

# English Teaching Methods and Pupils' Performance in Nangako Town Council, Uganda

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined English language teaching methods and their influence on primary school pupils' performance in Nangako Town Council, Bududa District, Uganda. The study was guided by the objective: to identify English language teaching methods used in local primary schools. A descriptive survey design was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study involved 255 participants, drawn from a target population of 510, comprising 48 teachers, 205 pupils, and 2 education officials. Stratified sampling was used for pupils, while purposive sampling was applied for teachers and education officials. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Findings revealed that 36% of teachers use audiovisual methods, while 20% use the direct method. The study concluded that over-reliance on the mother tongue and grammar translation impairs pupils' ability to develop proficiency in English. It recommends strategic bilingual education and strengthening teacher training in communicative and student-centered methodologies.

**Keywords:** English teaching methods, pupil performance, primary schools, Nangako

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

English is a foreign language taught in Ugandan primary schools and serves as the official language of instruction from upper primary onward. In Nangako Town Council, Bududa District, pupils' performance in English has consistently remained poor. According to UNEB reports (2019-2023), average PLE English scores in Bududa District ranged between 35% and 42%, significantly below the national average.

The primary aim of teaching at all educational levels is to bring about fundamental change in learners (Tebabal & Kahssay, 2011). Effective knowledge transmission requires teachers to apply suitable methods aligned with learners' needs. Traditionally, teacher-centered methods have dominated classroom instruction in Uganda, though student-centered approaches have gained attention. Research such as that by Hightower et al. (2011) and Adunola (2011) suggests that ineffective teaching methods often contribute to learners' poor academic outcomes.

Kibui and Athiemoolam (2012) observed that learners in Kenya struggle with English due to limited use outside school, often reverting to local languages. Similarly, in Uganda, Mushega (as cited in Shira, 2020) highlighted the decline in English usage in rural schools. This is further exacerbated by lack of teacher training and limited access to English literature (Mukholi & Mugeere, as cited in Shira, 2020).

Several English teaching methods are relevant to this context, including grammar translation, audio-lingual, communicative, direct, audiovisual, suggestopedia, and total physical response. However, in resource-constrained settings like Nangako, factors such as teacher preparedness, classroom size, language diversity, and policy environments influence method selection. This study explored which methods are applied and how they impact pupils' English performance.

## Statement Of the Problem

Pupils in Nangako Town Council have consistently underperformed in English. Contributing factors include teacher training inadequacies, use of mother tongue during instruction, lack of teaching materials, limited

parental support, and minimal learner exposure to English outside the classroom. While a study by Guloba, Wokadala, and Bategeka (2010) found teaching methods significantly influence academic performance, there is limited research focusing on rural areas like Nangako. Without empirical data on local teaching practices, it was difficult to identify effective strategies to improve English proficiency. This study sought to address that gap.

## Objective Of the Study

To identify English language teaching methods used in primary schools in Nangako Town Council, Bududa District.

## Research Question

What English language teaching methods are used in primary schools in Nangako Town Council, Bududa District?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching involves bringing about desired changes in learners using appropriate strategies. Chomsky (as cited in Hu, 2002) emphasized the role of internal linguistic mechanisms in language acquisition. Effective language teaching, however, also requires external methods tailored to context.

**Grammar Translation Method:** This teacher-centered method focuses on grammar rules and vocabulary memorization. It emphasizes reading and writing, often at the expense of communication (Stern, 2001). In Uganda, this method persists due to exam-oriented teaching, though it offers limited speaking practice.

**Audio-Lingual Method:** This behaviorist-based method involves drills and pattern practice to form language habits (Stern, 2001). While useful for pronunciation, its emphasis on rote repetition may not suit all learners, especially in large classes.

**Communicative Method:** This approach prioritizes language use in real-life situations. It encourages pair work, group discussion, and problem-solving tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, implementation in Ugandan classrooms may be limited by teacher confidence and class size.

**Direct Method:** The direct method avoids translation, emphasizing thinking in English through demonstration and action (Nila, 2015). It promotes immersion but can be demanding for teachers and learners in rural settings with limited resources.

**Audiovisual Method:** This method presents scenarios through visual media and encourages contextualized language use (Shira, 2020). It aligns well with modern technology but requires equipment not always available in rural schools.

**Suggestopedia:** Lozanov (2005) described this method as using music, art, and relaxation to enhance memory and engagement. While it fosters enjoyment, its cultural applicability in Uganda needs careful consideration.

**Total Physical Response (TPR):** TPR links physical movement to verbal commands to support memory (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). It is particularly useful in early stages of language learning, especially for young learners.

Empirical studies (e.g., Ojera & Bwire, 2020; Nambi, 2019) show that mixed methods—combining communicative, audiovisual, and direct techniques—are most effective when adapted to context. Local challenges, such as lack of teaching materials and linguistic diversity, must be considered when adopting these methods.

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** The study employed a descriptive survey design to collect data on current practices and perceptions. This design was suitable for capturing both numerical data and in-depth insights (Creswell, 2008).

**Research Approach:** A mixed methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. Triangulation ensured cross-validation of findings.

**Area of Study:** The study was conducted in Nangako Town Council, Bududa District, located 7 km east of Bududa town. The area was chosen due to persistent low performance in English.

**Target Population:** The population included 59 teachers, 449 pupils, and 2 education officials.

**Sample Size:** Based on Krejcie and Morgan's table (as cited in Amin, 2005), a sample of 255 was drawn: 48 teachers, 205 pupils, and 2 officials.

**Sampling Techniques:** Purposive sampling was used for teachers and officials to ensure relevant expertise. Pupils were stratified by grade level and gender, then randomly selected.

**Data Collection Methods and Instruments:** Questionnaires (structured and semi-structured), interview guides, and focus group discussion guides were used. Instruments were piloted in a nearby sub-county and revised accordingly.

**Reliability and Validity:** Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (0.83). Content validity was ensured through expert review and pretesting.

**Ethical Considerations:** Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were guaranteed in compliance with research ethics guidelines.

**Data Analysis:** Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to generate frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring ideas and teacher perspectives.

## FINDINGS

### Teaching Methods Used in English Lessons

Method Used	F	%
Learners observe situations and use language to talk about them (audiovisual)	16	36
Demonstration without local language (direct method)	9	20
Reading comprehension texts (reading method)	8	18
Imitation of pronunciation (audio-lingual method)	5	11
Exposure to communicative scenarios	4	9
Use of fun and music (suggestopedia)	2	4
Physical actions before verbal response (TPR)	1	2
Grammar translated into Lumasaaba	0	0

### Key Findings:

- The audiovisual method is the most commonly used (36%).
- 20% of teachers use the direct method.
- Minimal use of suggestopedia and TPR.
- Grammar translation is not reported in questionnaires, but qualitative responses confirm its occasional use.

**Teacher Insights:** Teachers often choose methods based on available resources, training, and class size. Many expressed limited confidence in communicative methods due to lack of exposure and training. Teachers also mentioned the need for contextual flexibility, sometimes using the mother tongue to aid comprehension.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that most teachers use audiovisual and direct methods to teach English, while communicative methods are less commonly applied. Though not formally acknowledged in surveys, occasional use of the mother tongue and grammar translation persists in some classrooms. Teachers lack sufficient training in modern, student-centered methods. Broader factors, such as resource limitations, minimal parental support, and large class sizes, also constrain teaching effectiveness. Without addressing these contextual challenges, pupil performance in English will remain low.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Strategic Use of Mother Tongue:** Advocate for context-sensitive bilingual education. Allow use of mother tongue for clarification during early learning stages, while gradually transitioning to full English immersion.
2. **Teacher Training Programs:** Develop and implement workshops focusing on communicative, project-based, and task-based approaches. Encourage peer learning and mentoring.
3. **Resource Allocation and Optimization:** Provide schools with basic multimedia tools, charts, and readers. Encourage community resource-sharing and integration of low-cost digital tools.
4. **Community and Parental Involvement:** Promote English through home-based activities, reading clubs, and parent engagement programs.
5. **Policy and Institutional Support:** Urge district-level interventions to provide regular in-service training and support for teachers. Policies should prioritize continuous professional development and classroom-based mentoring.

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