oral skills cannot take place where the teacher himself lacks competence in speaking and listening. Ayodele (1981) suggests that all teachers, irrespective of discipline should have some training in spoken English to encourage their conscious use of phonologically correct English. This can then make the attitude of other subjects' teachers to learn English to be more positive. It is a common knowledge that among the teachers who teach English at the JS level are teachers who read Mass communication, History, Social Studies or even Hausa These were teachers probably who neglected spoken English component of the curriculum.

Second among the pedagogical problems was the issue of large classes. This was found to be more acute in public schools. This tallies with Clifford's (2011) findings that large classes characterised ESL learning in Nigerian schools.

Inadequate time allocation for the teaching of the aural-oral skills was also found to be one of the problems militating against the teaching of the aural-oral skills. This cut across all the three

categories of schools. Many researchers reported this phenomenon in the past. For example Gatembay's (1960), Pascacios (1973) attributed poor performance of second language learners to time constraint. This gains support here. It suffices therefore to say that considering that native speakers of any language have an unlimited time to put their language to use, the time available for learning the two skills in the schools investigated is too inadequate to make learners effective and efficient users of English as aspired.

Linguistically, the generality (79%) of the teachers lacked confidence as models to teach the two skills. (see table 1). This, as Ogunrumbi (1986) asserts, arises from among other factors, that the English sound system creates problems for most second language users of English. For example Ogunrumbi (1986) points out that between 13 and 17 sounds out of 20 (English vowel sounds) pose serious difficulty for Nigerians. Similar number of consonant sounds does the same. This is in addition to the problem of phonological inconsistency, which abounds in English language. The result, among other things is to make spelling system in relation to pronunciation, e.g know, and psalm very inconsistent. What obtains from the exposure of the learners to poor models in the larger society and the inherent mother tongue interference as revealed by the findings of this study, are capable of compounding these problems.

The findings in this study revealed that the attitude of teachers of other subjects towards the teaching and learning of the aural-oral skills was not favourable to the teaching of English. It was found that non-teachers of English showed non-challant attitude towards learning the two skills. This is likely to create some psychological problem, inimical to the teaching and/or learning of the aural-oral skills. This further confirms Sofenwa's (1987), and Kado's (2013) assertion, that even fellow teachers do not support the work of the language teacher.

### **Recommendations**

- (i) Government should review upward, the current minimum teaching qualification and as an interim measure, intensify effort to provide teachers with lower qualifications the necessary linguistic background and skills for efficient teaching of the two skills. This is necessary because NCE as a teaching qualification has deteriorated beyond imagination (Alaku, 2001).
- (ii) Government should embark on recruitment of more English teachers to meet the need of the number of schools and students in the state.
- (iii) Non-specialist teachers such as graduates of Hausa, Arabic, Mass Communication, History etc. should not teach the English aural – oral skills. This is because the aural – oral skills as a result of their mechanical nature, requires that only trained teachers can teach them effectively (Enesi, 2001).
- (iv) All teachers irrespective of their discipline, should have some training in spoken English. That way, they would be conscious of the use of correct English and also help in correcting students.

The problems identified by this research as faced by teachers in the teaching of the aural-oral skills are psychological, linguistic and pedagogical. Government should establish more schools to

decongest large classes characterising especially public schools in the state. This will make teaching of English more practical and assessable.

(v) Instructional delivery time for aural-oral skills lessons should be realigned to correspond with the degree of importance of the two skills, in language learning. A special provision should be made on the time table for English Speech practicals.

(vi) The school administration through the Head of English Departments, should encourage team teaching so that different teachers could handle different aspects of the syllabus based on mastery or interest in the area. This way, over a time, each teacher can become a master of a particular area or areas.

(vii) The oral English component of English studies should be re-aligned to place the teaching of the aural-oral skills first, before the written skills and teaching of same intensified. This is with a view to following the natural order in teaching language (Obanya, 2005). This would lay better foundation for teaching and learning of the aural-oral skills at the JSS level.

(viii) In teaching the aural-oral skills, teachers should make adequate use of ear-training and drills as these are the main issues in learning the spoken form of the language (Osisanwo, 1981).

(ix) Poetry and drama should be exploited by teachers to enhance better understanding and lively teaching of the aural-oral skills.

## CONCLUSION

This study has established the fact that, the teaching of the aural – oral skills is under serious threat. Problems, as categorised – psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical are so pronounced, especially in public schools. The situation is so bad, that unless something is timely done, the aspiration of the 9-year English Studies Curriculum and indeed the stakeholders may never be achieved. As the curriculum states, the aural-oral skills are the backbone of the English Studies Curriculum. This, therefore calls for urgent attention to the issues. Conclusively, as English is the medium of instruction not only at the Post – Basic Level, but all other levels, and more importantly the foundational, role, the level at stake plays, something need to be done urgently to save the whole Education system from collapse.

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