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Language, Innovation, And Sustainability in ESL teacher training: Innovating ESL teacher education to meet the demands of a sustainable and entrepreneurial future

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Abstract

The increasing demand for entrepreneurial competencies and sustainable development skills has repositioned English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher training in Nigerian tertiary institutions as a critical platform for preparing future educators who can drive innovation and socio-economic growth. This paper investigates the integration of entrepreneurial communication skills within ESL teacher education, with a focus on sustainability and innovation. Specifically, it examines the extent to which current ESL training programs embed entrepreneurial communication skills relevant to a sustainable future; explores the role of innovative pedagogical practices in strengthening ESL teacher education for entrepreneurial and sustainability goals; and identifies the challenges and opportunities in innovating ESL teacher training to build a sustainable and entrepreneurial future in Nigeria. Using structured closed-ended questionnaire, the study draws on survey data from ESL lecturers and teacher trainers to capture deeper insights into institutional practices and challenges. The Findings reveal that while entrepreneurial communication skills are recognized as vital, their integration into ESL curricula remains limited and often peripheral. Innovative pedagogical practices, such as project-based learning, problem-solving tasks, and digital literacy integration emerge as underutilized but highly promising strategies for aligning teacher education with sustainability goals. Some of the key challenges identified include inadequate institutional support, limited training resources, and resistance to curriculum innovation. However, significant opportunities exist in leveraging interdisciplinary collaboration, policy reforms, and technology-driven learning. The study underscores the need for a paradigm shift in ESL teacher education to foster entrepreneurial and sustainability-oriented communication skills, equipping future educators to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's development trajectory.

Keywords: ESL Teacher Education, Entrepreneurial Communication Skills, Innovation, Sustainability in Higher Education, Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a paradigm shift in the goals of education, with emphasis increasingly placed on innovation, sustainability, and entrepreneurship as essential drivers of national development. In this context, language-particularly English as a Second Language (ESL) - emerges not only as a tool of communication but also as a critical resource for fostering creativity, business communication, and global engagement. As Nigeria grapples with challenges of youth unemployment, economic stagnation, and educational inefficiencies, tertiary education is under pressure to prepare graduates who can thrive in an entrepreneurial and globally connected future. This responsibility falls significantly on teachers, who are expected to integrate sustainable and innovative pedagogies into their practice. However, while entrepreneurship and innovation have gained prominence in Nigerian higher education policies, ESL teacher education has remained largely traditional and examination-driven,

focusing on grammar, literature, and general communication skills rather than practical, entrepreneurial, and sustainable language use. This situation raises questions about the adequacy of ESL teacher training in equipping future teachers to meet the demands of an economy where language competence is key to business success, international collaboration, and sustainable development.

Background to the Study

Nigeria's tertiary education system is confronted with peculiar challenges that hinder its capacity to deliver on the global education agenda. These include inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, outdated curricula, and insufficient integration of technology and innovation into teaching and learning (Ogunode, 2020; Okebukola, 2021). While national policies such as the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) emphasize the need for entrepreneurship education, there has been little progress in

aligning language education with entrepreneurial and sustainability goals.

Globally, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) - call for innovative approaches to teacher education that can empower learners with skills for a sustainable future. In Nigeria, this mandate is urgent given the high rate of graduate unemployment, the dominance of the informal sector, and the growing recognition of entrepreneurship as a pathway to sustainable livelihoods. Yet, ESL teacher training programs remain slow to adapt to these realities, often neglecting contextualized language skills such as pitching, negotiation, proposal writing, and digital communication - skills that are indispensable in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Moreover, sustainability in education requires teachers who can foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, not rote memorization. ESL teacher education, if innovatively designed, could become a platform for developing communicative competencies that empower graduates to participate in innovation-driven economies, access global opportunities, and contribute to sustainable national development.

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the centrality of English as Nigeria's official language and its status as the global language of business, diplomacy, and innovation, ESL teacher education in Nigerian tertiary institutions has not evolved to meet the demands of a sustainable and entrepreneurial future. Current programs are largely exam-focused, theoretical, and detached from real-world applications, leaving graduates ill-prepared to teach English as a tool for entrepreneurship, innovation, and global competitiveness.

A major gap exists in the integration of innovation-driven pedagogies, sustainability principles, and entrepreneurial communication into ESL teacher training curricula. While other disciplines, such as business and engineering, are progressively embedding entrepreneurship education, ESL teacher education has remained resistant to such changes. This means that future teachers- who are supposed to drive innovation and sustainability in classrooms- are themselves inadequately equipped with the communicative and pedagogical tools necessary for such roles.

Additionally, systemic challenges such as limited professional development opportunities for ESL lecturers, insufficient technological infrastructure, and poor institutional support further widen the gap between policy rhetoric and classroom practice. Consequently, ESL teacher education risks perpetuating a cycle where graduates can pass examinations but cannot effectively communicate entrepreneurial ideas, contribute to sustainable development, or compete in a knowledge-based global economy.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how ESL teacher education in Nigerian tertiary institutions can be reimagined and innovated to meet the demands of sustainability and entrepreneurship, with the ultimate aim of producing teachers who can function as agents of innovation, sustainability, and economic transformation.

Literature Review

Language and Entrepreneurial Communication in the 21st Century

Language, particularly English, has evolved beyond its traditional function of academic and social communication to become a driver of innovation and entrepreneurship. As the global lingua franca, English facilitates access to knowledge, international markets, and cross-border collaboration (Crystal, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2017). In entrepreneurship, effective communication is indispensable for pitching ideas, negotiating contracts, networking, and branding (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2014). Thus, for Nigerian graduates navigating both local and global economies, competence in entrepreneurial communication through English is no longer optional but essential.

However, Nigerian tertiary education often focuses on grammatical correctness rather than pragmatic, entrepreneurial-oriented language skills (Adebayo, 2019). This gap undermines the ability of graduates, particularly ESL lecturers/teachers, to train students in functional English that fosters innovation and sustainability.

ESL Teacher Education and Innovation

Teacher education worldwide has undergone transformation to integrate innovative teaching methods that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Innovative ESL teacher education emphasizes task-based learning, digital pedagogy, and communicative competence, aligning language teaching with real-world applications (Richards, 2015).

In Nigeria, however, ESL teacher education remains predominantly traditional and exam-centered, relying heavily on rote learning and outdated curricula (Ogunode, 2020). Innovative pedagogies such as project-based learning, entrepreneurship simulations, and digital storytelling are seldom incorporated into ESL teacher training, thereby limiting teachers' capacity to prepare learners for entrepreneurial and sustainable futures (Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2021).

Sustainability and Education for the Future

The concept of sustainability in education is anchored in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). These emphasize equipping learners with skills that support lifelong learning, employment, and entrepreneurship (UNESCO, 2017). Sustainability in ESL education implies preparing teachers to

cultivate critical communicative skills, cross-cultural awareness, and problem-solving abilities that align with global economic and environmental realities.

Scholars argue that embedding sustainability in ESL education requires a paradigm shift from mere language transmission to empowering learners to use English as a tool for global citizenship and entrepreneurial innovation (Sterling, 2016; Tilbury, 2019). In the Nigerian context, this means reorienting ESL teacher education towards curricula that integrate sustainability principles and practical communication skills relevant to business and innovation.

Challenges in the Nigerian Tertiary Education System

Several systemic challenges hinder the alignment of ESL teacher education with innovation and sustainability in Nigeria. These include:

Overcrowded classrooms and underfunding (Okebukola, 2021);

Rigid curricula that prioritize theory over application (Ogunode, 2020);

Inadequate professional development for ESL lecturers (Salami, 2019);

Limited technological infrastructure to support digital and innovative pedagogy (Adebayo, 2019).

As a result, ESL graduates may achieve proficiency in academic English but struggle with functional, entrepreneurial communication that is essential for Nigeria's knowledge economy and sustainable development goals.

While global studies have highlighted the role of language in fostering entrepreneurial and sustainable futures, little empirical research has been conducted in the Nigerian tertiary education context to examine how ESL teacher education can be innovated to meet these demands. Existing studies on entrepreneurship education in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2019; Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2021) often overlook the centrality of language as a medium of entrepreneurial expression and innovation. This study, therefore, fills a significant gap by exploring how ESL teacher training can integrate innovation, sustainability, and entrepreneurial communication to produce teachers who are agents of change.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Theory.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Theory

The ESP theory (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) argues that language learning should be need-driven, focusing on the specific communicative competencies learners require in their professional and academic environments. For ESL teacher education, ESP provides a framework for tailoring curricula and teaching practices toward preparing future teachers to equip students with entrepreneurial communication skills,

sustainability-oriented discourse, and innovation-driven thinking.

In the Nigerian tertiary context, where unemployment and underemployment remain pressing issues, ESP ensures that language education moves beyond grammar and general proficiency to include entrepreneurship pitches, proposal writing, negotiation, sustainable development discourse, and cross-cultural communication. Thus, ESP grounds this study by ensuring that teacher training in ESL is not abstract, but directly linked to national priorities in innovation, economic growth, and sustainability.

Research Objectives

- 1) To examine the extent to which ESL teacher training in Nigerian tertiary institutions integrates entrepreneurial communication skills relevant to a sustainable future.
- 2) To investigate the role of innovation and pedagogical practices in enhancing ESL teacher education for entrepreneurial and sustainability goals.
- 3) To identify the major challenges and opportunities in innovating ESL teacher training for building a sustainable and entrepreneurial future in Nigeria.

Research Questions

To what extent does ESL teacher training in Nigerian tertiary institutions develop entrepreneurial communication skills that align with the demands of sustainability?

How do innovation and teaching practices influence the effectiveness of ESL teacher training in preparing teachers for sustainable and entrepreneurial futures?

What are the major challenges and opportunities faced in integrating sustainability and entrepreneurship into ESL teacher education in Nigeria?

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research design with a survey element. This design is appropriate because the aim is not to generate numerical generalizations but to gain in-depth insights into processes, perceptions, and experiences of ESL lecturers within Nigerian tertiary education with regards to innovation and sustainability in ESL teacher education. A survey study approach allows for a contextualized understanding of how ESL teacher training integrate- or fail to integrate- entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainability into ESL teacher education.

Sample

The sample are ESL lecturers drawn from Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education. Purposive sampling was employed to select two institutions that offer ESL teacher training programs (Yusuf Maitama Sule- Federal University of Education Kano (YMS-FUEK)) and Federal College of Education Technical Bichi (FCET). The samples were drawn from the Departments of English Language, and

General English Education (GSE) of each of the institution. Within each institution, 15 participants were purposively selected, leading to an approximate sample size of 30 participants.

Data Collection Methods

A 29- item questionnaire was administered to explore ESL lecturers' perspectives on innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability in ESL teacher education and training. The questionnaire administered covered five major areas namely Language & Entrepreneurial Communication, Innovation in ESL Teacher Training, Sustainability in ESL Teacher education, Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training, and Opportunities and Future Directions. Each section contains four to five structured questionnaires (close - ended Likert - Scale) with one open - ended question

Data Analysis Methods

The responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using Descriptive Statistics. The Percentage, Means, and the

Standard Deviation were calculated for each item under the major sections. For the purpose of data computation and analysis, numeric values were assigned to the Likert scale.as follows: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1; Disagree (D) = 2; Neutral (N) = 3; Agree (A) = 4; Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. The analysis of data was across the five thematic areas used in the questionnaires:

Language & Entrepreneurial Communication (Theme 1)
Innovation in ESL Teacher Training (Theme 2)
Sustainability in ESL Teacher Training (Theme 3)
Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training (Theme4)
Opportunities & Future Directions (Theme 5)

Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussions

The data analysis was conducted in two stages as presented below:

Stage 1: Analysis of Data Obtained from ESL Lecturer in Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education Kano (YMS-FUEK)

Theme 1: Analysis of Responses on “Language and Entrepreneurial Communication” among 15 ESL Lecturers in YMS-FUEK

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	M	Std.Deviation	N
Q1	4(26.7%)	11(73.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	4.27	0.46	15
Q2	5(33.3%)	8(53.3%)	2(13.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.20	0.68	15
Q3	3(20%)	8(53.3%)	1(6.7%)	2(13.3%)	1(6.7%)	3.67	1.18	15
Q4	10(66.7%)	5(33.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.67	0.49	15
Q5	1(6.7%)	5(33.3%)	3(20%)	5(33.3%)	1(6.7%)	3.07	1.16	15

Table 1 above shows that, overall, respondents strongly agreed and agreed on most items, indicating positive perceptions about the role of language in entrepreneurial communication. While Q4 received the highest mean (4.67), showing a strong consensus on this item- likely suggesting a key importance of language in entrepreneurial contexts. Q5 had the lowest mean (3.07) with considerable disagreement (33.3% disagreed), indicating mixed views or uncertainty about that particular aspect. The relatively low standard

deviations for most questions (<1) reflect consistent responses, except for Q3 and Q5 which had higher deviations (1.18 and 1.16), suggesting more varied opinions. In response to open-ended Q6, the majority (66.7%) of respondents emphasized the incorporation of practical skills to enhance effective communication and collaboration, while others stressed curriculum review for practical entrepreneurial communication skills application.

Theme 2: Analysis of Responses on “Innovation in ESL Teacher Training “among 15 ESL lecturers in YMS-FUEK

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q7	6(40%)	4(26%)	3(20%)	2(13.3%)	0(0%)	3.93	1.16	15
Q8	2(13.3%)	7(46.7%)	2(13.3%)	3(20%)	1(6.7%)	3.40	1.18	15
Q9	4(26.7%)	9(60%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	1(6.7%)	4.00	1.07	15
Q10	8(53.3%)	6(40%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	4.47	0.74	15
Q11	3(20%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3.93	1.10	15

The responses reflect moderate to high agreement with innovation-related statements, with means ranging from 3.40 to 4.47. Q10 stood out with a high mean of 4.47 and 53.3% strongly agreeing, showing strong support for this

statement likely relating to specific innovative practices. Some questions like Q8 (mean 3.40) saw more disagreement and neutral responses, indicating areas where innovation gains less consensus. Standard deviations were generally

above 1, revealing some variability in perceptions on innovation. With regards to open-ended Q12, the result of the analysis shows that respondents (100%) unanimously

emphasized the introduction and use of ICT tools and integrative, multidisciplinary approaches incorporating technology for problem-solving.

Theme 3: Analysis of Responses on “Sustainability in ESL Teacher Training” among 15 ESL lecturers in YMS-FUEK.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q13	2(13.3%)	5(33.3%)	3(20%)	4(26.7%)	1(6.7%)	3.20	1.37	15
Q14	6(40%)	8(53.3%)	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.33	0.62	15
Q15	4(26.7%)	4(26.7%)	3(20%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3.53	1.19	15
Q16	5(33.3%)	10(66.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.33	0.49	15

The Means here are more moderate, ranging from 3.20 to 4.33, reflecting some uncertainty or mixed attitudes toward sustainability in teacher training. Q14 and Q16 had higher agreement (means of 4.33), demonstrating strong support for aspects of sustainability. Q13 (mean 3.20) received more neutral and negative responses, indicating sustainability may be less well understood or prioritized. The higher standard

deviations (up to 1.37) show varying opinions across lecturers on sustainability topics.

In response to Q17 about half (53.3%) suggested emphasizing sustainability issues related to the Nigerian context within ESL teacher education programs, while 46.7%) emphasized funding sustainable projects.

Theme 4: Analysis of Responses on “Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training” among 15 ESL lecturers in YUMS-FUEK.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q18	8(53.3%)	4(26.7%)	2(13.3%)	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	4.27	0.96	15
Q19	0(0%)	6(40%)	2(13.3%)	5(33.3%)	2(13.3%)	2.80	1.08	15
Q20	8(53.3%)	6(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	4.33	1.05	15
Q21	5(33.3%)	5(33.3%)	2(13.3%)	2(13.3%)	1(6.7%)	3.73	1.28	15
Q22	3(20%)	8(53.3%)	2(13.3%)	1(6.7%)	1(6.7%)	3.73	1.03	15

Responses on “Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training” show strong awareness of challenges, with means mostly above 3.7 and some items scored very high (Q18 mean = 4.27, Q20 mean = 4.33). However, Q19 scored much lower (mean = 2.80) with a substantial number disagreeing or neutral, highlighting a specific challenge with less consensus or a potential area for improvement. Standard

deviations (0.96 to 1.28) indicate moderate variability in perceptions but overall recognition of challenges.

On Q23, the unanimous identification of challenges such as lack of adequate knowledge about technology - mediated teaching tools, inadequate training and workshops, insufficient governmental and institutional support, resource scarcity, and language policy issues reflects common barriers reported worldwide.

Theme 5: Analysis of Responses on “Opportunities and Future Directions in ESL Teacher Training” among 15 ESL lecturers in YMS-FUEK.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q24	5(33.3%)	8(53.3%)	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	4.13	0.83	15
Q25	6(40%)	9(60%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.40	0.51	15
Q26	6(40%)	3(20%)	3(20%)	0(0%)	3(20%)	3.40	1.45	15
Q27	7(46.7%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.47	0.52	15
Q28	8(53.3%)	7(46.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.53	0.52	15

On “Opportunities and Future Directions” the ESL participants expressed strong optimism about opportunities with mostly high means (4.13 to 4.53). Q28 showed the highest mean (4.53), with complete agreement on future direction prospects. Lower mean and higher variability at

Q26 (mean 3.40, SD 1.45) may suggest some uncertainty or differing views about specific future directions. The consistency of agreement (low standard deviations around 0.5) for most questions signals strong collective confidence in future opportunities.

Responses on Q29, (60%) emphasised aligning ESL teacher training with entrepreneurial and sustainable development goals, integrating ICT tools, training teachers on their use, and ensuring sufficient support and funding. Others (40%)

suggested reviewing curricula to reflect contemporary realities of sustainability, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

STAGE 2: Analysis of Data Obtained from ESL in Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi (FCET)

Theme 1: Analysis of Responses on “Language and Entrepreneurial Communication” among 15 ESL Lecturers in FCET

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q1	2(13.3%)	13(86.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.13	0.35	15
Q2	5(33.3%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	2(13.3%)	0(0%)	4.07	0.88	15
Q3	4(26.7%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	2(13.3%)	1(6.7%)	3.80	1.08	15
Q4	10(66.7%)	5(33.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.67	0.49	15
Q5	4(26.7%)	5(33.3%)	0(0%)	5(33.3%)	1(6.7%)	3.13	1.36	15

On this theme, respondents generally agree on the importance of language in entrepreneurial communication, with means ranging from 3.13 to 4.67. Q4 received the highest mean (4.67) with 66.7% strongly agreeing, indicating strong consensus on that item's significance. Q5 had the lowest mean (3.13) and the highest standard deviation (1.36), showing considerable variation and some disagreement

(33.3% disagreed), suggesting some reservations on that item. In response to Q6, 86.7% emphasized teaching practical communicative writing skills (e.g., business proposals, product descriptions) as a key way ESL can support entrepreneurial communication, while 13.3% highlighted expanding market access and foreign investment communication

Theme 2: Analysis of Responses on “Innovation in ESL Teacher Training” among 15 ESL Lecturers from FCET

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q7	6(40%)	6(40%)	1(6.7%)	2(13.3%)	0(0%)	4.07	0.88	15
Q8	3(20%)	7(46.7%)	1(6.7%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3.60	1.12	15
Q9	5(33.3%)	9(60%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	4.13	0.83	15
Q10	8(53.3%)	7(46.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.53	0.52	15
Q11	3(20%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3.93	0.88	15

A significant positive attitude toward innovation is seen, with means mostly above 3.60 and an outstanding 4.53 for Q10 (53.3% strongly agree). Some questions, like Q8 (mean 3.60), show more neutral and negative responses, indicating moderate agreement with room for improvement.

Responses to Q12 reveal 60% advocating blended learning, mobile micro learning, peer networks, and AI coaching, while 40% suggest mentorship as innovative approaches, showing openness to both tech-driven and people-centered solutions.

Theme 3: Analysis of Responses on “Sustainability in ESL Teacher Training” among 15 ESL Lecturers from FCET.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q13	3(20%)	5(33.3%)	3(20%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3.47	1.06	15
Q14	6(40%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	4.27	0.80	15
Q15	4(26.7%)	5(33.3%)	2(13.3%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3.60	1.12	15
Q16	5(33.3%)	10(66.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.33	0.49	15

On the theme of Sustainability in ESL Teacher Training, the Means vary between 3.47 and 4.33, signaling moderately positive views but some uncertainty, especially on Q13 (mean 3.47, SD=1.06). Responses on Q14 and Q16 show strong agreement (means above 4.2), highlighting clear

support for key sustainability-related principles. For Q17, 66.7% believe equipping ESL educators with skills to enhance proficiency improves access to education and opportunities, while 33.3% emphasize embedding sustainability topics in the teacher education curriculum

Theme 4: Analysis of Responses on “Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training” among 15 ESL Lecturers from FCET

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q18	8(53.3%)	4(26.7%)	0(0%)	3(20%)	0(0%)	4.33	1.05	15
Q19	0(0%)	6(40%)	1(6.7%)	5(33.3%)	3(20%)	2.67	1.11	15
Q20	8(53.3%)	6(40%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	4.47	0.74	15
Q21	5(33.3%)	7(46.7%)	0(0%)	2(13.3%)	1(6.7%)	3.87	1.19	15
Q22	5(33.3%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	1(6.7%)	4.00	1.07	15

The responses obtained from the analysis of Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training theme show high agreement on several challenges, particularly Q18 (mean 4.33) and Q20 (mean 4.47), demonstrates strong recognition of barriers. However, Q19 stands out with a low mean of 2.67 and considerable disagreement (53.3% disagree or strongly

disagree), indicating that this particular challenge is not widely perceived or perhaps misunderstood. Qualitative responses (Q23) unanimously cite lack of funding for modern tools, inadequate professional training, poor access to digital infrastructure, and weak policy support as major challenges to innovation in ESL teacher training.

Theme 5: Analysis of Responses on “Opportunities and Future Directions” among 15 ESL Lecturers from FCET

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations

Question	SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Q24	5(33.3%)	10(66.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.33	0.49	15
Q25	6(40%)	9(60%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.40	0.51	15
Q26	6(40%)	6(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(20%)	3.87	1.46	15
Q27	7(46.7%)	8(53.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.47	0.52	15
Q28	8(53.3%)	7(46.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4.53	0.52	15

The responses on “Opportunities and Future Directions” show strong optimism as evident in the robust Mean which is between 3.87 and 4.53. On this question, Q28 received the highest score (mean = 4.53) with full agreement toward the potential of future directions. Despite overall positivity, Q26 shows more varied responses (mean 3.87, SD=1.46), suggesting differing views on certain prospects. In Q29, 53.3% recommend integrating digital literacy and entrepreneurship-focused content along with flexible, technology-driven training, while 46.7% suggest curriculum improvements and enhanced communication strategies

Discussions

A comparative analysis of responses from ESL lecturers in Yusuf Maitama Sule-Federal University of Education Kano (YMS-FUEK) and Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi (FCET) revealed a shared commitment to strengthening ESL teacher training across five major dimensions: language and entrepreneurial communication, innovation, sustainability, challenges, and future opportunities.

On language and entrepreneurial communication, the outcome of the analyses show that both institutions strongly support integrating English as Second Language (ESL) into entrepreneurial communication. Both acknowledged the critical role of language in business proposal writing, product description, and pitching ideas. However, recurring disagreements in Questions 3 and 5 reflect a systemic gap:

ESL instruction remains too theoretical, with insufficient emphasis on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), applied communication, and hands-on practice. This indicates a sector-wide need to embed entrepreneurial communication modules into the ESL curriculum. The strong consensus among lecturers on the importance of language, especially English, in entrepreneurial communication mirrors findings in the literature emphasizing English as a critical tool for global business and entrepreneurship success. Studies by Anana, (2022); Imtiaz, (2020); Shehu and Shittu, (2015) highlight that English proficiency enhances effective communication in business proposals, negotiations, and marketing, enabling entrepreneurs to access broader markets and foreign investments. The ability to communicate clearly in English is often linked to economic advantage and sustainable entrepreneurship in multilingual contexts, particularly in Africa where English functions as a lingua franca in business and trade.

On Innovation in ESL teacher training, lecturers from both institutions expressed strong endorsement of innovation, but with differing emphases. Yusuf Maitama Sule- Federal University of Education Kano (YUMS-FUEK) respondents valued innovation highly yet raised concerns about how it should be implemented (Q8). Meanwhile, Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi (FCET) lecturers showed strong consensus on Q10, perhaps reflecting local exposure to specific innovative practices, but were skeptical about broader feasibility (Q8 & Q11). This suggests that while the

concept of innovation is universally embraced, practical implementation is hindered by doubts about resources, staff readiness, and institutional support. The general support for innovation but observed variation in acceptance resonates with research that underscores both the potential and the challenges of integrating innovative pedagogies in ESL teacher education. Innovations such as ICT-mediated teaching, blended learning, AI coaching, and peer networks have been identified as transformative, fostering collaboration, autonomy, and learner agency. However, implementation challenges, including resistance to change and infrastructural constraints, often temper enthusiasm and reveal needs for targeted professional development and contextual (Chong, 2024; Nigina, 2022; Luis, Yamith, & Andrea, (2020) Pickering, & Gunashekar, 2014)

With regards to the theme of Sustainability in ESL Teacher Training, both groups highlighted sustainability as a vital but under-implemented component of ESL teacher education. While high support was recorded for Q14 and Q16, hesitations in Q13 and Q15 point to a policy–practice gap. This demonstrates that although sustainability is widely endorsed at a conceptual level, yet there are limited translation of it into practical pedagogy. Thus, effective integration will require curriculum adjustments, localized sustainability content, and specialized training for ESL lecturers. The mixed perceptions about sustainability reflect broader complexities highlighted in teacher education research. Sustainability education requires integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions into curricula and teacher training. Studies emphasize the necessity of equipping teachers with competencies and values for sustainable development to influence learners meaningfully. However, sustainability remains unevenly prioritized, with ongoing calls for structural reforms in teacher education programs to embed sustainability more comprehensively and systematically (Jan, Stefan, Stefan, Ferguson, Grinberg, Hoang et al., 2023; Ferreira, 2017; Ferreira, 2011).

On the theme of Challenges in Innovating ESL Teacher Training, the findings show near-universal recognition of challenges such as funding gaps, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate training opportunities. Both YMS-FUE Kano and FCE (T) Bichi respondents strongly endorsed Q18 and Q20, underscoring these as core barriers. However, divergence in Q19 highlights that some challenges are institution-specific or differently prioritized across contexts. This implies the need for localized institutional audits to identify and prioritize barriers before designing solutions. The acknowledgment of challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructure, policy support, and continuous professional development aligns with numerous studies documenting barriers to innovation in English language teaching,

especially within developing contexts. The challenges of curriculum overload, lack of resources, and insufficient training impede effective enactment of innovative instructional approaches. Research indicates that overcoming these barriers necessitates funding, robust institutional backing, professional learning opportunities, and flexible curriculum frameworks (Chong, 2024; Widya, & Acfira, 2024; Hameed & Hashim, 2022; Murray & Mosavian, 2021 & Okoth, 2016).

With regards to the theme of “Opportunities and Future Directions,” strong optimism characterizes responses from both institutions, with strong endorsement for future-oriented items (Q27 and Q28). The exception, Q26, drew skepticism from a minority of respondents in both institutions. This suggests that while stakeholders broadly support forward-looking strategies such as partnerships, interdisciplinary programs, and technology integration, there remain concerns about institutional readiness or perceived risks. Such dissent signals the importance of transparent planning, stakeholder sensitization, and capacity-building before rolling out ambitious initiatives. The strong optimism for future opportunities in ESL teacher training corresponds to contemporary research highlighting trends such as digital literacy integration, entrepreneurial content, flexible and technology-enhanced training, and improved communication strategies. This positive outlook is crucial for motivating sustained investment and continuous professional growth. Researchers advocate for agile curricula responsive to global and local needs and for fostering innovative, entrepreneurial, and sustainability-oriented competencies among ESL educators (Farrell, 2024; Uysal, 2024; Pankaj & Vaishnav, 2024; Hong & Yin Ling, 2018)

Findings

- 1) There is a shared recognition for the integrating entrepreneurial communication, innovation, and sustainability into ESL teacher training. Both ESL lecturers from YMS-FUE Kano and FCE (T) Bichi strongly endorse integrating entrepreneurial communication, innovation, and sustainability into ESL teacher training. Both institutions show a shared recognition that ESL must move beyond grammar to support entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability. This shared stance is a critical foundation for cross-institutional initiatives and policy advocacy
- 2) The most consistent gap in Innovating ESL teacher education to meet the demands of sustainability and entrepreneurial future is implementation: respondents agree on goals but report partial or inconsistent practice. Recurrent contested items (Q3, Q5, Q8, Q11, Q13, Q15, Q19, Q26) point to four interlinked causes: (a) curriculum rigidity, (b) lack of ESP-aligned materials, (c)

- instructor professional development gaps, and (d) infrastructural/resource constraints.
- 3) Even though, sustainability and entrepreneurship are recognized as national priorities, yet their recognition has not yet translated systematically into ESL teacher education practice. There is a notable gap between policy and practice. This indicates the need for targeted curriculum reform, teacher capacity-building, and institutional investment.
 - 4) There exists a general readiness to innovate as signified by an overwhelming positive attitude toward innovation. However, capacity constraints (training, infrastructure, time within a crowded curriculum) are the major bottlenecks.

Summary

This study examines the intersections of language, innovation, and sustainability in the context of ESL teacher education within Nigerian tertiary institutions. The discussion highlighted the crucial role of English in shaping entrepreneurial competence and sustainable development, given its dominance as the global language of business, technology, and academia. The findings show a shared recognition of the importance of ESL in entrepreneurial communication, positive attitudes towards innovation and sustainability, and optimism in future directions. The findings also revealed that while teachers demonstrate readiness to adopt innovative approaches, institutional barriers such as outdated curricula, inadequate training, implementation and policy gaps impede progress. These insights emphasize the need for curriculum reform, policy realignment, and capacity building to ensure that ESL teacher training contributes effectively to Nigeria's sustainable and entrepreneurial future

Conclusion

The Nigerian ESL teacher education requires urgent innovation and reorientation to meet 21st-century demands. English language instruction should transcend traditional grammar-based models and adopt ESP-focused, entrepreneurial, and sustainability-driven pedagogies. By equipping teacher educators and trainees with entrepreneurial communication skills and innovative teaching strategies, ESL teacher education can significantly contribute to youth empowerment, job creation, and sustainable national development. Moreover, sustainable education is not merely an academic exercise but a socio-economic imperative for Nigeria, given its youthful population and pressing unemployment challenges.

Recommendations

- 1) Curriculum Reform: Nigerian universities should revise ESL teacher training curricula to integrate entrepreneurial communication tasks, sustainability themes, and digital literacy.

- 2) Capacity Building: Regular professional development programs should be organized to equip ESL lecturers with innovative pedagogical skills for entrepreneurial and sustainability-focused instruction.
- 3) Policy Integration: The Federal Ministry of Education should adopt policies that explicitly link language education with entrepreneurship and sustainability goals, aligning with Nigeria's Vision 2050 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 4) Institutional Support: Universities should invest in digital infrastructure, innovation hubs, and language labs that allow ESL teacher trainees to practice real-world communication scenarios.

Limitations of the present findings and Suggestions for further studies

The findings are institution-based and reflect lecturers' perceptions. A triangulation with student data, classroom observations, and objective performance measures would strengthen generalizability. Further research could be conducted to extend the study to other Nigerian universities and Colleges of Education to examine whether the identified patterns hold across regions and institutional types.

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