

# Enhancing English Language Proficiency in Ghanaian Colleges of Education: Exploring Attitudes, Challenges, and Pedagogical Perspectives from Tutors and Trainees

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## Abstract

*This study examines factors inhibiting the quality of English language teaching and learning in Ghanaian colleges of education. Using a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, the study employed a mixed methods research approach, involving questionnaires with 128 teacher trainees from four colleges in the Eastern and Greater Accra zones and telephone interviews with 12 English language tutors. The findings reveal that while some teacher trainees have a positive attitude towards the English language course, they struggle with English concepts due to an overloaded curriculum content, limited instructional time, unfamiliar vocabulary, and ineffective teaching methods. Tutors also highlighted students' poor foundational knowledge, a shortage of experienced educators, and inadequate professional development opportunities. The study calls for a balanced integration of essentialist and progressivist theories to enhance foundational knowledge, interactive learning, and effective teaching methodologies, contributing to improved English language education in Ghana.*

**Keywords:** *education, essentialism, teacher trainees, teaching, progressivism*

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## Introduction

In Ghana, many colleges and universities work together to train teachers who will teach the English language in basic schools. There are 48 Colleges of Education affiliated with the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast, the University of Education, Winneba, the University of Development Studies and Akenten Appiah-Menka University. These colleges of education play a significant role in shaping how teachers are prepared. Becoming an English teacher in Ghana involves different paths depending on the level of teaching and the school you choose. After high school, students can attend colleges of education for thorough training. English language is a core subject at the colleges of education, while Literature in English is an elective subj-

ect for students who want to teach English after completion. For example, building on this foundation, in 2010, special programmes were introduced in the 48 colleges of education to provide additional training in subjects, such as French, Early Childhood Development, Mathematics, Science, and technical skills (Mereku, 2019). However, English Language remains a general or core course covering grammar, speech, writing, and reading. Proficiency in English is vital for students as it is necessary for various aspects of life, including government affairs, administration, and communication between different ethnic groups.

The significance of English language in the Ghanaian educational system cannot be overstated. It serves as the medium of instruction across all educational levels, from preschool to university. This pervasive role of English is rooted in the colonial history of Ghana, where it was established as the official language. English is the primary language used for teaching and learning most subjects. Proficiency in English allows students to access various educational re-sources, including textbooks, research papers, and online materials, predominantly available in English. This exposure is crucial for academic growth and global competitiveness. National examinations and assessments at various educational stages are conducted in English, making mastery of the language necessary for academic success and progression. Passing English language exams at the senior high school level is critical for advancing to higher educational levels in Ghana. English is the medium of instruction and communication in tertiary institutions. Therefore, a strong foundation in English is essential for comprehending course materials, participating in lectures and discussions, and completing assignments and examinations effectively.

Despite the importance of the English language, there are concerns about the declining English standards among Ghanaians, leading to questions about why students struggle with English exams and communication. Recognising the importance of English in Ghana's social and economic contexts, attention is turned to English language teachers as key facilitators (Fosu, 2009). The quality of education depends on how effective these teachers are, emphasising the need to recruit and train high-quality educators (Liston et al., 2008). Different educational bodies have taken steps to improve teaching and learning at Colleges of Education (Buabeng et al., 2020). For instance, in collaboration with UK Aid, the Government of Ghana launched the Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) project to address concerns regarding teaching quality in Ghanaian classrooms. The T-TEL project aims to enhance teaching and learning by supporting all public Colleges of Education in Ghana, specifically focusing on transforming pre-service teacher education delivery. This initiative developed the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF) and National Teachers' Standards (NTS) to guide teacher education programme development and establish minimum professional

competencies for educators. These frameworks have informed the creation of new standards-based curricula, replacing the objective-based curriculum for nearly two decades, ultimately improving the quality of teacher education in Ghana (Buabeng et al., 2020). In addition, the ongoing teacher education reforms in Ghana aim to equip teachers with essential competencies to address the changing demands of the educational system and deliver quality education to Ghanaian students. The pre-tertiary teacher education programme envisions nurturing teachers who can effectively serve in basic and second-cycle schools, fostering reflective and proficient practitioners. These efforts underscore a commitment to enhancing teaching and learning quality, aligning with Ghana's broader development goals.

However, the researchers argue that addressing broader educational challenges requires a deeper understanding. Looking at global perspectives on teacher training quality, it is clear that it plays a critical role in academic success and a nation's overall progress. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasises that high-quality teacher training is fundamental to student performance and educational outcomes, as highlighted in their Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) report (OECD, 2018). Similarly, the World Bank advocates for robust teacher education programmes to improve learning outcomes in developing countries, noting that well-prepared teachers are crucial for practical instruction and student achievement (World Bank, 2019). Furthermore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) underscores the importance of quality teacher education in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education (UNESCO, 2015). These perspectives underscore the global consensus that investing in quality teacher training fosters educational excellence and drives national development. Despite efforts to improve education quality, there is a need to focus on the quality of teachers. This work emphasises the importance of quality teacher training in achieving educational goals, aligning with the global and national emphasis on quality education. Researchers like Amakyi and Ampah-Mensah (2014) in their previous study found that teacher education lacks reflective practice, hindering teachers from analysing and adapting their teaching methods to student needs. Armah (2017) noted a disparity between acquired knowledge in colleges and practical teaching demands, with many teachers having weak content knowledge in core subjects. Akyeampong (2017) observed that teacher educators favoured traditional methods over learner-centred pedagogy, indicating a lack of constructivist teaching. Ntim (2017) surveyed teacher trainees and stakeholders, revealing issues such as admitting students with weak results, insufficient training pathways, lack of coordination among distance learning providers, and inadequate investment in education. These findings underscore the critical challenges facing teacher education in Ghana.

Against this backdrop, this study addresses several critical aspects of teaching and learning the English language at the colleges of education in Ghana. Firstly, it investigates the attitudes of teacher trainees toward learning English, which can significantly impact the quality of teaching they provide (Ajayi, 2009). Understanding these attitudes is essential, as negative perceptions and lack of motivation among trainees can hinder effective teaching practices (Gardner, 2010). Secondly, the study highlights teacher trainees' significant challenges in English language classrooms (Oluwole, 2008; Tella et al., 2010). Lastly, it explores the perspectives of English language tutors on factors that inhibit the quality of teaching and learning in Ghanaian colleges of education. Insights from these tutors are crucial for identifying systemic issues and implementing effective interventions to enhance teacher training programs (Ampofo & Osei-Owusu, 2015). By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving English language education in Ghana and ensuring that future teachers are well-prepared to meet the linguistic needs of their students.

### **Statement of the problem**

There is a problem with English language teaching and learning in the country, evidenced by the falling standards of English proficiency among students in Ghana. This decline can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, there is a shortage of adequately trained and qualified English language teachers (Asangba, 2016). Many teachers lack the necessary pedagogical skills and linguistic proficiency to teach English, leading to poor instructional quality effectively. Secondly, the teaching methodologies are often outdated and do not engage students or address their diverse learning needs (Taylor, 2016). Traditional rote learning methods do not encourage critical thinking or practical language use. Educational stakeholders agree that the effectiveness of instructors is the key to enhancing public education in every nation. Most Ghanaian educational institutions have seen a fall in English language performance among teacher-trainees, resulting in general despondency among Ghanaian educators with the teaching and learning in Ghana's colleges of education. Some Ghanaian authorities can attest to the decline in English language usage. For example, from 2016 to date, the Colleges of Education Chief Examiners' English Language reports have listed factors contributing to low English language performance. The reports detail several faults in the English Language that tutors of the English language must correct. Chief examiners for the National Teaching Council's (NTC) recent Licensure exams in Ghana have also led to a public outcry over teachers' low English language performance. The chief examiner's 2020/21 Licensure Examination report revealed that 11,143 people who took the literacy examination in May 2021 performed poorly (NTC, 2021). Specifically, of 11,143 students who sat for the examination, 5,465 (or 49%) passed the literacy exam. 51% of the remaining students failed the literacy exam. This situation is not unexpected, given that other

researchers have documented the underwhelming performance of trainees. According to Kessewah (2010), Ghanaian college students' English language proficiency level continues to decline. The current study aims to identify challenges to effective English language teaching and learning that hinder quality English education in colleges of education.

### **Purpose of study**

The study investigated the factors inhibiting the quality of English Language teaching and learning in Ghanaian colleges of education.

### **Study objectives**

- i. To investigate teacher trainees' attitudes toward learning English and how these attitudes impact the quality of English teaching.
- ii. To examine the factors that impede teacher trainees' understanding of English language course concepts.
- iii. To examine the key challenges teacher trainees face in teaching and learning English in the classroom and their impact on English instruction in basic schools.
- iv. To explore the views of English language tutors on factors inhibiting the quality of teaching and learning in Ghana's colleges of education.

### **Theoretical framework**

Several theories have been propounded on the nature of teacher instruction and how students learn. These theories include Progressivism, Essentialism, and Learning theories. John Dewey is credited as the founder of the progressivism movement in the early 1900s, but his ideas were influenced by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The early Progressives established a concept based on a philosophical approach known as Humanism, which emphasises that all humans are inherently good. The Theory of Essentialism is a view of education that emphasises the importance of learning skills that will help uphold democracy to guarantee that society does not lose its greatness (Dewey, 1938). Students are active in their studies since they determine the content, pace, and study period. Many essentialists vehemently oppose dualism in pedagogy, believing that a necessary balance between Progressivism and Essentialism was required to produce the ideal education system.

Essentialism asserts that teachers should be well-qualified and have a strong appreciation for learning and development. Essentialists believe that the role of the teacher is central in the classroom, with teachers serving as role models that students emulate. This reinforces the idea that teachers should be experts in content knowledge, positioning them as leaders in language classrooms who can influence effective teaching and learning. Based on these principles, any factor that inhibits

the training of teacher trainees would pose a significant challenge. In contrast, Progressivism emphasizes that students should be trained to be productive, contributing members of society. The key focus, according to progressivism, is assessing whether students have learned and improved. Learners are seen as active participants in their learning, and they should be encouraged to explore and engage. Teachers are tasked with providing activities that foster independence, ultimately preparing learners to become self-directed and lifelong learners.

## **Methodology**

### **Research approach**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teacher trainees' attitudes and challenges in learning and teaching English.

### **Research design**

This study utilised a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design to capture a snapshot of teacher trainees' attitudes and challenges in learning and teaching English. This design allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time from a large sample, providing insights into prevailing trends and relationships.

### **Sample size and sampling procedures**

#### ***Sampling for quantitative data***

Ghana's 48 Colleges of Education are organized into five zones: EAGAR (colleges from the Eastern and Greater Accra regions), VOLTA (colleges in the Volta Region), NORTHERN (colleges in the Northern Region), ASHBA (colleges from the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions), and CENTWEST (colleges in the Central and Western regions). For this study, convenience sampling was used to select the EAGAR zone, which consists of six Colleges of Education. This selection was influenced by the zone's accessibility and the researchers' familiarity with the region, which facilitated efficient data collection within the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. To minimize selection bias, four colleges were randomly selected from this zone. Each selected college was stratified into three levels: 100, 200, and 300. Simple random sampling was then employed to select 10 students each from levels 100 and 200, and 12 students from level 300. This yielded 32 students per college and a total of 128 students who participated in a questionnaire across four colleges. The sample comprised 65% male and 35% female students. Additionally, 79% were aged between 18 and 24 years, 20% were between 25 and 31 years, and 1% were older than 45 years.

Regarding academic level, 46 students (36%) were first-year students, 52 students (41%) were second-year students, and 30 students (23%) were third-year students. The higher selection of final-year students ensured adequate representation of those who had completed most of the English curriculum. This stratification allowed for a comprehensive capture of perspectives from all educational stages, providing a well-rounded view of students' experiences and attitudes toward English language teaching and learning. Some background characteristics, such as religion and marital status,

were also considered. Of the respondents, 95% identified as Christians, while 5% were Muslims. In terms of marital status, 98% of the respondents were single, and the remaining 2% were either married, divorced, widowed, or separated.

### ***Sampling for qualitative data***

Purposive sampling was used to select three English language tutors from each of the four colleges, yielding a total of 12 participants. This ensured that only tutors with relevant teaching experience were included for in-depth interviews.

## **Data collection methods**

### ***Quantitative data***

A questionnaire was administered to teacher trainees in the selected colleges to capture their attitudes, perceptions, and the extent of their training. This provided statistical evidence for the study.

### ***Qualitative data***

The researchers interviewed twelve English language tutors using telephone interviews, a method selected due to COVID-19 protocols. Telephone interviews provided several advantages, making them particularly well-suited for this study. They ensured a safe and effective means of communication while adhering to social distancing guidelines, thereby safeguarding both the interviewer and the interviewees. Telephone interviews also allowed the researchers to reach participants across diverse geographic locations, facilitating a broader and more inclusive sample. This was especially important in Ghana, where participants are distributed across regions with varying levels of accessibility. Lastly, telephone interviews offered flexibility in scheduling, making it easier to accommodate the busy timetables of participants.

## **Data analysis**

### ***Quantitative data***

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This analysis provided statistical evidence of trends and patterns in the teacher trainees' attitudes and perceptions regarding English language teaching and learning.

### ***Qualitative data***

The qualitative data from the telephone interviews with 12 English language tutors were analysed thematically to uncover the underlying challenges and factors influencing teacher trainees' attitudes and the quality of English language instruction. The interview transcripts were first transcribed and reviewed to familiarise the researchers with the data. Initial coding was done by identifying key phrases and concepts, which were then grouped into broader themes. The researchers refined the themes to ensure they were distinct and accurately reflected the data. Finally, the themes were interpreted to provide deeper insights into how these factors impacted both the quality of instruction and the learning experiences of teacher trainees. This thematic approach allowed the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by tutors and the factors shaping teacher trainees' attitudes towards English language teaching in the Ghanaian colleges of education.

## Results

### Students' attitude towards the teaching and learning of the English Language

This section discusses students' attitudes toward teaching and learning the English Language. Understanding teacher trainees' attitudes toward the English language is crucial. Attitudes towards a subject significantly influence how it is learned and taught. Positive attitudes can enhance engagement, motivation, and willingness to overcome challenges, while negative attitudes can hinder learning and teaching effectiveness.

Firstly, the teacher trainees were asked whether they liked all four fundamental language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Examining whether trainees like these skills can provide valuable insights into their strengths, challenges, and overall disposition towards English language learning. This information is vital for tailoring teaching methods and curricula to support their development as proficient English language educators. Their response is captured in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Aspects of English Language Liked by Students*

Do you like learning all the English language aspects of the curriculum?		
	Percent (%)	Percent (%)
yes	78	60.9
no	50	39.1
Total	128	100.0

Table 1 depicts that a majority (60.9%) of the students said they liked all aspects of the English Language, with only 39.1 % saying they did not like all aspects.

Students were then asked to give reasons for liking all aspects of the English language. Their responses are captured in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Reasons for Liking All Aspects of the English Language*

if yes, why		
Reason	Frequency	Per cent
English Language is a relevant subject that develops skills of communication and builds self-confidence with fluency	59	75.6
English Language helps in the production of sound techniques.	1	1.3
English Language helps in the correction of grammatical errors	3	3.8



It helps in the exploration of hidden aspects of the Language	4	5.1
English Language is a subject of interest in professionalism	11	14.1
Total	78	100.0

Of the 78 respondents who answered “yes,” 59 (64.1%) stated that the English language is a relevant subject that enhances communication skills and builds self-confidence. Additionally, one respondent noted that learning English helps develop sound techniques, while three mentioned its role in correcting grammatical errors. Four respondents highlighted that studying all aspects of the English language allows for the exploration of its hidden elements, and 11 expressed their enthusiasm for pursuing English as a profession.

### Table 3

#### *Reasons for Not Liking All Aspects of the English Language*

If not, why

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Complications in some aspects create problems with understanding.	29	58
Repetition of some topics in the English Language course.	1	2
Some aspects of the English Language course are irrelevant.	9	18
The subject is generally not interesting.	2	4
Financial barriers and motivational packages, e.g. scholarships.	1	2
The inability of some teachers to teach the subject comprehensively.	7	14
The English language course is broad, but its time is short.	1	2
Total	50	100

From Table 3, fifty (50) respondents answered no to being interested in learning all the English language aspects of the curriculum. Out of the fifty (50), twenty-nine (29), representing 58%, claimed they have complications with some aspects that create problems with understanding. Citing reasons for their responses, one (1) respondent said that topics are repeated sometimes, nine (9) respondents were convinced that learning all the aspects is irrelevant, two (2) respondents were lackadaisical about the study of all English Language, one (1) respondent had a financial problem being a setback to studying all the aspect of English language, seven (7) respondents representing 14% were also of the view that they dislike learning all the aspects because teachers fail to teach the subject effectively and finally, one (1) respondent explained that the English Language is a broad subject with little time allocated to it. In addition, at least 14% of the students raised the

issue of pedagogy. Thus, they believe that teachers are not adopting the proper pedagogy that will enable them to understand the content of the curriculum.

Exploring teacher trainees' feelings when the next period on their timetable is in the English language can provide valuable insights into their attitudes towards the subject. Understanding their emotional responses can help identify their levels of enthusiasm, indifference and lack of enthusiasm, which are crucial for developing effective teaching strategies and support systems.

**Table 4**

*How Students Feel When the Next Course is the English Language*

<b>How do you feel when it is time to have an English language class?</b>		
	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Very happy	49	38.3
Quite happy	54	42.2
Indifferent	15	11.7
Unhappy	7	5.5
Very unhappy	3	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 4, it is seen that when students were asked how they felt when it was time to have English classes, forty-nine (49) students, representing 38.3%, responded very happy, fifty-four (54), representing 42.2%, responded quite happy, fifteen (15) students representing 11.7% were indifferent, seven (7) students representing 5.5% responded unhappily, and three (3) students representing 2.3% responded very unhappily. This means that most students like the English Language as a course or subject of study.

Participation levels in English Language classes are a key indicator of students' engagement and interest in the subject. Investigating how actively teacher trainees participate in their English Language classes can reveal important insights into their attitudes towards learning the language and their overall academic involvement. Apart from asking students how they felt when they had an English Language class, students were also asked to rate their level of participation in an English class. Their rating is captured in Table 5.

**Table 5***Students' Level of Participation in an English Language Class*

<b>Describe your level of participation in an English language class.</b>		
	Frequency	Percent (%)
Very good	38	29.7
Quite good	78	60.9
Indifferent	7	5.5
Poor	5	3.9
Total	128	100

Table 5 shows that out of 128 students interviewed, thirty-eight (38), representing 29.7%, said that they were very good when participating in English language classes, seventy-eight (78) being the highest frequency with a percentage of 60.9% responded they were pretty good when participating in English language classes, with seven (7) representing 5.5% of the respondents been indifferent and five (5) responded that they were poor when it comes to participation in an English language class. This indicates that most students who responded to the questionnaire were highly involved during English language classes. Students were then asked whether the English Language as a course of study was complex or otherwise. The views of the students who responded to the questionnaire are captured in Table 6.

**Table 6***Students' View on the Complexity of the English Language Curriculum*

<b>The English language component of your curriculum is complex</b>		
	Frequency	Percent(%)
Strongly agree	46	35.9
Agree	55	43
Undecided	11	8.6
Disagree	15	11.7
Strongly disagree	1	0.8
Total	128	100

From Table 6, forty-six (46) students, representing 35.9%, strongly agree that the English language component of their curriculum is complex, fifty-five (55) students representing 43% also agree that the curriculum is complex, eleven (11) students representing 8.6% were undecided on the subject matter, fifteen (15) students representing 11.7% disagree, and one (1) student strongly disagrees that the English language component of their curriculum is complex. The data in Table 6 shows that the students who participated in the study indicated that the English Language curriculum was complicated since about 78.9% shared a similar view.

## **Factors impeding the understanding of English language course concepts**

This section discusses the factors that impede understanding of English language course concepts. Understanding these factors is crucial for improving the quality of education in Ghana's Colleges of Education. By identifying and addressing these impediments, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies and support systems, ultimately enhancing future teachers' learning experience and academic success in teacher colleges.

The teacher trainees were asked whether they had difficulty understanding the English Language course concepts. The students' views on this matter are captured in the following tables. Among 128 surveyed students, 84 acknowledged difficulties in comprehending English language course concepts. Of these 84 teacher trainees, seven (8%) cited the extensive course content coupled with insufficient instructional time as a barrier to thorough understanding. Ten (12%) students pointed to the frequent use of unfamiliar vocabulary as a significant challenge, while 31 (37%) criticised the teaching methods for lacking engagement and effectiveness. Fourteen (17%) respondents attributed their struggles to poor foundational education in English during primary school, and six (7%) highlighted limited access to supplementary learning materials as a hindrance. Sixteen (19%) students also perceived certain course topics as inherently complex, necessitating more time and effort to master.

Additionally, a number of students expressed concerns about the relevance of certain course materials to their teaching practice. This disconnect between course content and real-world application was noted as a challenge by 22% of respondents. The lack of practical experience, as reported by some students, further compounded their difficulty in grasping course concepts. Moreover, some teacher trainees emphasised the impact of large class sizes, which often led to limited individual attention from instructors, thereby reducing their ability to fully engage with the material. The factors impeding the understanding of English language course concepts are multifaceted, ranging from course content overload and ineffective teaching methods to foundational education gaps and limited resources. By addressing these issues, educators can better support teacher trainees in their journey to mastering the English language and prepare them for effective teaching in the future.

**Table 7***Students' Difficulty in Understanding the Concepts of the English Language Content*

Cross-tabulation of Do you have difficulty in understanding most of the concepts of the English language content, and If yes, why								
why If yes, why								
Do you have difficulty understanding most of the concepts of the English language content?	Yes	Broad content with less time allocation.	Uncomfortable and unfamiliar vocabularies.	The way and manner of teaching are sometimes challenging to understand.	Poor foundation.	Inadequate sources of information such as textbooks, dictionaries, etc.	Some of the content of the English Language is difficult to understand.	<b>Total</b>
		7	10	31	14	6	16	84

**Challenges associated with the teaching and learning of the English language*****Quantitative findings***

All the 128 students were asked if challenges were associated with teaching and learning the English Language. However, ninety-one (91) of them, representing 71%, admitted they had difficulties. Table 8 captures the views of these students.

**Table 8***Challenges Associated with the Teaching and Learning of the English Language*

Challenges associated with the teaching and learning of the English Language								
Students								
Students' attitudes towards learning, inadequate English teaching, and poor delivery by some teachers.		Inadequate English learning materials and poor English learning foundation.	More theoretical but less practical.	It is difficult to understand some aspects due to its complicated nature and unfamiliar vocabulary used.	Lack of/ limited research materials.	Overloaded syllabus with less motivation and supervision.	Total	
Are there challenges associated with learning the English Language?	Yes	23	29	4	29	2	4	91

Out of 128 respondents, 91 acknowledged challenges in learning English. Of these 91 teacher trainees, 23 (25%) cited negative student attitudes, inadequate English teachers, and poor teaching methods as key issues impacting engagement and instructional quality. Additionally, 29 (32%) respondents highlighted insufficient learning materials and poor foundational education as significant barriers, emphasising the need for better resources and stronger early education. Four (4%) respondents noted that the curriculum is overly theoretical, suggesting the need for more practical applications to enhance understanding. The use of complicated vocabulary was also a concern for 29 (32%) respondents. At the same time, two mentioned limited access to research materials, indicating a need for improved resources and curriculum adjustments to support student learning and motivation better. All the students were then asked to offer solutions to the challenges associated with teaching and learning the English Language. The views of the students are captured in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Solutions to the Challenges Associated with the Teaching and Learning of the English Language*

<b>What can be done to handle the challenges of learning the English Language?</b>		
	Frequency	Per cent
There should be well-trained and enthusiastic teachers alongside the availability of learning materials.	70	54.7
There should be a well-equipped foundation for learning English; again, it is very bulky, so its content must be reduced.	21	16.4
It should be a balanced theory – practical, subject-oriented, and motivated for the best English students.	12	9.4
Teachers should be well supervised and motivated, and again, teachers must establish a cordial relationship with students.	11	8.6
Concepts and contents should be well explained to lessen misunderstandings and complications.	14	10.9
Total	128	100

From Table 9, it can be seen that seventy (70) respondents, representing 54.7%, believe that having well-trained and enthusiastic teachers and the availability of learning materials is crucial for addressing the challenges in learning English. Twenty-one (21) students, representing 16.4% of the respondents, indicated the

importance of establishing a solid foundation for learning English. They also noted that the current curriculum is too bulky and suggested reducing its content for better comprehension. Additionally, twelve (12) students, or 9.4%, emphasised the need for a balance between the theoretical and practical aspects of the curriculum, ensuring that neither aspect is neglected. They also suggested incentives, such as awards for good English teachers, that could motivate tutors.

Furthermore, eleven (11) students, representing 8.6%, mentioned that teachers should be well-supervised and establish a cordial relationship with students to enhance the learning environment. Finally, fourteen (14) students, or 10.9%, stated that English concepts and content should be clearly explained to reduce misunderstandings and complications. These responses indicate that most students believe English language teachers should be adequately trained, well-motivated, and provided with sufficient learning materials. The emphasis on motivation aligns with Annan's (2020) findings, which revealed that poor motivation packages for teachers are one factor inhibiting the quality of education.

### *Qualitative findings*

Several issues contributing to the low quality of English language teaching and learning emerged from the interviews with English language tutors. These issues include a poor foundation for students in the English Language at the elementary and secondary levels, a lack of experienced tutors, a lack of tutor motivation, a lack of teaching and learning materials, a high student-to-teacher ratio, a lack of in-service training and professional development, the assumption that tutors already have language skills, tutor absenteeism and a lack of reading by trainee teachers. These themes are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs. All twelve English language tutors participating in the study were given codes, namely ET1 to ET12.

#### *Poor foundation*

The issue of trainee teachers' insufficient English language foundation is a significant theme throughout the interview with the instructors. According to the instructors, the trainee teachers were not adequately educated in English at the basic and secondary levels. As a result, English language teaching and learning in colleges of education are poor.

One respondent phrased it this way:

There is a problem with students' inadequate preparation at the basic and secondary school levels. As a result, students coming to the colleges of education have feeble foundations, which inhibits the teaching and learning of English (ET6, Individual Interview).

Another tutor reiterates the same sentiments by saying:

Furthermore, most pupils have shaky foundations in both elementary and secondary school. Therefore, policies should be implemented to address the issues surrounding teaching English at the basic and secondary levels (ET3, Individual Interview).

The teachers' quotes underscore a recurring and critical issue: the inadequate preparation of students in English at the basic and secondary school levels. This weak foundation poses significant challenges to effective teaching and learning as these students progress to colleges of education.

### *Inexperienced tutors*

Some of the tutors admitted that some English Language tutors at the colleges of education are not experienced. English is a subject that experienced tutors must teach. An inexperienced teacher will not be able to explain concepts to students well. An inexperienced teacher will not incorporate all four skills in a single lesson. This lack of experienced tutors, according to the tutors themselves, is a contributory factor to the low quality of the teaching and learning of English in the colleges of education. A tutor asserts that:

Some of the colleges lack experienced tutors in the English Language. In particular, English methodology tutors are scarce in the system. Since content and methodological knowledge are the two-fold skills needed at college, there will be a severe problem if one is affected (ET5, Individual Interview).

Another tutor also shares this sentiment:

Some tutors have insufficient language teacher training to impact effective teaching and learning in educational institutions. English tutors are accountable for the course outline's instructional resources (ET1, Individual Interview).

The scarcity of experienced English methodology tutors and insufficient language teacher training undermine content delivery and instructional effectiveness. This deficiency impacts students' learning experiences as inexperienced tutors struggle to provide comprehensive support for effective teaching and learning.

### *A lack of motivation among tutors*

Apart from the tutor's lack of expertise, some tutors claim that their lack of enthusiasm contributes to the low quality of their work. According to some tutors, if teachers are motivated, the quality of English teaching and learning at institutions of education will



improve. As a result, the current state is explained by a lack of motivation. “*Tutors in colleges of education are not driven enough to put out their best efforts,*” one tutor claims.

This lack of motivation results in suboptimal performance and a reduced commitment to instructional excellence. If teachers were more motivated, the quality of English education would likely improve, as motivated tutors are more likely to engage effectively with students, employ innovative teaching methods, and strive for better educational outcomes. Therefore, addressing motivational factors is essential for enhancing the overall effectiveness of English language instruction in colleges of education.

### *Teaching and learning materials*

The lack of teaching and learning resources is one of the most common reasons for students’ poor performance in any topic. This suggests that a shortage of teaching and learning resources is a factor in the poor quality of English language teaching and learning in institutions of education. One tutor expresses it this way:

Despite the lack of teaching and learning materials, our dedicated tutors are tirelessly developing improvised resources to ensure effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, the absence of online learning hubs in colleges, except T-TEL, is a challenge that our tutors and pupils are bravely navigating (ET10, Individual Interview).

Another teacher indicates that “*Teaching and learning resources should be available for effective teaching and learning (ET12, Individual Interview)*”. The lack of teaching and learning materials significantly challenges the quality of English language education in colleges. Tutors are often forced to develop improvised resources, which may be less effective or comprehensive than standard materials. Additionally, the absence of online learning hubs limits access to educational resources and digital tools to enhance teaching and learning.

### *High teacher-to-student ratio*

According to the tutors interviewed, the high teacher-to-student ratio is one of the reasons for the low quality of English language teaching and learning in colleges of education. This means that a small number of teachers are responsible for large groups of students. This means marking and providing student feedback will be difficult for teachers when they offer an assignment. One tutor expresses it this way:

The student-teacher ratio is higher, which has affected the teaching of writing. Tutors cannot give enough essay writing exercises, which affects the trainee teachers. In addition, some tutors cannot

mark trainees' essays on time and discuss students' errors with them (ET11, Individual Interview).

Another tutor asserts that:

Due to the overwhelming class loads, our English language tutors cannot provide enough tasks to assist trainees in practice. This is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of our education system (ET2, Individual Interview).

The inability to provide sufficient tasks and timely feedback affects the trainees' learning experience and development as competent English language educators. Interestingly, the teacher trainees also confirmed the assertion of the high teacher-to-student ratio as a reason for the low quality of the teaching and learning of the English language at the colleges of education.

#### *Lack of in-service training and professional development*

Another reason tutors give for the low quality of the teaching and learning of the English Language at the colleges of education is the lack of in-service training and professional development. This means that the quality of the teaching and learning of the English Language can be improved through the organisation of in-service training and professional development. A tutor laments the lack of in-service training by asserting that:

Lack of in-service training. Even though T-TEL has implemented several training programs for tutors, they are not enough. NTC and GTEC should organise more training (ET7, Individual Interview).

Another tutor indicates that "*Tutors have no professional development to cope with the current teaching method*". This gap in training affects their ability to effectively deliver content, engage students, and adapt to evolving educational standards. Consequently, the overall quality of teaching suffers, hindering the educational outcomes for trainee teachers and ultimately affecting the proficiency of future English language educators.

#### *Assumption of prior language proficiency among teacher trainees*

Another factor contributing to the low quality of English language teaching and learning in Colleges of Education is the assumption by some tutors that teacher trainees have already acquired essential language skills at the basic and secondary school levels. Consequently, tutors may not devote sufficient time to teaching, believing that students are already familiar with the content. As one tutor stated:

Some tutors also assume that the students have already acquired the basic language skills, so they only need a little push to get the advanced skills (ET5, Individual Interview).

This misconception leads to insufficient instruction and support, as tutors may not take the time to teach or reinforce fundamental concepts thoroughly. As a result, students who lack these basic skills are left struggling, which hampers their ability to grasp more advanced content.

### *Absenteeism by tutors*

According to the teachers interviewed, absenteeism is one reason why the quality of the teaching and learning of the English Language at the colleges of education is low. Some teachers absent themselves from class. One tutor asserts that when absent from class, students lose contact hours that could have gone into imparting knowledge to the students. The tutor asserted, “*Some tutors are not in school, and the absenteeism is putting a toll on the trainees’ learning (ET2, Individual Interview).*” The missed instructional time cannot be easily compensated, leading to gaps in the curriculum and insufficient preparation for exams and future teaching responsibilities. Consequently, absenteeism negatively impacts trainees’ learning outcomes and readiness to become competent English language educators.

### *A lack of reading by trainee teachers*

Tutors also indicated that the lack of reading by trainee teachers contributes to the low quality. Indeed, students or teacher trainees who do not read will not do well in all the other language skills, namely writing, speaking, and listening. This is because the skills are related. A tutor comments that: “*Students can spend all their leisure time exploring social media accounts but feel drowsy regarding academic reading (ET12, Individual Interview)*”. Another tutor recommends, “*Last but not least, pupils should be encouraged to read widely (ET11, Individual Interview)*”. When trainees do not engage in regular academic reading, their overall language competence suffers, impacting their ability to perform well in other language-related activities. This lack of reading hinders their academic progress and affects their future effectiveness as educators. Encouraging wide and consistent reading habits is essential to improve their language skills and prepare them for their teaching careers.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The first objective of the study was to assess teacher trainees’ attitudes towards teaching and learning English in Ghanaian colleges of education, using data from questionnaires and tutor interviews. While the majority of trainees expressed a positive attitude towards learning English, a significant minority faced challenges

that hindered their engagement. The trainees found the English curriculum complex, citing broad content, limited instructional time, unfamiliar vocabulary, and ineffective teaching methods as contributing factors. From the interviews, the tutors noted that many trainees lacked adequate preparation from their earlier education, supporting the essentialist view that a strong foundation is crucial for understanding complex concepts (Gagné, 2013). Despite these challenges, about two-thirds of the trainees reported active participation in English classes, which is essential for better learning outcomes and motivation, as emphasised by Webber and Miller (2016).

The study's second objective was to examine the factors impeding the trainees' understanding of English language course concepts. The study identified several factors hindering teacher trainees' understanding of English language concepts in Ghanaian colleges, including the mismatch between broad content and limited instructional time, unfamiliar vocabulary, ineffective teaching methods, and insufficient resources. The tutors themselves admitted that the way and manner the course is taught makes it challenging to understand, confirming the assertion of the teacher trainees. Also, some tutors attributed the difficulty in understanding concepts in the English language to some inexperienced tutors. The insufficient experience of teachers impacts both their ability to explain concepts effectively and their incorporation of all four language skills within a single lesson. These challenges align with essentialist and progressivist perspectives, highlighting the need for a structured curriculum to build foundational knowledge and student-centred, interactive teaching strategies to enhance engagement and comprehension (Lynch, 2016; Dewey, 1938).

The study's third objective was to identify challenges in teaching and learning English at Ghanaian colleges of education. Key issues included students' negative attitudes, inadequate English teachers, and poor instructional methods, all hindering effective learning. The tutors themselves support the finding about the poor delivery method. According to them, some tutors of the English language are not motivated to give their best efforts when it comes to teaching. The finding is supported by Annan's (2020) study, which revealed that poor motivation packages of teachers are one of the factors inhibiting the quality of education.

Additionally, insufficient English learning materials and limited access to research resources further weaken students' ability to practice and deepen their language understanding. The tutors supported this finding during the interview. The tutors admitted that there is a lack of teaching and learning materials; consequently, they are forced to develop improvised teaching and learning resources. A balanced approach, integrating essentialist and progressivist strategies, is recommended to address these challenges, focusing on improving teacher preparation, motivation,

instructional quality, and the availability of learning resources to enhance both foundational knowledge and critical thinking skills.

The study's fourth objective explored English language tutors' views on factors inhibiting the quality of teaching and learning in Ghanaian colleges of education. Tutors identified inadequate student preparation and poor foundational skills in English as significant obstacles, emphasising the essentialist principle that foundational solid knowledge is crucial for academic progress (Gagné, 2013). The lack of experienced tutors was another significant issue, with tutors emphasising the need for skilled educators to ensure effective teaching—an idea grounded in essentialism, which stresses teachers' expertise, and progressivism, which advocates for active, well-guided learning (Dewey, 1938). Additional challenges included low motivation among educators, insufficient professional development, inadequate teaching materials, high tutor-to-student ratios, absenteeism, and students' lack of regular reading. These findings indicate the need to enhance teacher preparation and motivation, as well as to provide sufficient resources and implement interactive, student-centred teaching methods to elevate the quality of English language education in Ghana's colleges of education.

## **Conclusion**

The study revealed that while most trainees had a positive attitude toward learning English, some faced difficulties due to inadequate foundational knowledge and ineffective teaching methods. Integrating complementary teaching philosophies could enhance engagement and comprehension. Key challenges identified include broad curriculum content constrained by limited instructional time, unfamiliar vocabulary, ineffective teaching strategies, and insufficient resources. The study recommends curriculum adjustments, improved instructional methods, enhanced teaching materials, and contextual support for vocabulary learning to address these issues. Additional challenges in teaching and learning the English language included negative student attitudes, inadequate learning materials, a theory-heavy curriculum with limited practical applications, and high tutor-to-student ratios. To overcome these barriers, the study highlights the need for better resources, more effective teaching methods, and a balanced curriculum. Tutors also reported challenges such as insufficient student preparation, a shortage of experienced tutors, and inadequate motivation among learners. Addressing these issues will require strengthening foundational knowledge, enhancing motivation, and providing essential teaching resources to ensure effective learning outcomes.

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