

# Assessment of Primary Teachers' Self-Perceived Communicative Competence in English as a Medium of Instruction in Nyamasheke District, Rwanda

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers' communicative competence in English as a medium of instruction is crucial for effective teaching and learning and for the overall positive relationship between students and teachers in the classroom. This article aimed to assess primary teachers' self-perceived communicative competence in English as a medium of instruction in two primary schools in Nyamasheke District, Rwanda. This article adopted a descriptive research design guided by Cummins' (1979) Dimensions of Language Proficiency. It used quantitative data collected by a questionnaire. Teachers rated their perceived English language proficiency focusing on the four English language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The results showed that teachers' overall communicative competence was low in terms of conversational fluency and academic language skills, which teachers need for successful teaching. This study highlights the need for appropriate training, support and guidelines for the use of English in the teaching of school subjects. This research recommended that training resources should include reading materials, films for listening and interpreting content, and essay writing to develop all the four English language skills. In addition, the benefits of English language training for teachers should be maximized, and language learning outcomes should be monitored and tested for future teacher assessment in order to encourage and motivate teachers to learn and improve their English language skills.

**Keywords:** Communicative Proficiency, English Language, Medium of Instruction

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In today's globalized society, English has become the international language that is widely used around the world as it serves as the language of business, the language of diplomacy, the language of science and technology, the language of education, finance and trade. English language proficiency has become an important component of academic achievement and eventual employability, especially in English as a foreign language in the educational context (Sumi, Lolita & Hans, 2024; Northrup, 2013; Mugiraneza, et al., 2024). Manivannan (2006) explained that because of the working knowledge of English, it is perceived that English is required in many fields, professions and occupations and many countries around the world mandate the use of English either as a subject or as a medium of instruction. Baloch (2003 cited in Shahwar and Shamsa, 2015) observed that when English is considered as a medium of instruction, it is directly related to the language proficiency of the teachers. Tahir (2007) observed that, the problems of the teachers using English in school subjects are that, they are not able to do full justice to the use of English as the medium of instruction throughout the sessions. Some of the problems are reported as difficulty in overcoming the mother tongue barrier, problems in forming new language habits, problems in pronunciation and problems in literal translation. Arshad (2009) found that teachers had gaps in their English language teaching competencies such as vocabulary teaching, oral communication, pronunciation, intonation, assessment and preparation of valid test.

Therefore, the concept of English as a language of instruction means that the teacher's English is used to teach school subjects such as English as a subject, mathematics, science and elementary technology, social studies, which are the main subjects taught in Rwandan primary schools. This functional nature of the language used in an English classroom may be reflected in the two constructs: language of instruction and language of interaction

(Pizarro and Velasco, 2023). The language of instruction refers to the fluency of the language used in teaching the students, while the language of interaction is a conversation or small talk in the classroom where teachers can use formal or casual expressions appropriately depending on the situation. It also refers to the selection of vocabulary appropriate to the topic (Clifford, 2022 in Pizarra and Velasco, 2023). Rosendal (2010 in Ntabwoba et al., 2024) showed that the level of formal English language learning in Rwanda is low. Giri Mbabazi, et al. (2024) note that the shift in medium of instruction in Rwanda has faced many challenges as teachers have failed to achieve high proficiency in English. This is true in a country like Rwanda, which consists of a monolingual society where Kinyarwanda is the only language used in everyday communication. Furthermore, at the time of the transition, there were no linguistic experts to implement the language transition policy (Nisibis, 2010; Sibomana, 2014). A survey conducted by MINEDUC (2009) to investigate teachers' background in English as the new medium of instruction found that only 35% of secondary school teachers had a background in English and had studied English formally during their education, while the remaining 65% had acquired English informally. Giri Mbabazi, et al (2024) found that teachers have negative attitudes towards English, which is a major challenge linked to the failure of many teachers to use English throughout the classroom.

Furthermore, research conducted by Pearson (2014) in Rwanda showed that all the teachers in the schools surveyed were unable to use English as a medium of instruction or as a subject. In another study, it was found that the situation is even more pathetic when it comes to the English language, as the Rwandan education system has always been dominated by French until 2008, when the government decided to phase out French as a medium of instruction in favor of English (Rutabana, 2023). Research by Ndi eye & Tabaro (2023) mentioned that 85% of primary school teachers were at beginner, elementary or pre-intermediate level of English, and Ingabire et al. (2024) observed that during the teaching and learning process, especially the teacher-learner interaction becomes very challenging when such teachers with such low proficiency in English medium are coupled with learners growing in xenoglossic ideology and at early stages of schooling with less prior knowledge of the English language. Sibomana's (2020) findings indicate that the transition from French to English medium of instruction is challenging for both teachers and learners due to their limited English proficiency. Learner engagement is very limited and teachers resort to unplanned code-switching, language pairing and content simplification. As a result, classroom interactions are dominated by drilled repetition after the teacher with extremely limited comprehension, a situation that hinders learners' deep understanding and de facto access to quality education.

Consequently, the Ministry of Education and its partners have done much to train teachers in the use of English as a medium of instruction and as a subject in order to improve the English language skills of Rwandan teachers. Interventions include improving access to education and strategies to improve student learning outcomes. One of the key components is to strengthen and capacitate teachers in the use of English as a medium of instruction. This is even more important as Cabinet decided on 28 November 2019 to expand English as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools (REB, 2023). Thus, improving teachers' English proficiency is essential for human capital development if Rwanda is to achieve its development goals and compete in the regional and global knowledge economy.

### **Functions of English as a Medium of Education**

For effective teaching, the interaction between teachers and learners should be understandable (Patrick, 2019; Krashen, 2015). Thus, interaction in the classroom promotes understanding and insight. Teachers teach to help their learners understand subject content as clearly as possible. The idea that a learner should develop deep insights into what they are studying is central. In addition to understanding content, teachers and learners need to understand themselves and each other. Teachers use their understanding of learners to deliver content in English in a way that meets individual needs. Both teachers and learners also need to understand their environment, as this understanding is also conducive to effective learning. Interacting with students by asking questions that encourage reflection is useful in promoting understanding through the effective use of English as a medium of instruction. Sharma (2023) writes that through classroom communication, individual learners can seek clarification on certain complex issues; they can ask questions, engage in discussions and receive accurate information from their teachers or peers.

In the same way, effective classroom interaction helps to persuade and influence learners. The whole process of teaching and learning is an attempt to influence another person and fluency in the medium of instruction

facilitates this classroom interaction. Teachers are trying to persuade learners and every teacher is going to influence their learners whether they like it or not. The important question then becomes: what do you say or do in your classroom to create a positive influence? Persuasion can take the form of direct words that are deliberately used to get a learner to do work, answer a question, change Behaviour and so on (Pasaragonda, 2021). Learners need to be explicitly taught how to use the medium of instruction to influence the teacher, other learners and others in the school community. Writing is also a powerful way of influencing others. Sharma (2023) notes that communication allows for fact-checking resources and methods so that learners and teachers can check the accuracy of information during teaching and learning

Furthermore, effective classroom interaction skills promote learning skills. Traditionally, teaching has been more about the teacher dominating the classroom with teacher talk. Today, the emphasis is shifting to helping learners take responsibility for their own learning. Learners develop their learning skills when a teacher gives them time to talk more, read texts and discuss in groups, and participate in writing tasks that involve summarizing key ideas from what the teacher says or from their reading (Pasaragonda, 2021). This is what teachers do when they search for new ideas and how they ask questions that require serious attention from learners, and all of this has to be done in English as the medium of instruction. A study by Adeleke, et al (2021) recommended that teachers should be made to understand that effective use of good English communication skills during the teaching-learning process is expedient. Teachers should improve their own speech and gestures to ensure that their presentation is clear and logical. They should continuously improve their English language skills to enhance the teaching-learning process.

Finally, proficiency in English as a medium of instruction initiates and sustains relationships between learners and students. Classroom teaching is both interpersonal and social in the sense that learners learn best when they have a strong sense of belonging. The teacher should be interested in using the medium of instruction to promote a social climate in which learners work together (Pasaragonda, 2021). Each learner should feel valued and respected by the teacher and other learners. Effective use of English as a medium of instruction should minimize the need for competition and focus on caring for and supporting students. Within this function many educational goals can be supported such as unity, love, cultural diversity, integrity (Nelson, 2022; Wangdi, 2022). These functions apply to many different areas of human endeavor and as such English language skills are considered to be at the top of the list of 21st century skills. Every education system is now challenged to oversee the development of these skills in its teachers.

### **Communication Proficiency in English as a Second Language**

The ability to communicate in English can be conceptualized as the ability to apply grammatical and social knowledge to know how to make sentences in English appropriate to the context and actual use of the language in a particular situation (Nguyen, et al., 2021). Hymes (1972) proposed the concept of communicative competence for language use. Hymes argued that a person who uses a second language should have both knowledge of the language and the ability to use it appropriately in a given language community. Based on this notion of language competence, successful language use refers to the ability to interpret and produce appropriate and meaningful utterances in a given situation (Thirakunkovit, 2018).

In his research, Sabri (2023) stated that communicative competence refers to the ability of language users to communicate and includes all the competencies and skills required for communication, whether oral or written. This proficiency includes all the components of communicative competence proposed by Canale's (1983) model together with fluency and automaticity skills, i.e. the ability to use the underlying communicative competence effectively in communication through the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Fluency and automaticity are at the heart of communicative competence in this model. Canale (ibid) states that a teacher's acquisition of grammatical and sociocultural knowledge does not guarantee his or her ability to use it in communication unless he or she has acquired a good level of fluency and automaticity that enables him or her to access, retrieve and use this underlying linguistic and sociocultural knowledge in communication smoothly and rapidly. Each of these components of communicative competence represents a crucial part of the English as a second language user's communication system, without which the system will not function properly to achieve communicative purposes (Sabri, 2023).

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a framework for communicative competence consisting of four elements: grammatical/linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Galajda (2012) stated that grammatical competence is the mastery of the language code. It means that speakers know the rules of the language which include vocabulary, word and sentence formation, spelling, pronunciation and linguistic semantics. It is the knowledge of how to express oneself appropriately and how to understand others. Sociolinguistic competence includes socio-cultural rules of language use, which basically means that the speaker is able to produce and understand utterances in different contexts. Each interaction has its own norms and purpose, and the speaker's role is to convey meaning in a form appropriate to a given context. Discourse competence also refers to the appropriateness of language in relation to a given situation. It is the speaker's ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to produce a unified spoken/written text in a particular genre. Unity depends on cohesion (the utterance should be structurally linked so that the text is easy to understand) and coherence of meaning (different meanings in a text are related to each other).

Finally, strategic competence occurs when there is a breakdown in communication or when the speaker suffers from inadequate communication skills. Strategic skills are also used when the speaker wants to increase the impact of communication or when other problems, such as sociolinguistic or discourse problems arise. Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) claim that these strategies include paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, reluctance, avoidance of words, structures or topics, guessing, changing register and style, changing messages, etc. Wolfson (1983) suggests that norms of communicative competence are culturally specific. The fact that speakers are not aware of sociolinguistic relativity means that both native speakers and language learners cannot avoid misunderstandings. Hymes (1972 cited in Thirakunkovit, 2018) refers to this phenomenon of miscommunication as 'communicative interference'. He argues that language teaching should aim to develop communicative competence along with the rules of speaking. Thus, sociolinguistic analysis is needed to uncover the patterns of communication and teach them to language learners, who in turn are expected to use them in their classroom teaching.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Cummins' Dimensions of Language Proficiency**

Cummins' (1979) theories of language acquisition have had a direct impact on classroom interaction. Cummins identifies two types of language: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)/Conversational Fluency and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). In the context of the classroom, these two types of skills are important for teachers to carry out effective teaching activities. This theoretical framework focuses on the dimensions of language proficiency proposed by Cummins (1979, 1981).

#### **Conversational Fluency**

Conversational fluency or basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) are the language skills used in face-to-face communication where interactions are contextualized (Cummins, 1981). Having conversational skills means that the speaker can interact with others in the language and hold his/her own in a conversation. He/she may not necessarily sound like a native speaker, but he/she understands what people are saying to him/her and can be understood by listeners. A conversational level speaker is able to follow social formalities such as greetings and basic sentences. Can make enquiries about others, talk about work, hobbies, interests and lifestyle. The speaker navigates through everyday conversations, such as shopping or asking for directions. The more you talk to others, the more your conversation will extend beyond the classroom and textbooks. For example, the speaker may become familiar with idioms of a particular region or technical language related to the person's field of work. Morales and Diamond (2023) note that this language is used in simple conversations, including conversations with friends and informal interactions and acquaintances, and is contextualized communication.

#### **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency**

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to cognitive/academic language skills. CALP is a set of language skills used for academic purposes where the context for understanding is reduced or limited (Cummins, 1981). Morales and Diamond (2023) assert that it is the language used to describe the formal

language used in academia. It is the form of language required to understand and discuss content in the classroom. Academic language is often complex and decontextualized, i.e. language that is removed from the here and now. This language tends to involve unusual words and reduced context. In the classroom, it is used in teaching and learning activities such as reading a textbook, watching a PowerPoint presentation, introducing a course, etc. According to Scarcella (2003), academic English is a variety or register of English used in professional books and characterized by the linguistic features associated with academic disciplines. In the same way, Chabot and O'Malley (1994 cited in Rao, 2020 p.6) define it as "the language used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills ... imparting new information, describing abstract ideas, and developing students' conceptual understanding". While recognizing settings of use and suggestions is important, a broader meaning of academic language requires further identification. As Scarcella (2003) suggests, there are three dimensions to academic language proficiency: linguistic, cognitive and socio cultural/psychological.

In the same vein, Edwards (2005 in Clauss-Ehlers, 2010) provides a rich portrait of the English language knowledge and strategies that both students and teachers need to manage their learning effectively in an English medium classroom. He describes five categories of academic language strategies which are (1) essential survival phrases such as asking for help, asking about the language, polite requests and responses etc., (2) classroom-only language such as initiation-answer-evaluation (IRE) sequences which consist of an initiation by the teacher and the learners and an evaluation by the teacher, (3) discussion language opinions which consist of agreeing, disagreeing, suggesting, advising, negotiating. These strategies include inviting participation in classroom conversation or creating opportunities for more complex language expression by inviting meaningful expansion, (4) Grammar Terminology or metalanguage, which is used to describe the language often found in books and which is the vehicle of knowledge and the content of academic learning, (5) Teacher's Classroom Management Language, which is used to give instructions and manage students' behavior.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population consisted of 29 primary school teachers from two (2) schools in Nyamaskeke District. The sample was purposively selected in line with Darlington and Scott's (2002:87) statement that research participants must have "the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of the experience under study and the ability to develop some significant relationship with the phenomenon under study". Therefore, 29 teachers in two schools were purposively selected to participate in the research process. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire, coded and analyzed using SPSS software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Teachers' Perceived English Speaking Proficiency

English speaking fluency is important in teachers' every day communication in classroom. It helps the dialogic teaching to happen between teachers and students. It helps the teacher to explain deeply the content and have a long interaction with students in a context of collaboration and mutual support. Akinfe (2012) argued that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of context; it is the crucial part of second language learning and teaching.

Speaking Proficiency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	9	31.0	31.0	31.0
Very good	18	62.1	62.1	93.1
Good	2	6.9	6.9	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0	

**Source:** Primary data (2024)

From the table above, it can be seen that the teachers had good English language skills as 9 (31.0%) rated themselves as excellent and thus able to speak fluently, be a role model for the learners and help them to improve their own level of English and 18 (62.1%) felt very good while 2 (6.9%) rated their speaking skills as good. This means that the teachers did not have any language barriers when delivering lessons in English as the medium of instruction. According to Alexander (2005 in Scott, 2009), a teacher's fluency in spoken language helps him/her to achieve common understanding through structured, cumulative questioning and discussion, which guides, prompts, reduces choices, minimizes risks and errors, and facilitates students' internalization of concepts and principles. Therefore, an ideal teacher should have this competence in order to be able to co-ordinate classroom activities, to give feedback to students, to provide comprehensible input to students, and to have a high degree of influence in shaping classroom talk so that it supports students' learning, thus helping them to learn content and language at the same time.

### Teachers' Perceived English Reading Proficiency

The ability to read for meaning is arguably the most important skill that teachers teach children in secondary school. Since almost all learning depends on this basic understanding of the relationship between print and spoken language, it is obvious that literacy is built on a firm foundation of basic reading skills; it is used as one of the secondary school effectiveness skills. This skill has been included because teachers cannot teach without reading what they expect to teach or are teaching. They need this skill to keep themselves up to date by reading books, making summaries and guiding their students in the pronunciation of difficult words. They need fluency in reading the English medium of instruction to be able to provide quality teaching. Teachers perceived English reading skills are summarized in the table below.

Reading Skills	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	9	31.0	31.0	31.0
Very good	17	58.6	58.6	89.7
Good	3	10.3	10.3	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0	

**Source:** Primary data (2024)

The results obtained from the teachers' perceived reading skills about lessons written in English, the table above shows that 9 (31.0%) rated their reading skills as excellent and 17 (58.6%) rated themselves as very good, while 3 (10.3%) felt that they had good written English skills. This is an indication that they had no problem with this English skill and that they could be role models for their students in learning the pronunciation of some words and reading school texts. In his research, Niranjana (2015) argued that good teachers help their students to understand the individual sentences and organizational structure of a piece of writing; they understand ideas, follow arguments and recognize implications. They already know most of the words in the text, but they can also determine the meaning of many unfamiliar words from the context.

### Teachers' Perceived English Listening Proficiency

Listening, as we know, is the ability to understand spoken language. Listening is an essential skill that is present in most of the activities we undertake throughout our lives. As one of the so-called receptive skills, listening, like reading, has often been seen by teachers as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Listening Skills	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	11	37.9	37.9	37.9
Very good	16	55.2	55.2	93.1

Good	2	6.9	6.9	100
Total	29	100	100	

**Source:** Primary data (2024)

The table above shows that 11 (37.9%) were excellent listeners, 16 (55.2%) rated their listening skills as very good and while 2 (6.9%) replied that their listening skills were good. This shows that the teachers had no problems with their listening skills and that it is not difficult for them to learn from the radio programmed that the government has introduced to improve teachers' English language skills. Research on second language acquisition (Krashen, 1994; Wilson, 2000), which emphasizes the role of comprehensible input, has done much to raise awareness of the importance of listening in second language teaching. Learning cannot begin without understanding input, and listening is therefore fundamental to speaking (Nunan, 1997 cited by Scott, 2009). An effective classroom teacher is not only a knowledgeable and skilled teacher; he/she should also be an active listener. Good listening skills are needed to develop empathy and understanding with students and to assess whether they understand what is being taught (Kereni, 2004).

### Teachers' Perceived Writing English Proficiency

In this study, written English fluency was investigated because it involves summarizing books and preparing school texts for students. However, Richards (1990 cited by Kereni, 2004) argues that writing is considered to be the most difficult skill in language learning. Furthermore, McCarthy (1999, cited by Jennifer, 2009) wrote that written language skills are of most concern because the written form is more formally bound than the spoken form. Teachers' perceived levels of written English proficiency are summarized in the table below.

	Reading	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	9	31.0	31.0	31.0
	Very good	17	58.6	58.6	89.7
	Good	3	10.3	10.3	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

**Source:** Primary data (2024)

Writing is a key skill in teaching and learning. Teachers' responses to this skill were such that only 7 (24.1%) felt they were excellent, 21 (72.4%) felt they were very good and 1 (3.4%) felt they were good. This indicates that the teachers had good writing skills. It shows that most of them have no difficulty in making summaries in class and preparing notes for students. In order to write well, teachers need to master the structure, spelling, punctuation and a large part of the vocabulary of the language in which they are writing. They need to express their thoughts in clear, logical, well-constructed sentences. Kereni (2004) argues that familiarity with what is known about writing and the teaching of writing can help the teacher to reflect on assumptions and enable him/her to approach old teaching methods with an informed and critical eye. Thus, fluency in the medium of instruction forms the basis of all teaching, since everything a teacher teaches depends on his or her command and control of the medium of instruction.

### The Teachers' Perceived Most Difficult English Skill

Human intelligence is primarily developed through speaking and listening. The quality of our lives depends on the quality of our thinking and our ability to communicate and discuss our thoughts with others. Speaking is intrinsic to literacy and to our ability to relate to others (Fisher, 2007 cited by Scott, 2009). It is therefore important to note that the four language skills are cornerstones of human communication in general and in the

classroom in particular. In this study, the researcher wanted to know which of the four English language skills were more difficult than others. In Table 3.5 it was found that speaking and listening were the most difficult skills, as summarized in the following table.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Speaking	12	41.4	41.4	41.4
	Listening	9	31.0	31.0	72.4
	Reading	5	17.2	17.2	89.7
	Writing	3	10.3	10.3	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

**Source:** Primary data (2024)

As shown in Table 3.5, the most challenging skill was speaking with 12(41%) of the respondents reporting it as the most challenging, meaning that they cannot speak in English throughout the lesson. Speaking was followed by listening with 9 (31.0%) of the respondents reporting listening as challenging, meaning that they cannot listen effectively to their learners speaking. This requires them to ask their learners for clarification in Kinyarwanda. On the other hand, 5 (17.2%) reported that reading was the most challenging for them. Teachers find it difficult to read for pleasure or to prepare notes for class. Only 3 (10.3%) found writing the most challenging. Speaking was found to be more challenging than other skills, yet this skill is essential for teaching any subject. This means that speaking was a challenge for the teachers and listening came second. Therefore, they were able to engage in long discussions and provide comprehensible input to their students because they could not use the target language extensively during the lesson.

Despite the importance of speaking and listening, for many years the teaching of these skills has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking/listening only as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues (Chaney, 1998 cited by Maniraho, 2014). However, today's education demands that the aim of teaching speaking skills should be to improve students' communicative competence, because this is the only way to enable students to express themselves and learn to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate to each communicative situation. Krashen (1985 cited by Qorvo, 2006) states that no matter what subject is taught, the language used in the classroom is also taught. That is, students are exposed to the vocabulary and syntax of the language of instruction as they hear it, understand it, and later use it for whatever purpose. In this study, the teacher's role in solving students' problems and his or her own ability to deal with students' deficiencies seems to be limited. This lack of ability to establish clear communication between teachers and students blocks learning and is a source of poor student performance, especially in cognitively demanding subjects (Giri Mbabazi, et al.; 2021, Ingabire, 2024). The low language proficiency of teachers in Rwanda is not surprising because they only use English in class and when they go home, they use their mother tongue, Kinyarwanda, which is spoken by the whole community. Therefore, they cannot become fluent in English without practicing it in their daily interactions.

### The Teachers' Initiatives to Improve their English Language Proficiency

The teaching profession requires continuous professional development, which can be initiated by the Ministry of Education, schools or self-initiated programmed by teachers. As seen earlier (MacNeal, 2010; Pearson, 2014), programmed initiated by the Ministry of Education are not sufficient to help teachers acquire the required English language skills. This section aimed to explore the various initiatives taken by teachers in Rwandan primary schools to address the medium of instruction problem arising from their poor command of English. Scott (2009) argues that teachers have a great deal of influence in shaping classroom talk so that it is conducive to student



learning, and that teacher involvement is an essential component of the dialogical technique. This can only be achieved if they are able to communicate effectively in the medium of instruction. Teachers' initiatives and strategies to improve their English language skills are summarized in the table below.

	Measures taken by teachers	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Attending all the public trainings in the English language	21	72.4	72.4	72.4
	Independent reading of books in English language (novels, short stories, non-fiction, academic journal...)	3	10.3	10.3	82.8
	Attending Continuous Professional Development (CPD, CoP) at school	5	17.2	17.2	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

**Source:** Primary Data (2024)

The results in the table above show that 21(72.4%) of the teachers expect to improve their English language skills by attending all English language training courses and ignoring other self-initiated methods. In addition, only 3(10.3%) can improve their English language skills by independently reading books in English (novels, short stories and non-fiction) as an activity to improve their English language skills. Furthermore, 5(17.2%) said that they would try to improve their English by using it in their daily lives.

The first most frequently reported activity was attending all training sessions in English, chosen by 72.4% of participants who said they attended these sessions. This activity appeared to be the most attractive to teachers and the one most likely to help them improve their English. Therefore, this option is the main option as the Ministry of Education is keen to help them improve their English language skills through regular in-service training with trainers from the national level, District Master Trainers and School Mentors. According to Clement (1986), participation in such programmed would greatly increase the chances of intercultural contact, second language communication practice and comprehensible input from their fellow teachers.

The second strategy used by the teachers surveyed was the independent reading of books, newspapers and novels in English as an activity to improve their English language skills, which 10.3% of the teachers said they used. This percentage probably reflects the scarcity of printed materials in English in rural areas. Teachers in rural parts of Rwanda, as in many other African countries, have little exposure to English. This finding is consistent with research by Samuelson and Freedman (2010) that English is not a vernacular language in rural areas.

Finally, another strategy adopted by teachers is to participate in continuous professional development (CPD), with 17.2%. During such training, teachers can benefit from in-service training such as continuous professional development (CPD) and communities of practice (CoP) recommended by the Ministry of Education, with the help of their colleagues who have received training and with improved English language skills. As stated by Alabaster (2018 in Molina, 2022), one of the tenets of team teaching is to share experiences and encourage dialogue that leads to reflection. Research by Pizarra & Velasco (2023) recommended that teachers could attend more conferences, seminars and training sessions on English language proficiency in order to improve more their skills in the four macro skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking, as English is the second language for the majority of teachers. Teachers should train themselves to use English not only in their classroom but also in everyday conversations outside school to improve their speaking and writing skills needed in an English classroom to serve as role models for their students. They need to develop more their English competence in the four macro skills to have better communication skills through a lot of reading, attending language training, exposure to English speaking environment such as films, media broadcasts, conversations and other English related activities.

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings highlighted that despite fifteen years of English as the medium of instruction in Rwandan schools, the low level of English proficiency among teachers persists. This was found to be a consequence of the lack of exposure to English as a foreign language in Rwanda. The study revealed that the problem of limited English proficiency is that rural teachers and learners have limited access to English. They revealed that they have to wait for trainings organized by the Ministry of Education and its partners, continuous professional development at school level and community of practice through peer learning to improve their English proficiency. This is because they do not have access to native or near-native speakers of English in their work environment, nor do they interact with people with advanced skills. In addition, they do not converse or read for pleasure outside the school premises because English is not widely spoken in rural areas. This leaves the school as the only place for practice. This finding is in line with Adeleke, et al. (2021) that teachers seem to lack communication skills such as listening, writing, speaking, conversing, discussing, questioning and answering which may inevitably affect teacher effectiveness in schools. This research highlights the need for appropriate training, support and guidelines for the use of English in the teaching of other subjects. The study recommends that the benefits of English language training should be maximized and that language learning outcomes should be monitored and tested for future teacher evaluation to encourage teachers to learn and improve their English language skills. In addition, teachers should help each other to improve their English language skills through peer and senior observations by headteachers and inspectors during English language training, and through workshops where neighboring schools can come together for peer observation and learning.

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