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ELT Research Papers

Minimum academic standards and the English language curriculum in two Nigerian universities: Benchmarking, implementation and evaluation

Dr Oris Tom-Lawyer, Dr Henry Hunjo,
Oluwaremilekun Temitope Adetayo and Dr Michael Thomas

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Abstract

This report presents findings from the MERLIN project (Minimum Academic Standards and the English Language Curriculum in Nigerian Universities: Benchmarking, Implementation and Evaluation) which explored the English language curriculum of two Nigerian universities against the background of declining standards in English language education as evidenced by national test scores. In order to examine the current state of English language teacher training, MERLIN evaluated the implementation of the English language curriculum for undergraduate trainee teachers. The project adopted a mixed methods approach in which quantitative data (via questionnaires) and qualitative data (via semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observation checklists, documentary analysis) were collected in a case study approach utilising the CIPP evaluation model (Context, Input, Process and Product) as the theoretical framework. Findings highlighted several areas of concern with the teacher training curriculum, including challenges faced in the areas of course content, the overcrowding of facilities, the use of learning technologies and pedagogical approaches. A series of recommendations relating to these areas of concern are outlined.

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1

Context and background

The National Commission for Universities (NUC) in Nigeria was established in 1962. Through the Federal Government Act of 1985, the Commission regulates and controls Nigerian universities' activities and is responsible for the Minimum Academic Standards framework which governs quality assurance (Ibijola, 2015). The Minimum Academic Standards were revised in 2018 to take into consideration factors such as the influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and globalisation, and this resulted in the development of new outcome-based benchmark statements. Arising from this, the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for the English language were produced in the same year and identified the standards required for admission, graduation, teaching and learning resources, course structure and course content in Nigerian universities. The philosophical aims and objectives of the BMAS underpin English language and literature courses that lead to the award of undergraduate degrees.

Regardless of the quality assurance measures associated with the BMAS, over the last three decades there has been a steady decline in English language proficiency in Nigerian primary and secondary schools as reported by national test results (Odeh, 2017). Graduates of English language degree programmes often go on to become teachers of the language in schools, and therefore it is an important to understand what, if any, role university teacher training programmes may have played in this process.

The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) states that the medium of instruction in primary schools is the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English is taught as a subject and from the fourth year, English is progressively used as a medium of instruction (EMI) and the language of the immediate environment is taught as a subject. This policy gives currency to the formalisation of EMI and demonstrates, as Abdullahi and Abdullah (2014) argue, the importance of English as a prerequisite for participating in higher education. This is particularly apposite to female students, as

acquiring English skills can help to improve their social and geographical mobility through better national and international employment opportunities that challenge traditional gender roles that still position them in the home (Aja-Okorie, 2013; Ogege, 2017).

The decline in English language skills over the last three decades has been particularly evident in spoken and written English (Alhassan, 2017; Ola-Busari, 2014). With growing regularity, the decline has been noted in the mass media, academic publications and on social media platforms up to the present time (Alhassan, 2023; Olaopa, 2019). Typically, teachers have been blamed or made scapegoats for the falling standards. However, more nuanced research studies suggest that the main challenges stem from the broader English language education policy context (Ola-Busari, 2014).

Given the complex context outlined above, more research is required on the factors shaping English language education in Nigeria. In particular, more studies triangulating the context, knowledge and practices of English teacher trainers, trainee teachers and university managers need to be conducted across several institutions and regions to understand what is happening on the ground. Moreover, a thorough curriculum evaluation process may also make a valuable contribution to updating English language pedagogical approaches, as well as the content, resources and other elements required for a fit-for-purpose English language curriculum (Al-Jardani, 2012). To facilitate this process, the CIPP model (Context, Input, Process and Product) was chosen as the main theoretical framework for the evaluation of the curriculum explored in this report. The model is designed to facilitate a holistic evaluation of context, implementation, decision-making and outcomes (Stufflebeam, 2003). While the CIPP model has been used extensively in high-income countries (HICs), fewer studies have been undertaken in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) such as Nigeria. In addition, the model typically focuses on the evaluation of high technology contexts. Its use in the study in Nigeria described in this report, adds a potentially new

dimension to curriculum evaluation in the country, as the often overlooked role of ICT in teacher education will also be considered.

The research in this report was designed to evaluate the implementation of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (English Language Curriculum) in two Nigerian Universities – the University of the North and the University of the South (the names have been anonymised). In line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) 4 and 5, gender equality was considered as integral to the objectives guiding the study. In providing an overview of the state of English language education, the research had four interconnected objectives: a) to describe the institutional factors

shaping English language programmes, such as the setting, organisation, facilities, objectives and needs of the students (the *context*); b) to investigate the course content, with particular reference to the four language skills, methodology, instructional and materials (the *input*); c) to explore the implementation of the curriculum in relation to resource requirements, facilities, teaching resources, staff development, evaluation, and quality assurance (the *process*); and d) to examine how the programme achieves its objectives, with reference to the students' ability in the four language skills (the *product*). This focus produced a complex range of data, and we report on the main aspects of this in this report, prior to a fuller elaboration in future publications.



2

Literature review

2.1 The NUC Benchmark Minimum Standards

The number of universities in Nigeria has grown considerably from a base in 2007 when there were just 75 (Nkoroma, 2008). Presently, there are 219 universities, including federal (49), state (59) and private institutions (111) (National Universities Commission, 2018). The 2018 Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) shape the objectives of the English language programmes in these institutions which aim to prepare students for further studies in English language and linguistics (National Universities Commission, 2018). The feasibility of these objectives depends to a large extent on the quality of university entrants, as research suggests that there is a strong correlation between entrance standards and performance in Nigeria (Kanyip, 2013). Just 45 per cent of students are admitted into Nigerian universities on educational merit, a statistic that fails to live up to the aspiration of the Declaration of the United Nations on Human Rights (Article 26) which enshrines everyone's right to education on the basis of merit (United Nations, 2022). The other students are admitted from educationally disadvantaged states (20 per cent); catchment regions (25 per cent); and Vice Chancellors' awards (10 per cent) (Omeje, Egwa and Adikwu, 2016).

In addition to the challenges associated with admissions policies, research has shown that Nigerian graduates often lack employability skills (Okojie, 2013). Uchendu (2015) directly attributes this to the result of inadequate funding, inconducive learning environments, the low motivation of staff, and insufficient infrastructure that does not meet the recommended standards. Indeed, the Benchmark recommends a staff/student ratio of 1:30 for Arts subjects and each institution is expected to commence with six full time academic staff. At least 70 per cent of staff should hold doctoral degrees. Other support staff should include administrative and technical personnel. To teach the English language, senior academicians need to have majored in at least one of the following areas: English syntax, semantics, English phonetics

and phonology, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), linguistics, stylistics, or English as a Second Language (ESL).

The training and provision of quality teachers to a large extent determines the quality of an educational system. In Nigeria, research indicates that there has been a dearth of lecturers in the universities due to migration since 1985 which has resulted in over-working and unsatisfactory practices (Raji, 2012). The Federal Government's Needs Assessment Report (2012) shows that most of the universities are short-staffed and that they do not meet the recommended numbers for staff who hold relevant doctoral degrees. In addition, the number of support staff outweighs academic staff and the staff/student ratio in most universities is 1:100, leading teacher quality to fall below NUC standards (Raji, 2012). Akpan (2015) has also pointed out that, to avoid discriminatory practices, the recruitment and selection of academic staff in Nigerian public universities should be based on more uniform policies and procedures.

In terms of facilities, recommended standards stipulate that libraries should be equipped to accommodate the needs of students and staff. Journals, handbooks, textbooks, manuals, codes of practice, standards and specifications also need to be provided in sufficient numbers (NUC-BMAS, 2018). Research has suggested that this is generally not the case due to the expansion in student numbers in higher education (Ebehikhalu and Dawan, 2016).

Oyeniya (2010) found that the principal facilities in Nigerian universities are inadequate and also noted the lack of facilities and other infrastructure necessary for an effective teaching, learning and research environment. The inadequacy of facilities in the institutions is a factor that needs to be addressed if quality education is to be achieved (Subair, Okoktimi and Adebakin, 2012), particularly in the federal universities where research has indicated that the physical facilities such as lecture theatres and laboratories are in a deplorable state (Isa and Wan, 2015; Isa, Zahari and Yussof, 2015). Over-enrolment leading to overcrowding is a direct cause of these developments (Fabiya and Uzoka,

2005). The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) contends that Nigerian lecturers teach in overcrowded classrooms in contravention of the NUC guidelines (Sunday and Rosemary, 2017), and that overcrowded classrooms affect students' achievement, overburden lecturers due to increased workload, and this in turn has a negative effect on student and lecturer performance. This challenging context has led to regular and prolonged national strikes over working conditions and pay that sometimes last for up to one year and therefore greatly impact the delivery of the curriculum (Orjinmo, 2022).

2.2 The declining standard of English in Nigeria

The English language is the official language in Nigeria and it helps to maintain a sense of nationhood (Taiwo, 2017). The National Policy on Education (2014) states that the medium of instruction from primary school should be the mother tongue for the first three years and thereafter the English language. The importance of English in the country cannot be underestimated as it enables upward mobility, social cohesion and economic development (Odeh, 2017).

The decline in the standard of English language in Nigeria (Odeh, 2017) over the last three decades has been noted even among those engaged in tertiary and white collar jobs (Ola-Busari, 2014; Akinnaso, 2018). Prior to this period, proficiency in the language was higher amongst students, as well as the elite groups within Nigerian society (Ola-Busari, 2014). This perceived decline has been evident in the results of Nigerian students who sit external examinations from the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO).

Primary and elementary schools provide the foundations for education in Nigeria and the poor performance of students at the secondary and tertiary levels has been directly associated with their shortcomings (Sofowora, 2014). In turn, this poor performance reflects the challenges faced by teacher training institutions in Nigeria. Moreover, the relationship between the poor performance of students and the decline of standards in the teaching and learning of English at the junior and senior secondary levels has been extensively explored by researchers (Murana, 2019). Some of the causes of the poor performance at the senior secondary level include the dearth of qualified staff, inappropriate or out of date pedagogical approaches, inadequate facilities, and the non-availability of language laboratories (Sa'ad and Usman, 2014). According to Ola-Busari (2014), an evaluation of the English language teaching and

learning process is necessary to improve standards across all four language skills (Abderrahim, 2001) and aid future internal growth.

2.3 ICT and English language teaching and learning in Nigeria

The use of Information and Communication Technologies in English language teaching reflects the greater use of digital technologies in everyday life and the importance of improving students' digital literacy and employability skills. ICTs can help teachers to promote more flexible and hybrid approaches to learning (Divaharan and Koh, 2010), providing them with the skills to access information and learning materials quickly and efficiently (Aworanti, 2016). While Nigeria has a national policy on ICT in education, the country's ranking in the Network Readiness Index, where it is ranked 117 out of 134 countries (Portulans Institute, 2020), suggests that Nigeria is yet to fully optimise the opportunities that digital education may offer. While the most common ICT tools used in Nigerian Universities are computers and mobile phones, the country's digital education policy is still in the primary stage of its development, and the technologies are not always appropriately integrated into curricula or used alongside appropriate pedagogies (Ekundayo, 2012). The National policy (FME, 2019) outlines the objectives of ICT in terms of promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills, while aiding academics to consider new pedagogical approaches (Baba and Odiba, 2015). This approach often positions lecturers as facilitators within a student-centred approach; however, most university lecturers still use the traditional method of teacher-centred instruction as they lack digital literacy skills and their institutions have an inadequate ICT infrastructure (Aworanti, 2016). Research by Nwankwoala (2015) suggests that the inadequacy of ICT equipment and lecturers' lack of skills and dedicated continuing professional development (CPD) in digital pedagogies continues to inhibit the integration of technologies in the teaching and learning process.

Ajelebelen (2016) asserts that the poor maintenance of network infrastructure is also a significant hinderance to integrating ICT in the educational process. Furthermore, more mundane barriers faced by lecturers and students, such as the erratic power supply, challenge a lot of the opportunities afforded by digital education technologies (Baba and Odiba, 2015). Teachers also encounter challenges in upskilling their technical and pedagogical skills due to the lack of a certified programme on ICT and this has a knock-on effect in terms of teacher self-efficacy and their willingness to incorporate new practices into their pedagogical approaches.

2.4 Gender inequality

Gender equality is enshrined in UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 which positions it as a question of human rights, not only of women's rights. Enyioko (2021) describes gender equality in terms of 'the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men' so that they are 'considered, valued and favoured equally' and gender equity as the 'treatment of women and men according to their respective needs' (p. 6). Research on gender in Nigeria's educational system reveals a complex picture in which inequalities are sustained by a combination of familial, cultural and traditional values, as well as colonial and educational policies. In some regions, girls enrol in schools in equal measure to boys, while in others, they may still be forced into early marriage and are not supported to complete their education to the same extent as their male counterparts (Mustapha, 2012). Okoli (2007) suggests that parents prefer to invest in their male, rather than female, children as girls do not continue the family name. More recently, national educational policies have sought to challenge the complex combination of familiar, cultural, traditional values and inherited colonial norms, but gender disparities in higher education are still evident. This is particularly the case for academic staff in terms of recruitment and selection practices, as well as lack of mentoring and poor remuneration. It is also the case for students where there is a lack of support for students with caring and family responsibilities, against the general perception that women have lower career aspirations (Ogbogu, 2011). While generally more female than male students enrol in teacher training programmes and become language teachers, their career advancement and digital literacy skills may lag behind those of male students (Adetimirin, 2016). These disparities are observable in women's reduced academic research output and in their inability to achieve more senior level academic, administrative or managerial positions (Vandima, 2020). Likewise, Olaogun, Adebayo and Oluyemo (2015) and Enyioko (2021) reported that while national plans of action have been put in place which have led to an increase in more girls and women in school and universities, Nigeria was still lagging behind comparable low- and middle-income countries in Africa in terms of gender equality.

2.5 Research questions

Arising from the gaps identified by this review, five key questions emerged to guide this study:

1. What contextual factors shape the English language programmes with respect to the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards in Nigerian Universities?
2. How does the implementation of the curriculum equip students to develop the four language skills?
3. What are the lecturers and students' perceptions of the implementation of the curriculum?
4. How have the objectives of the curriculum been achieved?
5. What issues of gender inequality emerged as a result of the CIPP evaluation?

3

Methodology

3.1 Research context

Data were collected from two different types of university in different states in Nigeria: the University of the North in Edo State and the University of the South in Lagos State. The University of the North, established in the early 1970s, is a Federal University with two campuses and approximately 48,000 students. The University of the South, established in the early 1980s, is a state university with three campuses and around 29,000 students.

3.2 Research design

The research design for the project involved both quantitative and qualitative data. For the qualitative data, documentary analysis and interviews were analysed with content analysis. The quantitative data entailed the use of questionnaires and were analysed using descriptive statistics.

3.2.1 The CIPP Evaluation Framework

The CIPP evaluation model, consisting of context, input, process and product evaluations of the two research sites in Nigeria, was the theoretical framework chosen for the study (Stufflebeam, 2003). (See Table 1.)

The instruments used to collect data in both universities were:

Questionnaires

a) *The Students' Process Questionnaire* was designed to collect data on the implementation of the BMAS Curriculum and consisted of 35 Likert scale questions and two open-ended questions and divided into two sections: Section A on Demographic questions and Section B on questions on the Implementation of the Curriculum (see Appendix VII).

- b) *The Lecturers' Process Questionnaire* was designed for the same purpose and consisted of 48 closed and two open-ended questions divided into three sections: Section A on Demographic Information, Section B on the Implementation of the Curriculum and Section C on ICT Implementation and Gender Imbalance (see Appendix V).
- c) *The Students' Questionnaire on the Courses Embodying the Four Language Skills* explored the evaluation of the four language skills (e.g., speaking, reading, writing and listening) and consisted of 30 questions divided into two sections: Section A on Demographic Information and Section B on Self-Assessment of English Skills (see Appendix VIII).

Interviews

- a) *The English Language Lecturers' Interview* aimed to collect data on the language skills courses and consisted of 20 questions on language skills, teaching methods, curriculum implementation, the development of language skills, the CPD of lecturers and gender inequalities (see Appendix IV).
- b) *The Heads of Department Interview* collected data from the Heads of the English Language Department for their perspectives on the implementation of the curriculum. It consisted of 12 questions covering several sections: demographic information, vision and objectives of the BMAS English language curriculum, student concerns, gender imbalance, CPD and quality assurance (see Appendix III).

Focus Groups

- a) *Students Focus Group Interviews* involved undergraduate English language and Literature students and questions related to the evaluation of BMAS for the English Language Curriculum (see Appendix VI).

∞ **Table 1.** Objectives of the Curriculum Implementation Framework

	Context	Input	Process	Product
Objective	To describe the contextual factors of the English language programme, its settings, organisation, facilities, the objectives of the programme, the courses and the needs of the students.	To examine the suitability of course contents (with particular reference to the four language skills), methodology, instructional materials and assessment.	To identify the inadequacies in the implementation of the curriculum. Several factors are explored: resource requirements, facilities, teaching resources, staff development, evaluation, and quality assurance.	The perceptions of key personnel on the achievement of the objectives are sought, with reference to the students' ability in the four language skills, their confidence and competence in the use of spoken and written English, acquisition of critical skills, ability to teach English effectively, preparation for further studies in the language and suggestions for improvement.
Data source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) University websites; b) university prospectuses; c) NUC BMAS Curriculum for Undergraduate Programmes in Nigerian Universities 2018; d) Head of Department interviews; e) interviews with lecturers; f) interviews with students. 	a) Questionnaire for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Questionnaire for students and lecturers; b) interviews with lecturers; c) focus groups with students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Interviews with Heads of Department and lecturers; b) focus groups with students.
Appendices	I, II, III, IV, VI	IV	IV, V, VII, VIII	III, IV, VIII

Observation

- a) *The Observation Checklist: State of the Facilities* consisted of questions on the state of facilities in which researchers ranked the facilities in the university (e.g., language laboratory, the recording studio, tutorial rooms and instructional resources). (See Appendix II.)
- b) *The Observation Checklist: Availability of Equipment* recorded the availability of equipment in the institution (e.g., tape recorders, televisions, video recorders, record players and DVDs (see Appendix I).

Document Analysis

- a) University websites, prospectuses, BMAS and course documents were examined to provide detailed information about course syllabi, institutional policies and related teaching materials.

3.3 Participants

At the University of the North, questionnaire data were collected from 100 students who attended lectures ($f=81.4$ per cent; $m=18.5$ per cent). In addition, questionnaire and interview data were collected from 10 lecturers ($f=40$ per cent; $m=60$ per cent) in the Department of English, while focus group interviews consisted of two sessions with 10 students ($f=50$ per cent; $m=50$ per cent). The male Head of Department was also interviewed. At the University of the South, questionnaires were also completed by 100 undergraduate students ($f=75$ per cent; $m=25$ per cent) and 10 lecturers ($f=70$ per cent; $m=30$ per cent) in the Department of English. Within the same period, interviews were held with five lecturers ($f=20$ per cent $m=80$ per cent) and two focus group sessions were conducted with 10 students ($f=70$ per cent; $m=30$ per cent). The male Head of the Department of English was also interviewed.

3.4 Procedures

In Phase 1 of the research, all of the instruments were piloted at the University of the North. Phase 2 involved the comprehensive main study involving both universities. Phase 3 of the project involved data analysis in Nigeria and the UK. Workshops were also held with teacher trainers and students from several universities in the south of Nigeria to disseminate the results of the project.

3.5 Ethics

Ethical approval for the entire project was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at Liverpool John Moores University. Local ethical procedures were also followed in Nigeria at each of the two data collection sites. Heads of Department and lecturers acted as gatekeepers to advertise the study to staff and students who voluntarily chose to participate based on informed consent.

3.6 Data analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and descriptive statistics. Content analysis involving NVivo 12 and manual methods were used in the coding and analysis of the qualitative data. The interviews and focus group transcripts were transcribed and organised into main and sub-themes. Connections were made between themes using synonyms and inferences were drawn from the themes, sub-themes and word clouds to provide a graphical illustration of the keywords provided by the respondents.

4

Findings

4.1 Context evaluation

4.1.1 University of the North

The University of the North was established in 1970 as an Institute of Technology and granted university status in 1971, making it a 'first generation' Nigerian university. It currently has approximately 48,000 students with a male to female ratio of 51:49. It became a Federal University in 1975, the same year that the Faculty of Humanities was established. The Department of English and Literature was founded in 1977 as an offshoot of the Department of Modern Languages, and has had three areas of specialisation (Literature, Oral Literature and Language) since its inception. The English Language and Literature degree programme combines two degrees: the BA English Language and the BA Literature in English. For the four-year programme, admission requirements are five O-Level credit passes in WASC, NECO/GCE, while candidates who possess GCE A-Level, NCE, or another relevant diploma, are admitted for three years (BMAS 2018).

Observation of the facilities in the Department showed that lecturers and students had access to a dedicated language laboratory, a recording studio, tutorial rooms, a resources centre and a phonetics laboratory. The language laboratory was well-equipped with a projector and cubicles were available for students to use. Data from student focus groups suggested, however, that the laboratory was too small to accommodate many of them at the same time.

Talking about the [language] lab, we have everything there but most of the devices do not function, and also, the place is not conducive for everybody ... it is not spacious enough. (Student Interviewee 3)

This view was confirmed by the lecturers' interview data, which indicated that some lecturers had between 200 to 300 students in each of their classes.

... the problem is that the lab cannot really cater for the students because we have Education students and Art students. ... there about 600 students; it means they have to go there in batches and that is about 6 batches. It is very stressful for the lecturers. (Lecturer Interviewee 5)

The recording studio, like the language lab, was not big enough to accommodate large numbers of students. While there was a good supply of tape recorders, the equipment was in limited supply for televisions, video players, record players and digital video discs (DVD). Similarly, although available, classrooms were small and in need of refurbishment.

... what I am seeing is [a] dilapidated building. (Student Interviewee 1)

According to our lecturers ... about 20 years ago, these classrooms [were designed for] about 66 students [but] we are using [them now] with about 200 students. (Student Interviewee 2)

The University's main library provided digital and physical learning resources to lecturers and students and was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Questionnaire data indicated that 45 per cent of students would like to see a dedicated departmental library to support their teacher training studies as the stock of books was not sufficiently up-to-date.

To realise the objectives of the BMAS (2018), the four years of the English and Literature programme offers a comprehensive list of compulsory, required and elective courses for students. Year 1 includes survey courses on English language, morphology and syntax, poetry, prose literature, philosophy and logic, drama, creative writing, and history, science and technology. Year 2 has survey courses on English literature, spoken English, grammar, and publishing. Year 3 has courses on phonology, Nigerian literature, African-American literature, research methods, English for mass communication and English for business communication. This is continued into year 4 with courses on syntax, stylistics, African poetry, British literature, pragmatics, applied linguistics and a long essay project. Lecturers' interviews indicated that, from their perspective, the programme tended to focus too much on applied linguistics and that there were too many survey type courses that did not provide a sufficient grounding in English grammar.

I have noticed that we are concentrating a lot on applied linguistics, meanwhile the linguistics ... have [been] neglected. Simple grammar is a problem for ... students. ... The BMAS seems to be very loose in some areas ... you will find that it is a survey of this or that. (Lecturer interviewee 4)

The curriculum is not paying attention at the lower level to the basics of grammar. (Lecturer interviewee 4)

These deficiencies were also related specifically to criticisms of the structure of the course, following BMAS guidelines.

When they brought the BMAS [in], I was a bit disappointed because I thought it would have more of the basic courses at Year 1 [and] Year 2. Basic courses that deal with basic syntax, basic phonology and basic morphology. (Lecturer interviewee 4)

From the students' perspective, the need to have courses that enhanced their employability and transferable skills were identified as important.

... I was talking with a graduate ... and complaining that I did not know why a course like copy writing should not be incorporated. ... Courses that can make us learn public speaking, we do not have that. (Student interviewee 2)

4.1.2 University of the South

The University of the South was established in 1983 and currently has approximately 29,000 students with a male to female ratio of 55:45. The Department of English in the University of the South was established in January 1991 as a consequence of the reorganisation of the former Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The Department, according to the Head, and as described in the Departmental Handbook, aimed to promote the functional academic study of English Language and Literature-in-English through the exposure of the students to the most current techniques in English Studies. English is the language of communication between the lecturers and students and the use of Nigerian Pidgin is actively discouraged.

The Department of English has two areas of specialisation: BA English Language and BA Literature-in-English. The English language component of the programme has an emphasis on improved speaking, reading, writing and grammatical knowledge. In level 1, students learn practical spoken English and concentrate on the development of pronunciation skills. The course is reinforced in level 2 with two courses on phonology. In level 3, phonology is also taught practically, while in level 4, students learn the impact of linguistic theories on the phonological analysis. Moreover, there are courses on composition that aim to develop listening and reading on the one hand, and writing skills on the other. There are also courses aimed at developing students' knowledge of grammar from the point of view of descriptive linguistics and applied linguistics.

Findings from interviews with lecturers suggest that the effective implementation of the curriculum has been restricted by the over-recruitment of students. The year 1 student population is higher than the capacity of lecture halls, which are shared with students of other courses in the Faculty of Arts, and can only accommodate 80 students from an average of 250 English students at each level of the programme. While the Department of English is well-equipped with computers, headphones and keyboards that are linked with the instructor's consoles, there are only two language laboratories used for teaching listening and speaking skills. Each laboratory is equipped for only 50 students at a time. Although students' interview data suggested that the facility was useful, the majority indicated that a larger facility should be provided to accommodate bigger classes.

4.2 Input evaluation

4.2.1 Lecturers' perspectives

In the University of the North, lecturers teach the four language skills using the integrated and segregated skills approaches. The lecturers also use task-based instruction to teach practical skills in English. Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of the demographic profile of the students from both universities who answered the questionnaire on the four English skills.

Table 2. Demographic Profile: University of the North Students and the Questionnaire on the Four English Skills

					Total	Missing
Gender	Male	Female			47	3
	11 (22.4%)	36 (77.6%)			(94%)	(6%)
School Type	Federal	State	Private		47	3
	47 (94%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		(94%)	(6%)
Age	17–19	20–22	23–25	26+	50	0
	0 (0%)	28 (56%)	20 (40%)	2 (4%)	(100%)	(0%)
Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	50	0
	0 (0%)	6 (12%)	8 (16%)	36 (72%)	(100%)	(0%)
Qualification	WAEC	GCE	NECO	Other	50	0
	39 (78%)	0 (0%)	11 (22%)	0 (0%)	(100%)	(0%)

Table 3. Demographic Profile: University of the South Students and the Questionnaire on the Four English Skills

					Total	Missing
Gender	Male	Female			50	0
	12 (24%)	38 (76%)			(100%)	(0%)
School Type	Federal	State	Private		49	1
	0 (0%)	49 (98%)	0 (0%)		(98%)	(2%)
Age	17–19	20–22	23–25	26+	50	0
	10 (20%)	29 (58%)	9 (18%)	2 (4%)	(100%)	(0%)
Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	50	0
	15 (30%)	8 (16%)	12 (24%)	15 (30%)	(100%)	(0%)
Qualification	WAEC	GCE	NECO	Other	49	1
	44 (89.8%)	2 (4.1%)	3 (6.1%)	0 (0%)	(98%)	(2%)

Table 4 shows the students' standard of English as measured by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) test, which was undertaken as a pre-requisite for admission to each university.

Table 4. Students' Standard of English (n=50)

WAEC	University of the North Per cent	University of the South Per cent
F9 (Fail)	0	2
E8 (Pass)	0	0
D7 (Pass)	0	0
C6 (Credit)	8	2
C5 (Credit)	8	12
C4 (Credit)	20	12
B3 (Good)	26	16
B2 (Very good)	18	34
A1 (Excellent)	2	14
Missing	18	8

Interview excerpts from lecturers in the North indicated that they taught the four skills using a mix of integrated approaches, such as speaking and listening, or writing, listening and reading.

... we use the four language skills. (Lecturer Interviewee 3)

... most of the time, we do online challenges to improve their speaking and listening skills. (Lecturer Interviewee 1)

... we are teaching writing and listening skills. The speaking skill is incidental. ... Most of the courses I teach will not include deliberate teaching of speaking. ... [as for] writing and reading skills, those are incorporated in almost every course. (Lecturer Interviewee 4)

Data from interviews with lecturers from the South identified that they were aware of the specific needs of students:

... one of the language skills that they need right now is [the] reading skill. Because most of them find it easy to speak but [this was not the case] when it comes to reading and understanding. (Lecturer 1 interview)

... most of them demonstrate [an] intensive lack of language skills ranging across speaking, writing. (Lecturer 2 interview)

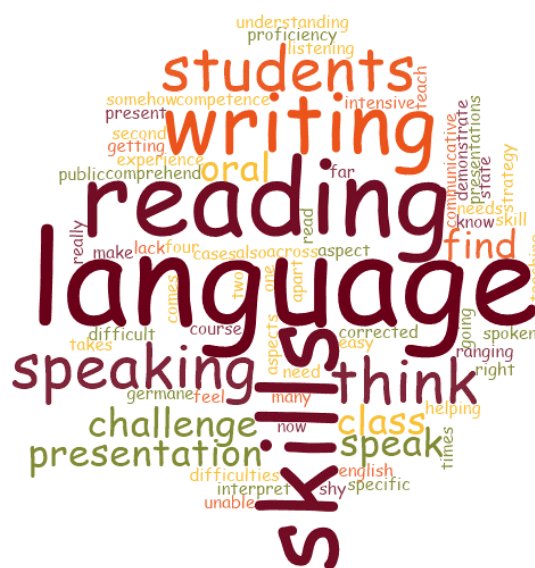


Figure 1. Needs of the English Students: University of the South

As indicated by the word cloud in Figure 1, from the themes generated from the qualitative data, the lecturers identified several key areas as specific needs for their students: improving language skills in writing, reading, speaking and presentation. In this respect, 60 per cent of the lecturers were aware of the objectives of the NUC BMAS (English Language Curriculum).

Yes ... part of the objective is to ... ensure that students understand the basic concepts in relation to the course taught. (Lecturer 2 Interview)

Yes, my subject requires the students to acquire knowledge in the content of the subject matter and at the end of the lesson be able to answer to questions. (Lecturer 3 Interview)

The minority of lecturers who were not aware of the objectives indicated that they required further training on the topic.

... this is something we have not been put through and we need a lot of education [on] this ... certainly we need a lot of interaction with the NUC people. (Lecturer 4 Interview)

Lecturers were asked also about the suitability of the courses on the four language skills to the needs of the students.

we have a lot of resources for teaching that are very suitable for teaching in these courses. For instance, in one of the courses I teach ... we use a textbook on Academic Writing written by one of our Associate Professors and it is very suitable, it is very comprehensive very explanatory that when the student read those textbooks they find it easy to understand the concept of the course. (Lecturer 1 Interview)

The lecturers confirmed that the resources in the university were suitable and appropriate for supporting courses that covered language skills needed by the students.

4.2.2 Students' perspectives

Students' perspectives on their language skills are shown for comparison in Figures 2 to 5. Contradicting the lecturers' perspectives, the self-reported student questionnaire data indicated a positive overall trend, with 66 per cent of students from the North suggesting that they communicated effectively in writing academic essays compared with 64 per cent from the South (Figure 2). 60 per cent of students from the North had good reading and scanning skills compared with 80 per cent from the South (Figure 3). 74 per cent of students from the North showed agreement/strong agreement that they had good oral skills in argumentation and grasped key ideas conveyed in English compared with 86 per cent from the South (Figure 4). 84 per cent of students from the North showed agreement/strong agreement that they could follow lectures and demonstrations by listening effectively, compared with 90 per cent from the South (Figure 5).

Figure 2. I can write an essay that shows my ability to communicate, giving few difficulties to the reader (n=50)

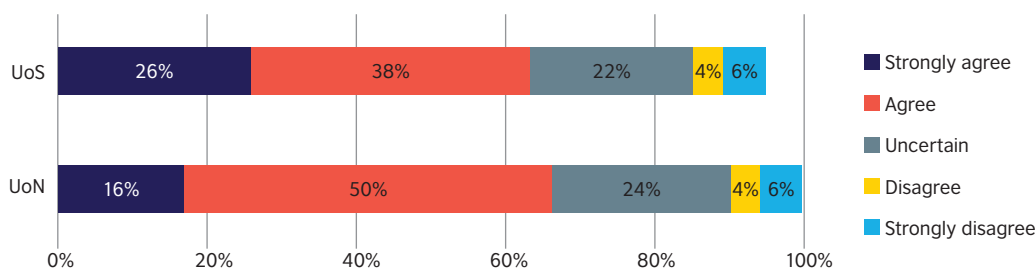


Figure 3. I can scan texts for important information and grasp the main ideas (n=50)

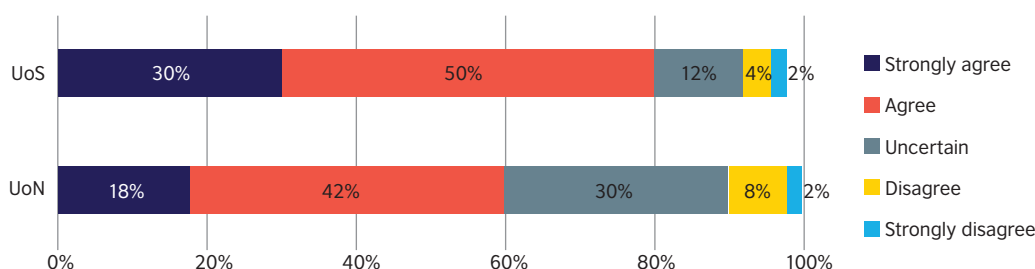


Figure 4. I can argue for or against a case within my area of study information and grasp the main ideas (n=50)

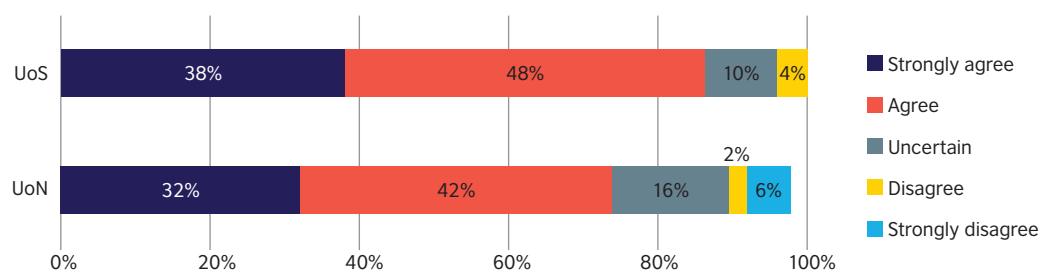
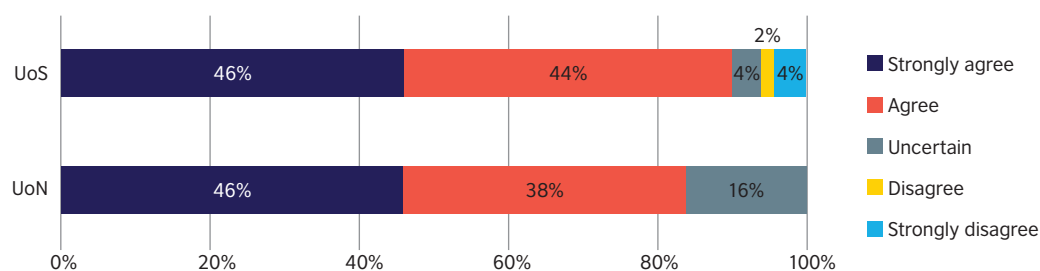


Figure 5. I can follow what is said in a lecture presentation or demonstration (n=50)



4.3 Process

4.3.1 Lecturers' perspectives

The demographic details of the lecturers who participated in data collection for the process evaluation the University of the North are shown in Table 5 and for the University of the South in Table 6.

Table 5. Demographic details of lecturers: North

				Total	Missing
Gender	Male	Female		10	0
	6 (60%)	4 (40%)			
School type	Federal	State	Private	10	0
	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
Age	31–35	36–40	41+	10	0
	1 (10%)	3 (30%)	6 (60%)		
Qualification	First degree 0 (0%)	Masters 3 (30%)	Doctoral 7 (70%)	10	0
Experience (years)	1–10	11–20	21+	7	3
	5 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)		

Table 6. Demographic details of lecturers: South

				Total	Missing
Gender	Male 8 (80%)	Female 2 (20%)		10	0
School type	Federal 0 (0%)	State 10 (100%)	Private 0 (0%)	10	0
Age	25–30 1 (10%)	31–35 1 (10%)	41+ 8 (80%)	10	0
Qualification	First degree 1 (10%)	Masters 2 (20%)	Doctoral 7 (70%)	10	0
Experience (years)	1–10 4 (44.4%)	11–20 5 (55.5%)	21+ 0 (0%)	9	1

With regards to class size, two out of ten lecturers from the University of the North reported class sizes of 210–300 students and six lecturers reported class sizes of 301–400 students. Whereas nine out of ten lecturers from the University of the south reported class sizes of 50–201 students and one lecturer reported class sizes of 210–300 students. These results highlight the problem of student overcrowding, which is inconsistent with the NUC BMAS recommended staff/student ratio of 1:30.

Figure 6 shows that most of the lecturers (seven out of ten) at the University of the North used the lecture format to deliver input to students compared to University of the South where eight out of ten used lectures and two out of ten used an eclectic approach. Discussion (five out of ten) was perceived as being more effective in the North (Figure 7), while in the South, the eclectic approach was considered the most effective (six out of ten lecturers).

Interview data from the North revealed that lecturers adopted other modes of teaching in a blended format.

In class, I lecture, at the same time I teach and it is more like blended learning. (Lecturer 1 Interview)

Popularly, I adopt ... the question-and-answer method ... I have come to discover that once you created a regimented environment, students are usually put off. (Lecturer 2 Interview)

I use multiple/eclectic method[s]. Sometimes, I use audio-visual when there is power supply. Sometimes, we use PowerPoints. During [the] Covid period, some lecturers had to go online. (Lecturer Interview 3)

Figure 6. Teaching modes adopted by lecturers (n=10)

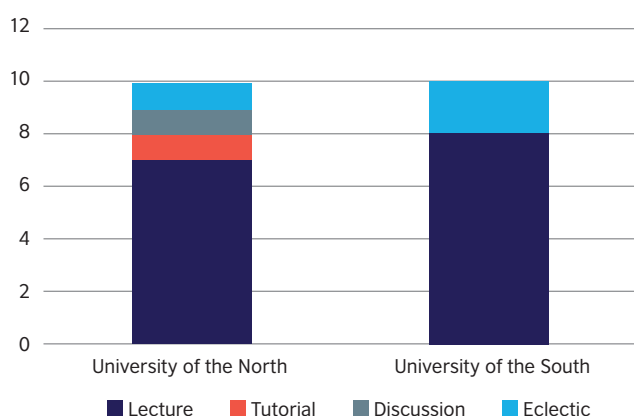


Figure 7. Teaching mode perceived as most effective (n=10)

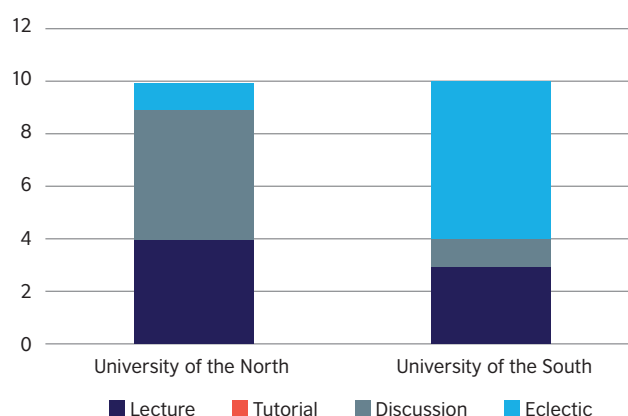


Figure 9. Erratic power supply is a major challenge with regard to ICT (n=10)

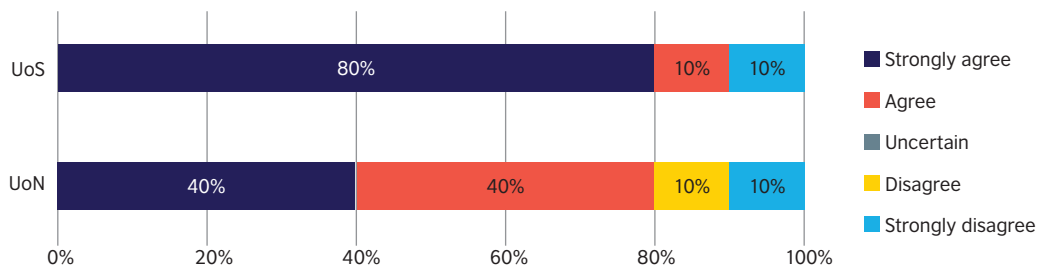


Figure 10. Class size hinders effective utilisation of ICT tools in class (n=10)

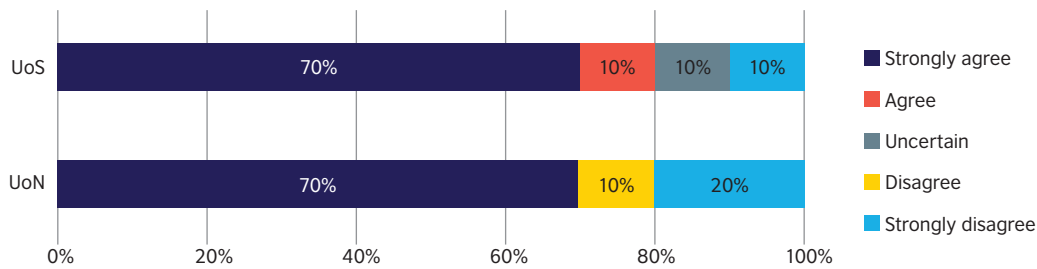


Figure 11. Men dominate in our department (n=10)

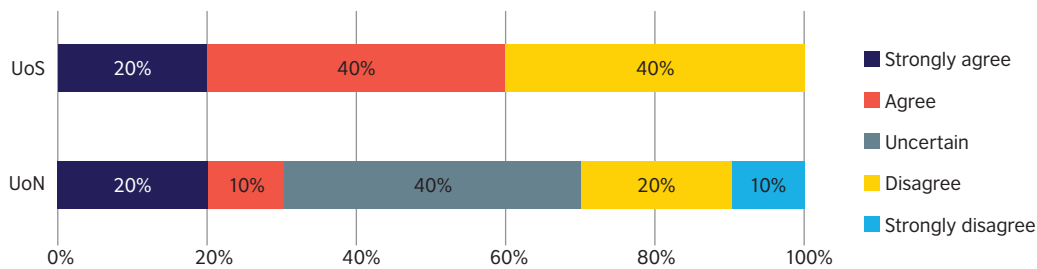


Figure 12. There have been more males than female Heads of Department in the last 5 years (n=10)

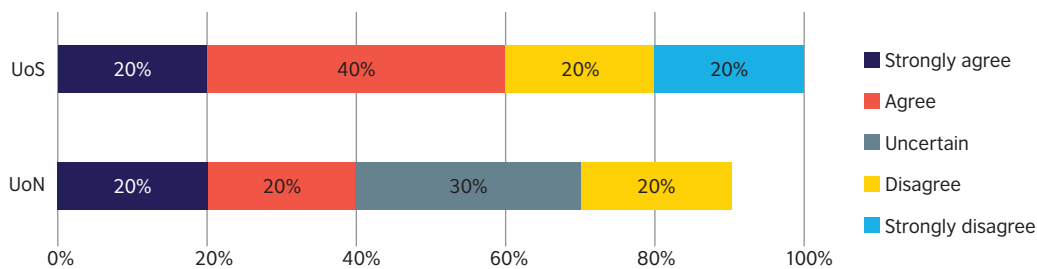
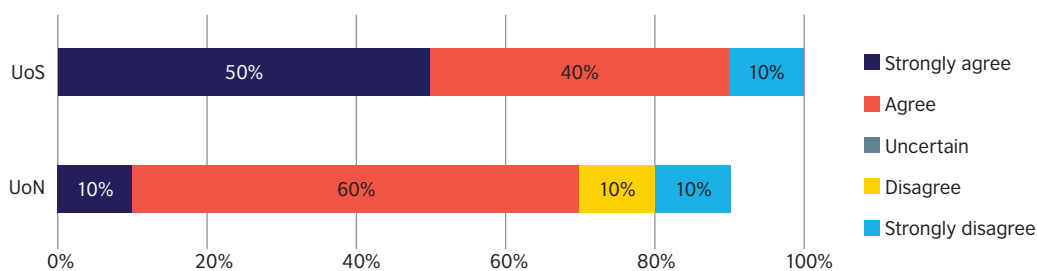


Figure 13. Currently, there are more males than females in our department (n=10)



Anonymised responses to open-ended questions indicated that lecturers from both universities identified several challenges that they encountered during the implementation of the BMAS curriculum:

- *Class size is a major challenge.*
- *Overpopulated classes pose a challenge to effective teaching and assessment of students.*
- *Technical hitches and overpopulation, coupled with non-availability of teaching aids.*
- *The curriculum is broad and does not really contain topics relevant to current society.*
- *The document is too traditional and does not give attention to recent trends.*
- *There is no audio-visual equipment to aid teaching.*

Open-ended comments also allowed lecturers to identify a list of improvements that they would like to see in the BMAS curriculum:

- *[The BMAS] should be subjected to review every five years.*
- *More functional, contemporary and relevant courses should be added to the curriculum.*
- *Most of the courses on the curriculum are still disconnected from the needs of the workplace.*
- *[The] staff student ratio.*

4.3.2 Perceptions of students

Tables 7 and 8 provide an overview of the demographic profile of the students from both universities who completed the process questionnaire according to gender, school type, age, year and qualifications for entry.

Table 7. Composition of Students' Process Questionnaire: University of the North (n=50)

Gender	Male 7 (14%)	Female 43 (86%)		
School Type	Federal 48 (96%)	State 2 (4%)	Private 0 (0%)	
Age	17–19 2 (4%)	20–22 26 (52%)	23–25 16 (32%)	26+ 5 (10%)
Year	Year 1 0 (0%)	Year 2 6 (12%)	Year 3 9 (18%)	Year 4 35 (70%)
Qualification	WAEC 43 (86%)	NECO 3 (6%)	TG II 0 (0%)	A-Level 1 (2%)

Table 8. Composition of Students' Process Questionnaire: University of the South (n=50)

Gender	Male 13 (26%)	Female 37 (74%)		
School Type	Federal 0 (0%)	State 50 (100%)	Private 0 (0%)	
Age	17–19 10 (20%)	20–22 23 (46%)	23–25 13 (26%)	26+ 4 (8%)
Year	Year 1 14 (28%)	Year 2 7 (14%)	Year 3 12 (24%)	Year 4 17 (34%)
Qualification	WAEC 45 (90%)	NECO 1 (2%)	TG II 0 (0%)	GCE A-Level 4 (8%)

Figures 14 and 15 show the socio-economic status for students from both universities and that the students are from parents who belong to the lowest strata of Nigerian society.

Figure 14. Father's socio-economic status (n=50)

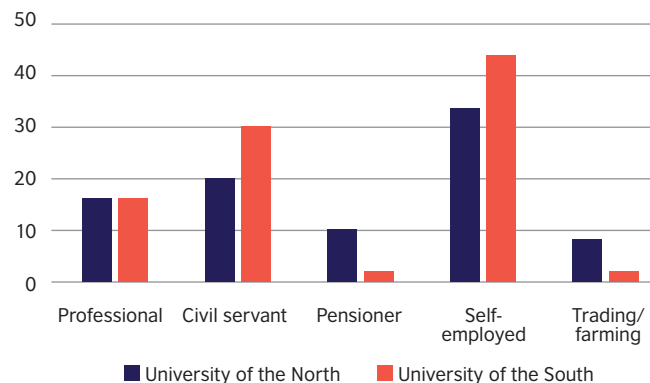


Figure 15. Mother's socio-economic status (n=50)

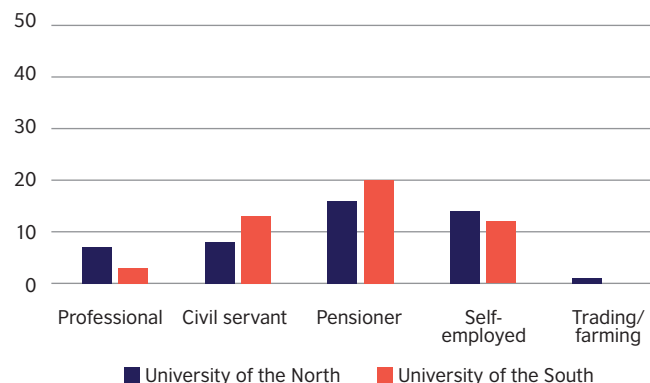


Figure 16 confirms the answers provided by the lecturers in that the lecturing approach was used for the majority of the time (72 per cent in the North and 86 per cent in the South). Discussion was the most effective mode of teaching (Figure 17) for students in the North (46 per cent), while lecturing was perceived as the most effective in the South (66 per cent).

Figure 16. Teaching mode adopted by lecturers according to students (n=50)

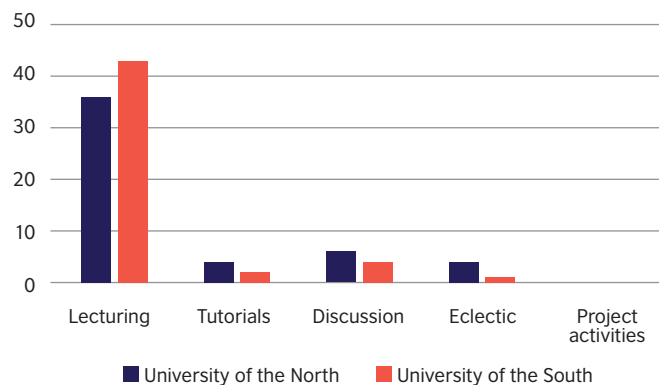
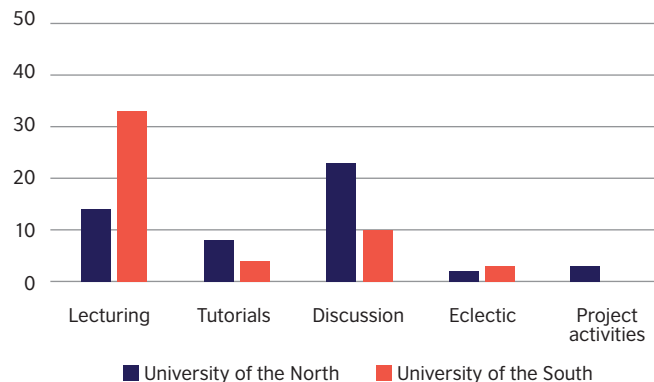


Figure 17. Which teaching mode is most effective according to students (n=50)



Turning to several questions on gender, Figure 18 shows that 52 per cent of students agreed that they have more male governors than females in the North compared to 60 per cent in the South. Most of the students (52 per cent did not agree that males dominated in the Department in the North, compared with 54 per cent in the South (Figure 19). Only 28 per cent in the North and 10 per cent in the South agreed that more female students drop out of school (Figure 20).

Figure 18. We have more male governors/class captains than females (n=50)

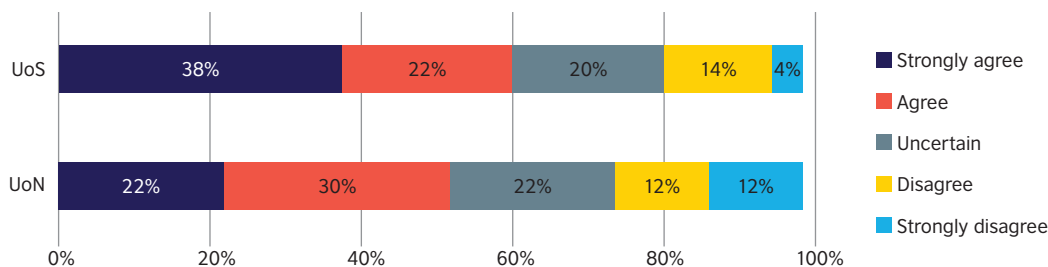


Figure 19. Males dominate in our department (n=50)

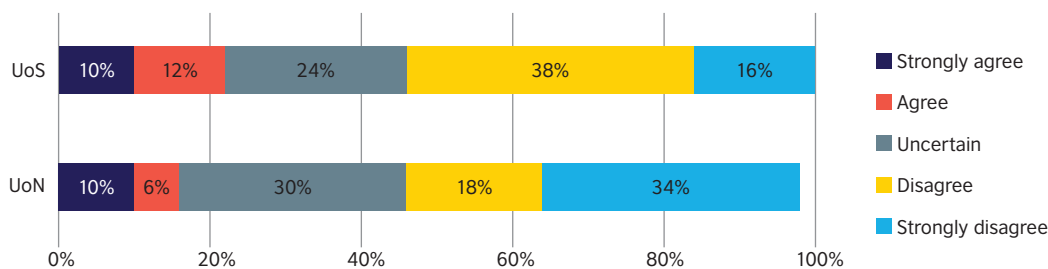
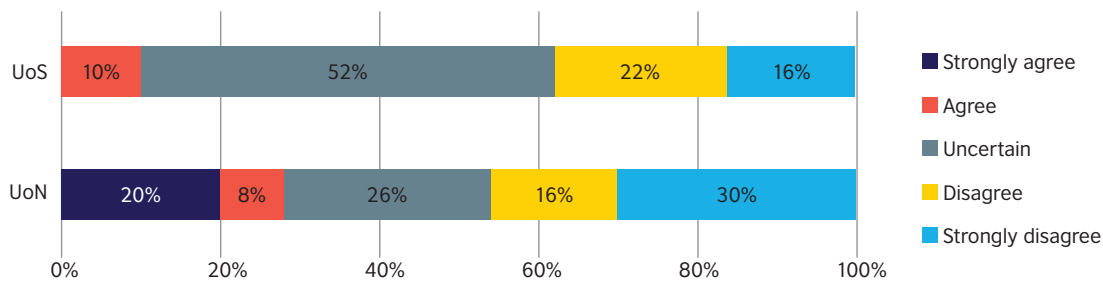


Figure 20. More females drop out of school before graduation (n=50)



Anonymised open-ended questions from both universities indicated that the students identified a range of improvements they would like to see in the teaching and learning process:

- *Accurate power supply and [a] conducive environment.*
- *By adopting online lectures, using computers and LCD projectors for effective learning.*
- *Conducive environment and more classrooms.*
- *Conducive learning environment and availability of current textbooks.*
- Equip and improve the language laboratory.
- Making use of PowerPoint and laptops in class.
- Provision of more classrooms to solve the problem of overcrowding.

4.4 Product

4.4.1 University of the North

Interview excerpts with the Head of Department in the University of the North indicate that he was uncertain about the overall achievement of the curriculum objectives. However, the graduates of the department were rated highly by employers in his view, thus meeting one of the key criteria of BMAS.

Although there is no official report on that but what we get from sources is that our [students] are rated high because what we do here in the department is to combine English language and Literary studies; it is a two in one barrel. (Head of Department Interview)

In relation to linguistic skills, the interview with lecturers demonstrated that the students did not have a good grasp of fundamental grammar which is also an important BMAS objective:

... they do not have a good grip of grammar. Simple grammar is a problem for master's students, they come in here for over a month you can't get a suitable title. (Lecturer 4 Interview)

Likewise, student's communicative and oral skills needed further opportunity for practice and development.

Focus group interviews show that the students were not satisfied with the curriculum and wanted more guided instruction and a better mix of theory and practice as required by BMAS.

In the long run, I have discovered that some aspects of the curriculum have not been met, thereby giving me the responsibility of having to train myself and go through tedious training in those aspects of the curriculum that have not been met. (Student Interviewee 1)

I believe it is not suitable, most of the things should be practicable. The curriculum is more ... theory. (Student Interviewee 4)

4.4.2 University of the South

In the University of the South, the majority of lecturers were aware of the objectives of the NUC BMAS curriculum, but were unclear about the extent to which they were meeting their targets. On the other hand, the Head of Department was positive about meeting curriculum objectives, particularly in terms of employability.

... so the basic knowledge for any graduate to cope with life and living is what they received here beyond the content of the language itself and these we believe have been helping many of them to be well positioned in different professions outside of the school area.
(Head of Department Interview)

One of the students was equally positive about the Department of English working to meet the objectives of the curriculum in that it encouraged a broader appreciation of language and literature.

... so far so good, the curriculum has been wonderful, the fact that English, the department of English ... allows or should I say make it mandatory for us to have a knowledge of literature even though one will still pick language department or the literature department.
(Student Interviewee)

Nevertheless, other students highlighted the importance of courses that helped them develop critical thinking and writing skills as stipulated by BMAS.



5

Analysis

5.1 What contextual factors shape the English language programmes with respect to the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards in Nigerian universities?

Contextual factors relate to the ‘settings [and] community in which a programme occurs, the stakeholders involved and the characteristics of the programme itself’ (Darlington, Violon and Jourdan, 2018, p. 1). The 2018 BMAS guidance recognised developments in the educational landscape related to the increasing importance of ICTs and digital literacy for Nigerian academics and students, as well as the need to design courses that improved students’ employability skills. More specifically, the BMAS established expectations in relation to the setting, organisation, facilities, objectives and needs of the students that require strategic adjustment from Heads of Department, senior university management and academic staff. It is clear from the variety of different perspectives shown in the data from Heads of Department, lecturers and students, that both universities are still adjusting to the new guidance, and it will take time to change their physical and intellectual infrastructure so that there is a more effective alignment with the contextual goals set out in BMAS.

One of the most striking findings in relation to the context was the problems caused by the significant over enrollment in the undergraduate student population in both universities. This is a systemic problem that confirms the findings of Uchendu (2015), who argued that this presents challenges to maintaining satisfactory educational standards. This is especially relevant for university infrastructure, the quality of teaching and learning facilities and access to ICTs; the types and range of pedagogical approaches that can be used in an overpopulated environment; and the ability of lecturers to deliver the curriculum effectively. Data from the lecturers and students at both universities repeatedly underlined that effective English teaching and learning could not occur in such an overcrowded context, and this undermined efforts to implement the BMAS curriculum recommendations. Although

the NUC stipulation is for a 1:30 staff/student ratio (National Universities Commission, 2018), this has not been achieved and overpopulation is a significant challenge, thus confirming earlier research by Fabiyi and Uzoka (2005) and Ademola, Ogundipe and Babatunde (2014). Overcrowded classrooms affect students’ achievement and larger classes increase the workload of lecturers, which can have a negative effect on students’ outcomes and academic performance.

While language learning labs and facilities and resources were in evidence at both universities, observation and qualitative data indicated that overpopulation hindered their effective use and some were in a dilapidated condition in line with earlier findings from Isa, Zahari and Yussof (2015). The libraries in both institutions were increasingly digitalised, but data revealed that students wanted to see a dedicated departmental library that was better equipped with English language learning and teacher training materials and resources. While some lecturers used ICTs, it was evident that in-service professional development will need to be put in place to develop lecturers’ digital pedagogy skills for this to translate into effective modes of instruction. This will depend on basic infrastructure upgrades to guarantee access to digital resources and alleviate challenges with erratic power supply in the country.

To meet the BMAS objectives for English language programmes, the three- and four-year undergraduate programmes in both universities provide a comprehensive mix of survey courses, but deficiencies were highlighted by lecturers and students in the areas of speaking skills, a fundamental understanding of grammar, and employability. A close examination of the objectives of the BMAS highlights the important role of employability skills in line with research by Omoniwa and Adedapo (2017). While this was acknowledged by Heads of Department and lecturers, data from the students suggested that they wanted more language courses of a practical nature. Students also highlighted the need for more courses that improved their abilities in critical thinking,

knowledge of basic grammar, public speaking and practical writing course. In this respect, findings on the contextual factors highlight discrepancies between BMAS' expectations and the current lived reality of staff and students on the ground.

5.2 How does the implementation of the curriculum equip students to develop the four language skills?

Data from both universities suggested that students develop the four language skills, sometimes in an integrated fashion and sometimes through a focus on pairs of skills (e.g., speaking and listening, and reading and writing), in line with Pardede's research (2019). Nevertheless, some lecturers also used a discrete skills approach. A range of pedagogical approaches were used by the lecturers and they also noted how ICTs were used to offer blended modes of course content delivery that helped with the development of students' digital and literacy skills. Students were given the opportunity to practise their speaking and listening skills through online activities using task-based instruction. This is in line with Pardede's (2017, p. 218) recommendation that the integrated approach 'enables EFL students to develop their knowledge of English and to use it in real communication'.

Following Abderrahim (2001), at the commencement of students' studies at the University of the North, lecturers emphasised the importance of receptive skills prior to focusing on productive skills, and they provided students with the opportunity to practise their speaking and listening skills through online activities using task-based instruction. Data from the students showed that they considered themselves proficient in the four language skills, which was a finding contrary to earlier studies (Dabalén, Oni and Adekola, 2000; Odey, 2017) and the perspectives of their lecturers.

At the University of the South, lecturers indicated that the four language skills were taught in a student-centred way to encourage student participation. Nevertheless, data from lecturers identified weaknesses across the use of all four skills, with students experiencing challenges in relation to reading and writing, as well as giving oral presentations. Lecturers closely observed student performance during classroom interaction and provided feedback to students arising from their written work and oral assignments, highlighting additional deficiencies in terms of responding to written English questions. As was the case with the University of the North, students nevertheless rated themselves highly proficient across the four skills. In both cases, this is a contradictory finding that prompts the need for more research on student outcomes and end of course proficiency levels.

5.3 What are the lecturers' and students' perceptions of the implementation of the curriculum?

At the University of the North, lecturers adopted lecturing as the most popular method of instruction but recognised discussion as the most effective approach; both of which are consistent with previous studies on this topic in Nigerian universities (Conti, 2004). The adoption of lecturing is likely to be a consequence of the problem of overpopulation. While it may, therefore, be used as a way of managing large groups of students, there is a risk that it fails to engage them in active forms of learning as suggested by Bajak (2004). While lecturers agreed that the BMAS was a clearly written document and the majority understood what they were expected to teach under its guidance, they wanted to be consulted in future about its direction.

From the students' perspective, workload was highlighted as a cause of stress in their engagement with the curriculum. Moreover, other challenges to the effective implementation of the curriculum related to the admissions policy and the need to have more learner-friendly classrooms and laboratory equipment, as well as up-to-date books and resources.

In the University of the South, by contrast, many of the lecturers in the Department of English combined the lecturing method with the discussion method. The lecturers preferred the lecture mode to transmit knowledge, while discussion enabled them to facilitate and check the effectiveness of the knowledge acquisition process.

In terms of ICT integration, to manage large classes, sometimes the lecturers examined courses with the application of internet-based testing systems. Moreover, lecturers used online materials to augment lecture notes and discussions. For teaching resources, data reveals that lecturers depended on the University library, the internet and purchasing books to access teaching materials. Lecturers who taught phonology used audio-visual aids to assist students' learning in the language laboratory.

Students, on the other hand, highlighted how effectively they had improved their knowledge of English vocabulary, speaking and writing skills, resulting in overall improvements in their levels of confidence in using English. They described the curriculum in terms of 'assisting' them to be creative and commented on how it helped them to learn and use the language appropriately in the correct context arising from their knowledge of sociolinguistics. They were keen to highlight the importance of ICTs to provide a twenty-first

century learning environment through the use of digital technologies and the internet, which were not always available in their university or library facilities. Moreover, the students identified the need for courses to be more practical rather than theoretical in orientation, as well as to focus on specific skills such as public speaking in English. Other employability skills such as learning English to enhance their confidence and to become a more effective editor and writer were also singled out for a future role in the curriculum.

5.4 How have the objectives of the curriculum been achieved?

Different perspectives on the question of meeting the objectives of the curriculum were received from departmental heads, lecturers and students across both universities. Interview data from the Heads of Department at both universities presented a positive view which placed a firm emphasis on the ability of the curriculum to meet the objectives of improving student employability, communicative fluency, and literacy. Interestingly, however, there was a sharp contrast between the perspectives of the departmental heads and that of the students and lecturers at both universities. Uchendu's (2015) findings that Nigerian students lack basic employability skills was in line with the perspectives of the students and lecturers, but not in line with the responses from Heads of Department, who thought this was a strength of their current programme.

Students called into question the quality of the available resources and teaching approach, while the lecturers identified how graduates were still consistently poor in writing and speaking skills. Both lecturers and students highlighted significant infrastructural, pedagogical and resource-based challenges which prevented the university from effectively achieving the objectives of the curriculum.

The majority of lecturers indicated that they adopted lecturing as the main mode of delivery to implement the curriculum. As student perspectives suggested, however, using the lecturing method alone may not be an effective teaching approach. Therefore, lecturers may need to combine other modes of teaching of English such as role play and presentations, for example, if there is to be a more effective curriculum implementation process. Nevertheless, the majority of the students said that the curriculum was satisfactory for learning English because it was inclusive and helped them to understand the necessary language skills required for studying the language.

In relation to the use of ICTs, students lamented the lack of computers to aid teaching and expressed concerns that language laboratories were not sufficiently well-equipped, both of which help to explain why the contents of the courses were not fully integrated into the institution's online platform to enable students to access them more flexibly. Students at both universities indicated that they ought to be better equipped with twenty-first century technologies for teaching. Indeed, the majority of the students reported that lecturers do not currently use PowerPoint presentations in teaching and learning exercises. In this respect, the importance of ICT infrastructure in language teaching and learning cannot be overstated. Preparing students to communicate and learn was perceived as essential for success in language learning and teaching.

Lecturers highlighted how student performance has been poor, especially in writing and speaking. This decline in proficiency may be attributed to the influence of their mother tongue as well as some lecturers' inability to communicate effectively in English. Indeed, the majority of English lecturers highlighted the need for continuing professional development programmes in areas of language teaching, including, in particular, those that would improve their own fluency in English. Moreover, English language lecturers need greater support to develop effective teaching and pedagogical skills. This should include recognition of the need for a greater degree of formal teacher training from the Faculty of Education about the use of technology, such as computer-mediated tools to support teaching and learning exercises and improve students' engagement during online classroom exercises. As a result, an appropriate learning strategy is required to increase students' performance in reading, writing, listening and presentation. Students placed an emphasis on the need for lecturers to develop a creative and engaging instructional process that was appropriate to the task of helping students to adapt to society and apply their knowledge in real-life situations.

5.5 What issues of gender inequality emerged as a result of the CIPP evaluation?

Data were collected by several instruments relating to perceptions about gender equality. No interview or focus group data from Heads of Department, academic staff or students at either university suggested that gender inequality was a significant factor shaping management, teaching or learning processes related to the English language curriculum or teaching and learning.

Disparities were evident, however, in the questionnaire data collected from lecturers and students. From the lecturer perspective, there was a disparity between North and South in relation to the question of whether male or female staff dominated in the department, with 60 per cent identifying this in the South compared with 30 per cent of lecturers from the North. Likewise, significant percentages of lecturers indicated that there had been more male academic staff in leadership positions over the last five years; 40 per cent of lecturers from the North compared with 60 per cent from the South. This perception was also in evidence in relation to the percentage of male to female staff in the English departments in both universities, with 80 per cent identifying this trend in the North and 90 per cent in the South. This imbalance in the department was also reflected in the percentage of male academic staff who completed our questionnaires in each institution – 60 per cent in the North and 80 per cent in the South – thus continuing to support the conclusions of Olaogun, Adebayo and Oluyemo (2015) and Enyioko (2021), that the proportion of female academic staff remains low and there is low mobility in terms of obtaining senior management positions.

From the student perspective, male to female ratios in each university – 51 to 49 (North) and 55 to 45 (South) – show high levels of parity in terms of overall admission. More females undertake teacher training on average and this is reflected in the higher number of female students who agreed to take part in our questionnaire; 74 per cent in the North and 86 per cent in the South. Other findings were less consistent. 52 per cent of students agreed that there were more male student governors than females in the North compared to 60 per cent in the South. Just over half of the students (52 per cent) did not agree that males dominated in the Department in the North, compared with 54 per cent in the South. Only 28 per cent in the North and 26 per cent in the South agreed that more female students drop out of school.

Most of the research on gender inequality in Nigeria has been on the school sector with little specifically on teacher training as Mustapha (2012) indicates. The mixed local picture presented above confirms that challenges remain in terms of a) female academic career progression, and b) opportunities to represent and empower the female student voice on campus.

6

Implications

Findings arising from this study have identified several major challenges facing the English language teacher training curriculum in the two Nigerian universities explored in this study. The data provided valuable insights into the workings of the curriculum for these institutions, and while they cannot be generalised, they nevertheless highlight a series of strategic, operational and pedagogical challenges that should contribute to future debates and policies about English language teacher training programmes in Nigeria in the wake of the revised 2018 BMAS.

While the CIPP evaluation model is aimed at providing a holistic overview, inevitably the study identified several limitations in its use: a) it was difficult to obtain reliable institutional data in Nigeria, particularly in relation to student numbers and gender; b) CIPP is a complex model and requires a significant amount of access from the institutions involved in the study, as well as researcher time and expertise to collect and analyse data over several months; c) as we have seen in the different perspectives of Heads of Department, lecturers and students, several stages of CIPP rely on subjective perceptions, which can be biased; d) although only two universities were used in this study, it requires a strict process of standardisation to enable the comparison of results, and this was not always possible in a challenging LMIC context such as Nigeria; and e) data on students' English language performance was not available at the end of each year of the programme, and this would help researchers to understand the effectiveness of the content and pedagogical approaches used and contextualise the lecturer and student perceptions.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the evaluation of the factors shaping the English language BMAS curriculum in the two Nigerian universities in this study, the following recommendations have been identified:

Admission Policy: the significant increases in the number of undergraduate students have led to a strain on the teaching and learning infrastructure and resources of both universities. A review of the

admission policy is recommended to explore the reasons for this and to bring it into line with the stated staff-student ratios as expected by the BMAS.

Curriculum content: Annual and periodic course reviews are recommended to address the highlighted deficiencies in relation to the teaching of basic grammar, particularly for lower proficiency level students and those at the beginning of their course, as well as the employability aspects of the programmes.

Pedagogical approaches: While there was evidence of the growing importance of ICTs in both universities, data from lecturers recommends the design of more effective in-service CPD programmes for teacher trainers and trainee teachers to keep pace with digital literacy skills and developments in digital pedagogy. Moreover, it is recommended to explore the role of blended learning, enabling staff and students to work on and off campus, as a way of addressing overpopulation.

The workload of the lecturers: To mitigate the increasing demands on lecturers' workloads, which weaken their ability to implement the curriculum effectively, a review of staffing policy, is recommended to achieve a workable balance.

Availability of learning resources: Audits of the libraries and student feedback indicated that up-to-date library materials should be provided and a review of the centralisation of resources undertaken with the goal of a) providing more dedicated departmental libraries for students, and b) more widespread use of e-resources.

Gender equality: Further research is required on in-service inequalities to explore how female academic staff in English departments, from the early to later stage of their careers, are given opportunities to advance in terms of seniority and management and leadership positions. Likewise, from the student perspective, more research on potential inequalities in the student voice in higher education are required to explore how and in what ways female students are empowered to provide input into processes shaping the design and implementation of the curriculum.

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APPENDIX I

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST: AVAILABILITY OF EQUIPMENT

INSTRUCTIONS: Please tick the appropriate box.

Item	Available	Quantity Available	Available and Used	Not Available
Tape Recorders				
TV, Video				
Record Players				
DVDs				

APPENDIX II

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST: STATE OF THE FACILITIES

INSTRUCTIONS: Please tick the appropriate box.

Item	1	2	3	4
Language Laboratory				
Recording Studio				
Tutorial Rooms				
Instructional Resources Centre for the Faculty of Arts				
Phonetics Laboratory				

Ranking Order

Excellent (4) Facility is available with the necessary equipment in good condition.

Good (3) Facility is available with equipment not in good condition.

Fair (2) Facility is available without the necessary equipment.

Poor (1) Facility is not available.

APPENDIX III

INTERVIEW: HEADS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

Demographic Information

1. How long have you been the Head of Department?
2. Could you chronicle some of your successes and challenges since you assumed this office?

Vision and Objectives of the BMAS English Language Curriculum

3. What is the vision of your school? How does the BMAS English Curriculum impact on the vision of your school?
4. Could you shed more light on the relevance of the English language curriculum to the job needs of the students?
5. What in the socio-economic and political environment of this city inhibits the achievement of the objectives of the English language curriculum?

Student concerns

6. Does your school meet with other stakeholders of your institution e.g., parents (Parent Teacher Association), employers and community leaders? If it does, what have been the benefits of such a forum? If it does not, why?

Gender imbalance

7. Do you have more males than females in this Department? Why is this so?
8. From the establishment of the university to date, have you had more males as HOD than females? Why is this so?

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

9. How do your staff members engage in professional development?
10. How often does your school organise programmes that enhance staff development?

Quality Assurance

11. How does the Department of English Language assess the effectiveness of the lecturers?
(How do you get feedback? What is the nature of this feedback? How do you remedy or deal with what may be assessed as poor performance?)
12. How does your school ensure the use of appropriate examinations in terms of teacher standards and coverage?

APPENDIX IV

INTERVIEW WITH LECTURERS ON THE EVALUATION OF THE COURSES USING THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

Demographic Information

1. How long have you been teaching in this university?
2. What is the highest level of qualification you have attained?
3. What is your area of specialisation?

The Language Skill Courses

4. What knowledge of the specific needs of the students do you have? From what sources do you obtain your information?
5. What are the NUC BMAS (English Language Curriculum) objectives of the courses you teach?
6. How suitable and appropriate are the courses that cover the four language skills to the needs of the students?
7. How do you decide on the appropriateness of the textbooks and other materials you use for the courses you teach?

Teaching Methods

8. What method(s) of teaching do you adopt in class? Why?
9. What teaching resources do you use in classrooms? Why?
10. Which teaching methods and classroom activities are most effective? Why?
11. Which methods and classroom activities are least effective? Why?

Curriculum Implementation

12. How many of the topics in a course do you cover by the end of a semester?
13. How do you teach a topic? Do you add to it or you teach it as stated in the NUC BMAS? Why? What modifications, if any, do you make?

Development of Language Skills

14. What language skills do you teach? How do your students develop writing/speaking listening/reading skills?
15. What is the level of the students' performance in the skills you teach?

CPD of Lecturers

16. What kind of professional development have you taken part in?
17. What sort of training would you like to see made available? Why do you think this training is important?
18. What kind of training would support you best as a lecturer?

Gender Imbalance

19. Do you think men are given advantages over females in you Department?
20. If yes/no. Why is this the case?

APPENDIX V

LECTURERS' PROCESS QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE EVALUATION OF NUC MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM) IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Section A: Demographic Information

Instructions: For questions 1–6, please tick the appropriate answer.

1. Your gender:
 - a. Female _____
 - b. Male _____
2. Type of school you work:
 - a. Federal _____
 - b. State _____
 - c. Private _____
3. Your age:
 - a. 25–30 _____
 - b. 31–35 _____
 - c. 36–40 _____
 - d. 41+ _____
4. Your qualification:
 - a. First Degree _____
 - b. Master's Degree _____
 - c. PhD _____
 - d. Other (please specify) _____
5. What is your area of specialisation? _____
6. How many years have you been teaching English Language? _____
7. What is your academic rank?
 - a. Graduate Assistant _____
 - b. Assistant Lecturer _____
 - c. Lecturer II _____
 - d. Lecturer I _____
 - e. Senior Lecturer _____
 - f. Reader (Associate Professor) _____
 - h. Professor _____

SECTION B: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM

8. How many students on the average are usually in your class? _____

9. How many contact hours per week do you have with students in your Department? _____

INSTRUCTIONS: For Questions 8–10, first, decide which items you would like to choose (e.g., lecture, tutorial). Next, tick the relevant number using this scale:

5 = Always 4 = Frequently 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never.

10. Which teaching mode do you adopt?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Lecturing					
b. Tutorial					
c. Project Activities					
d. Discussion					
e. Other (please specify)					

11. What teaching mode do you perceive as being more effective?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Lecturing					
b. Tutorial					
c. Project Activities					
d. Discussion					
e. Eclectic					

12. Which teaching materials do you provide for students?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Lecture Notes					
b. Textbooks					
c. Power Point Slide Shows					
d. Other (please specify)					

INSTRUCTIONS: For items 13–30, please, use the scale below:

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = uncertain 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

Question(s) 13–30	5	4	3	2	1
The NUC BMAS					
13. We had training sessions for orientation on the latest revised NUC BMAS					
14. I am familiar with the latest revised NUC BMAS					
15. I feel the NUC BMAS is a clearly written document					
Teaching Resources and Methods					
16. I have audio-visual resources to use in my language classes					
17. I have access to English teaching resources					
18. Students participate actively in class activities					
19. I find it hard to get students involved in group work or pair work activities in the classroom					
20. I employ teaching aids and learning resources for teaching language					
Professional Development					
21. In-service teacher training is not available for me in my university					
22. I would like to learn more about computer-assisted teaching					
23. I attend workshops/conferences for my professional development					
24. I benefit/have benefitted from the Staff Development Scheme					
Implementation of NUC BMAS					
25. I feel that the NUC Benchmark Minimum Standards is a clearly written document					
26. I understand what I am expected to teach under the guidance of NUC BMAS					
27. There is a curriculum committee in the university that reviews curricula in the University					
Evaluation and Quality Assurance					
28. My students evaluate me anonymously					
29. An External Examiner moderates the examination questions					
30. An External Examiner examines the examination papers to determine the depth and scope of the exam questions					
31. Students are given feedback after every assessment					
32. Course accommodation is maintained (no constant room changes)					
33. The students' English abilities influence my teaching					
Support Personnel/ Staff					
34. There are academic support personnel in the Department that make my work easier					
35. There are administrative support staff in the Department					
36. There are technical support personnel who man the laboratory					

SECTION C

INSTRUCTIONS: For items 13–30, please, use the scale below:

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = uncertain 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

ICT IMPLEMENTATION AND GENDER IMBALANCE

ICT Implementation					
37. I am computer literate					
38. I possess a computer for my lecturing role					
39. Online materials are well integrated into my teaching					
40. I have networking challenges					
41. The erratic power supply is a major challenge with regard to ICT					
42. Class size hinders the effective utilisation of ICT tools in class					
43. I use the traditional method of teaching					
44. More males head the committees in the Department than females					
45. In the last three sessions, we have had more male graduates than females in the department					
46. There have been more males than females as HOD over the years					
47. Currently, there are more males in the department than females					
48. I am satisfied with the work conditions in our Department					

49. What challenges have you encountered during the implementation of the NUC BMAS (English Curriculum)?

50. Which (if any) improvements would you like to have in the curriculum?

STUDENTS' FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS ON THE EVALUATION OF NUC MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM) IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

1. Please, introduce yourselves – tell us your name, Department, level and why you like English Language.
2. Think back to when you were admitted, what were your expectations with regard to the curriculum for the programme? Are they being met?
3. Where do you intend to work after your programme?
4. Do you think the curriculum is suitable for you?
5. How would you define a twenty-first century classroom? How does your classroom and what happens in it reflect the definition?
6. What changes would you want to see in your course contents?
7. Do you think you are acquiring the necessary skills for the world of work? If yes/no, why?
8. Are the physical facilities needed for the implementation of the curriculum in a good shape?
9. What barriers have you encountered in trying to use technology to learn?
10. What would be your advice to prospective English language candidates?

APPENDIX VII

STUDENTS' PROCESS QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE EVALUATION OF NUC MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM) IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

INSTRUCTIONS: For questions 1–6, please tick the appropriate answer.

1. Your gender:
 - a. Female _____
 - b. Male _____
2. Type of school you attend:
 - a. Federal _____
 - b. State _____
 - c. Private _____
3. Your age:
 - a. 17–19 _____
 - b. 20–22 _____
 - c. 23–25 _____
 - d. other _____
4. Your year of study:
 - a. Year 1 _____
 - b. Year 2 _____
 - c. Year 3 _____
 - d. Year 4 _____
5. Latest certificate currently possessed:
 - a. West African School Certificate _____
 - b. General Certificate of Education _____
 - c. Teachers' Grade 11 Certificate _____
 - d. Other (please specify) _____

6. Parents' Socio-Economic Status:

Please, tick the relevant boxes and use the occupational codes to indicate the occupations of your parents.

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 01 Professional | 03 Pensioner | 05 Trading/Farming |
| 02 Civil Servant | 04 Self-employed | 06 Full Time Housewife |

Parents	Year Level			Highest Academic Achievement	Occupation
	Elementary	Secondary	University		
Father					
Mother					

7. How many hours per week do you study? _____

SECTION B: CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

INSTRUCTIONS: For Questions 8–11, first, decide which items you would like to choose (e.g., lecture, tutorial). Next, tick the relevant number using this scale:

5 = Always 4 = Frequently 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never.

8. Teaching modes employed by lecturers:

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Lecturing					
b. Tutorial					
c. Project Activities					
d. Discussion					
e. Other (please specify)					

9. Which teaching mode do you feel is most effective?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Lecturing					
b. Tutorial					
c. Project Activities					
d. Discussion					
e. Other (please specify)					

10. Which technological teaching aids are available in your school?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Television					
b. LCD Projectors					
c. Computers					
d. Other (please specify)					

11. Which content materials are provided by lecturers?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
a. Lecture Notes					
b. Textbooks					
c. Power Point Slide Shows					
d. Other (please specify)					

INSTRUCTIONS: For items 12–30, please, use the scale below:

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = uncertain 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

Question(s) 12–30	5	4	3	2	1
Admission					
12. I was denied admission at least once by JAMB					
13. The criteria of JAMB for admission were fair for me					
14. Admission Policies into Nigerian Universities should be reviewed					
15. My school library has current books. e.g., books published within the last five years.					
16. Lecturers are available to teach all courses					
Continuous Assessment					
17. Continuous assessment constitutes 30–40% of theory courses in the department					
18. Continuous assessment constitutes 40% of partly practical and partly theoretical courses in the department					
19. Lecturers always give continuous assessment					
20. The criteria used for marking assessments are made clear in advance					
21. Teaching aids used by lecturers are available					
19. Lecturers use PowerPoint to teach					
20. Lecturers encourage student participation in class					
21. The textbooks given usually motivated my interest in the courses					
22. The lectures added value in terms of meeting the course objectives					
23. Feedback provided is usually helpful in understanding the course					
24. Feedback is provided within four weeks					
25. Assessments are given at least once in a month					
26. Language laboratories are well-equipped for my course					
27. Online materials are well-integrated into our courses					
28. Subject matter are usually well-explained by lecturers					
29. My workload is manageable					
30. I have practical teaching on English pronunciation in the laboratory					
31. We have more male governors/class captains than females					
32. Males dominate in our department					
33. More females drop out of school before graduation					
34. Females are given preferential treatment in the Department					
35. Females perform better in the Department because they are assisted					

36. In what way can the teaching learning process be improved in your department?

37. What changes would you like to see in your department?

APPENDIX VIII

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE COURSES EMBODYING THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

INSTRUCTIONS: For questions 1–6, please tick the appropriate answer.

1. Your gender:
 - a. Female _____
 - b. Male _____
2. Type of school you attend:
 - a. Federal _____
 - b. State _____
 - c. Private _____
3. Your age:
 - a. 17–19 _____
 - b. 20–22 _____
 - c. 23–25 _____
 - d. other _____
4. Your current year of study:
 - a. Year 1 _____
 - b. Year 2 _____
 - c. Year 3 _____
 - d. Year 4 _____
5. Latest certificate currently possessed:
 - a. West African School Certificate _____
 - b. General Certificate of Education _____
 - c. National Examination Council Certificate _____
 - d. Other (please specify) _____

6. Parents' Socio-Economic Status:

Please, tick the relevant boxes and use the occupational codes to indicate the occupations of your parents.

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 01 Professional | 03 Pensioner | 05 Trading/Farming |
| 02 Civil Servant | 04 Self-employed | 06 Full Time Housewife |

Parents	Year Level			Highest Academic Achievement	Occupation
	Elementary	Secondary	University		
Father					
Mother					

7. What is the standard of your English? Please, use the West African Examination Council's Grading System (WAEC).

Please tick the relevant box in the 'Your Standard and Date of Exam' columns.

Bands	Percentage	Number	Rating	Date of Exam		Your Standard
A1	75%–100%	5	Excellent	2018		
B2	70%–74%	4	Very Good	2017		
B3	65%–69%	3	Good	2016		
C4	60%–64%	2.75	Credit	2015		
C5	55%–59%	2.50	Credit	2014		
C6	50%–54%	2.00	Credit	2013		
D7	45%–49%	1.50	Pass	2012		
E8	40%–44%	1.00	Pass	2011		
F9	0%–39%	<1.00	Fail	2010		

B. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH SKILLS

INSTRUCTIONS: For items 7–30, please, use the scale below:

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = uncertain 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

	5	4	3	2	1
Writing Skills					
8. I can make complete notes during the course of a lesson					
9. I can write an essay that shows my ability to communicate, giving few difficulties to the reader					
10. I can write down information given at a lecture, if this is dictated					
Reading Skills					
11. I can read quickly enough in order to cope with the demands of an academic course					
12. I can scan texts for important information and grasp the main idea of text					
13. I can access all sources of information promptly					
Speaking Skills					
14. I can discuss different topics with a good degree of fluency					
15. I can contribute effectively to meetings and seminars within my own area of study					
16. I can argue for or against a case within my area of study					
Listening Skills					
17. I use different media to practise my listening skills					
18. I can understand simple predictable questions					
19. I can follow much of what is said in a lecture presentation or demonstration					
Course Content and Organisation					
20. The course objectives are clear					
21. The course load is manageable					
22. The courses are well organised (e.g., timely access to materials, notification of changes etc.)					
Learning Environment and Teaching Methods					
23. The learning and teaching methods encourage participation					
24. Classrooms are satisfactory					
25. The overall environment is conducive to learning					
Learning Resources					
26. Recommended reading books are relevant					
27. The provision of learning resources in the library are adequate					
28. Learning resources are available in the laboratory					
Assessment					
29. Feedback on assessment is timely.					
30. The methods of assessment are appropriate					

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