

English Language As A Medium Of Instruction And Learners' Academic Performance In Secondary Day Schools Of Ruhango District, Rwanda

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to find out how English language as a medium of instruction affects the learners' academic performance in secondary day schools of Ruhango district. Specifically, the paper analyzed the use of English as medium of instruction in secondary day schools, the status of learners' academic performance in English language in secondary day schools and the relationship between English as medium of instruction and learners' academic performance in the classroom. The paper used the survey design whereby the questionnaires were used to collect data and data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics generated from a computer based software known as statistical package for social sciences. The stratified sampling, and simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample size of 266 learners from 1002 learners and 27 teachers from 100 teachers. Results revealed that learners expressed that they like studying in English language (59.8%) despite the challenges they encounter. Learners expressed that they fear to speak English in public (28.6%). Teachers expressed that they need more training in English language (55.6%). Concerning the learner's academic performance, the study revealed that learners like studying English as subject but they perform poorly in it. The majority of them score between 21-40 marks (31.2%). The study revealed that learner's use of English as medium of instruction is positively correlated with improved learner's proficiency in the use of English, improved scores in English subject and learner's interest in reading and writing in English. In light with these results, the paper recommended the need of enough and updated teaching aids in English language, more motivation to both learners and teachers for improving the use of English language and learner's academic performance. More training in English language for both learners and teachers is needed to improve English language in use in Ruhango district secondary day schools.

Keywords: *Academic Performance, Day School, Medium of Instruction, Secondary Schools.*

1. Introduction

The learner always seeks an awareness on structures, content and contextual knowledge and should be facilitated with the tactics of practical communication. According to Yule (2010), English in the modern world is not just a language. It is how the world deals with business and shares the ideas. In short term, it is how the world communicates. In reality, when the medium of instruction becomes a foreign language, classroom interactions also become limited and most of the time it leads to the teacher's centered method than the learner centered one and all this leads to low performance of the learners. Here in Rwanda, this becomes one of the barriers to the effective implementation of the new education system which is Competence Based Curriculum (CBC).

According to R.E.B report of 2014, the Rwandan government recognizes this through policies such as Rwanda vision 2020 and EDPRS II, seeks to improve opportunities for the next generation of Rwandans by improving the English language levels of all Rwandan children in education, ICT, business, trade, diplomacy and cultural exchanges across the region and beyond. For this to happen, the English language levels of Rwandan teachers must be improved as much as possible. Although a great effort has been made to improve the use of English language as a medium of instruction in secondary schools, a big number of learners and teachers are still struggling to master that language and use it effectively. Lack of that English language mastery of course, has

the negative effects on the learner's academic performance. Some learners have tried their best to understand the subject contents taught to them but they end up with poor performance because of the limitations in the use of English language.

One of those limitations is lack of motivation and exposure to English as the new language of instruction in Rwanda. In other words, English language is not yet a language of communication in Rwandan schools as it was expected and learners are still poor in the academic performance. The researches have been done in this area but still the challenges and issues related to the implementation of the new language transition policy are not exhausted. Therefore, this study sought to find out how the new medium of instruction (English) in Rwanda is related to the learners' academic performance in secondary day schools, particularly in Ruhango District..

The research objectives were:

- i. To analyze the learners' use of English language as Medium of Instruction in secondary day schools in Ruhango District
- ii. To examine the status of learners' academic performance in English language in secondary day schools of Ruhango District
- iii. To establish the relationship between English as Medium of Instruction and learners' academic performance in the classroom.

2. Review of Literature

This paper deals with a review of the past studies that are related to English language as a medium of instruction and learner's performance. A study of Nzanana (2016) argues that English as a second or foreign language simply means the use of English by speakers with different native languages. English as a foreign language is used for non-native English speakers learning English in a country where English is not commonly spoken. The term English as a Second Language has been seen by some to indicate that English would be of secondary importance in use.

Yule (2010) argues that some children grow up in a social environment where more than one language is used and are able to acquire a second language in circumstances similar to these of first language acquisition. Those fortunate individuals are bilingual. For instance, the general census of 2002 on the languages used in Rwanda showed clearly that the majority of Rwandan population were using the native language (Kinyarwanda): 93.18% of the population were using Kinyarwanda only while 0.06% were using English only.

A study of Sibomana (2014) on the acquisition or learning of English as a second language in Rwanda: challenges and premises. The study suggests that while the teaching of English language has been improved and several factors appear to increase Rwandan people's motivation to learn English, the context is not yet favorable to the attainment of communicative competence in this language. For example, the results from the census conducted in 2012 on the use of languages in Rwanda revealed that among 6,187,890 people of fifteen years old and above, 14.7% were able to use English and 0.1% of them were using English only. On the other hand, 48.8% were using Kinyarwanda only and 6.5% could use both Kinyarwanda and English.

A study of Mouhamad (2016) on English as a Medium of Instruction in the tertiary education setting of the United Arab Emirates: the perspectives of content teachers. The study problematizes taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding an exclusive English medium of instruction model as it is currently implemented in the UAE's Higher Education Institutions, where low English proficiency level and a limited use of Arabic are characteristics.

Laxmi (2018) observed that most of the teachers in community schools have never studied in English and were not trained to teach in English. Furthermore, those teachers did not have enough training in teaching in English language. For instance, the below entry test results from four academic years highlight the English difficulties that students in Rwanda were facing: in 2010, among 2,362 learners who did the test, 20.4% passed and 79.5% failed. In 2012-2013, among 2839 learners, only 4.5% passed the test while 95.4% failed.

Tabaro (2015) made a study on Rwandan's Motivation to learn and use English as a Medium of Instruction. The study revealed that Rwandans are aware of benefits that they can enjoy from mastering and using English language, which normally range from economic affairs, world globalization, political and diplomatic relations among others. This focused on the motivation factors of learning and using English as medium of instruction but it did not show deeply how English as medium of instruction affects the academic performance of secondary schools' learners in Rwanda, particularly those in the secondary day schools.

Nzanana (2016) conducted the study on Language Learning Motivation and Proficiency in Learning of English as a Foreign Language: the case of University students in Rwanda. That study aimed at investigating the relationship between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation and their oral proficiency. The results from survey and interviews with both students and teachers revealed that students were highly motivated, while their oral proficiency was found to be average. Findings revealed a weak correlation between learners' motivation to learn English and their oral proficiency.

3. Materials and Methods

This study used a descriptive design by using the quantitative approach through the interviews or the questionnaires distributed to the respondents from the sample population. In this regards, the target population for this research was all secondary day schools in Ruhango District. The paper involved both learners and teachers from six selected schools among those day schools with the sampled population of 1002 learners and 100 teachers. The sample size of 293 was calculated by the following formula.

Eq (1):

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

When

n represent sample size; N represents population size; E represent margin error which is equal to 5% (0.05).

The questionnaire was composed of the closed-ended questions provided for each category of respondents. This type of data collection instrument was chosen by the researcher because it helps to reach a large number of respondents in a good rang of time. It helped to give the reliable data simply because the respondents feel free, in their own mood to provide answers without the researcher’s presence consideration.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Learners’ Use of English language as a Medium of Instruction

Table 4. 1 The first objective determined the use of English language as Medium of Instruction.

Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		N	Total Mean	sdv
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
I Like Studying in English Language	0.4	6.1	13	4.9	30	11.3	63	23.7	159	59.8	266	3.54	1.32
English Language Is an Easy Language for Me	48	18.0	60	22.6	47	17.7	73	27.4	38	14.3	266	3.75	1.38
There Is a Lack of Enough English Language Teaching Aids in Our School	43	16.2	57	21.4	53	19.9	63	23.7	50	18.8	266	3.71	1.33
I Fear to Speak English in front of Many People	18.8	2.6	40	15.0	66	24.8	76	28.6	34	12.8	266	3.90	1.27

Source: Primary Data (2022)

The analysis of data about the statement “I like studying in English language” showed that one hundred and fifty-nine (59.8%) of the learners who responded said that they do like studying in English language; they strongly agreed to that statement and sixty-three (23.7%) respondents agreed. On the other side, some of the respondents did not agree on that point. As the figures presented in the table above show it, thirteen (4.9%) disagreed and only one (0.4%) respondent strongly disagreed.

The paper revealed that Seventy-three (27.4%) of the respondents agreed and thirty-eight (14.3%) strongly agreed. Forty-seven (17.7%) learners said that they were not sure of that statement. On the other side, sixty (22.6%) respondents disagreed while other forty-eight (18%) strongly disagreed. On the side of teachers, the majority of the respondents agreed that they don’t get chance to practice English language. In the table above, fourteen (51.9%) respondents agreed and one (3.7%) of them disagreed. Among those respondents, four (14.8%) of them were not sure. On the opposite side, six (22.2%) respondents disagreed and other two (7.4%) strongly disagreed. The findings in the table 4.5 show that fifty (18.8%) learners who responded said they strongly agree that there is a lack of enough teaching aids in English language. Sixty-three (23.7%) among the respondents agreed, fifty-three (19.9%) respondents said that they were not sure while fifty-seven (21.4%) disagreed and even forty-three (16.2%) of them strongly disagreed. The paper show that thirty-four (12.8%) respondents strongly agreed while seventy-six (28.6%) respondents agreed. On the other hand, forty (15%) respondents did not agree, even fifty (18.8%) of them strongly disagreed. Other sixty-six (18.8%) were not sure of that statement.

4.2. Level of Learners’ Academic performance in English Subject

Table 4. 2 I like Studying English Subject

I like Studying English Subject	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	168	63.2
Agree	85	32.0
Not Sure	11	4.1
Disagree	2	.8

Total	266	100.0
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Source: Field data (2022)

Relating this to the findings in this study, the table above shows that the learners like studying English as a subject. One hundred and sixty-eight (63.2%) respondents strongly agreed that they like studying English subject. On the other hand, eighty-five (32%) respondents agreed on the same statement. Eleven (4.1%) learners who responded to the questionnaire were not sure and only two (0.8%) learners disagreed. Therefore, the findings proved that the learners in secondary day schools like English as a subject despite the difficulties they encounter in the process of learning that subject such as lack of enough teaching aids and well trained teachers in that language.

Table 4. 3 In English subject evaluations I normally get the marks between:

Marks	Frequency	Percent
0-20	61	22.9
21-40	83	31.2
41-60	76	28.6
61-80	32	12.0
81-100	14	5.3
Total	266	100.0

Source: Field data (2022)

The findings show clearly that the performance of the learners in English subject is still poor. The majority are getting below fifty per cent in evaluations' results. In the table above, sixty-one respondents (22.9%) get between 0-20 marks in English subject evaluations. Eight three of the respondents (31.2%) fall under the category of those who score between 21-40 marks while seventy-six of those respondents (28.6%) score between 41-60 marks. On the other hand, some learners are trying to get higher marks in their performance. Thirty-two respondents (12%) get between 61-80 marks and fourteen of those respondents (5.3%) can score between 81-100 marks in the evaluations. There are some of reasons of poor performance in English subject as they were given by learners: they said that some English subject teachers are not competent, they meet challenges while teaching.

Table 4. 4 When I read English texts, I understand well the content

When I read English texts, I understand well the content	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	38	14.3
Agree	68	25.6
Not Sure	59	22.2
Disagree	90	33.8
Strongly Disagree	11	4.1
Total	266	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

The paper show clearly that the majority of learners are not able to understand the contents of the English texts. Ninety respondents (33.8%) went against that they can understand what they read in English, even eleven of the respondents (4.1%) strongly disagreed.

4.3. Relationship Between English Language as a Medium of Instruction and Learner's Academic Performance

The third objective established the relationship between English Language as a Medium of Instruction and Learner's Academic Performance in Secondary Day Schools of Ruhango District, Rwanda. In this regards a correlation and regression analysis were performed in order to evaluate either a positive or a negative correlation between dependent and independent variables. The establishment of a correlation analysis between English Language as a Medium of Instruction and Learner's Academic Performance in Secondary Day Schools has based on the improved learner's proficiency in the use of English language, improvement in the classroom work commitment, improved scores in English subject and Learner's interest in reading and writing in English language in the previous five years.

Table 4. 5 Coefficients of Between English Language as a Medium of Instruction and Learner's Academic Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	.047	.074		.641	.523
Learner's use of English as medium of instruction	.059	.053	.088	1.121	.263
Teacher's use of English as medium of instruction	.089	.043	.103	2.072	.001
Teacher's and learner's practice of English language outside the school compound	.514	.052	.515	9.820	.000
Learner's use of English as medium of instruction	.361	.039	.441	9.257	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Learner's academic performance

Source: Primary Data (2022)

Information demonstrated that English as a Medium of Instruction was associated with improve impact on Learner's academic performance. The regression analysis demonstrated was a positive significance correlation between English as a Medium of instruction and learner's academic performance owing to all determined p value were than 0.05 each. Coefficients gave regression model, $Y=B_0+B_1X_1+B_2X_2+B_3X_3+B_4X_4+E$. This become $.047+0.88X_1+.089X_2+.514X_3+.361X_4$, English as a medium of instruction. In another context, population plays a significant and role of English as a medium of instruction and their Learner's academic performance (Mouhamad, 2016). This study not only looked at learner's use of English as medium of instruction but how teacher use English as medium of instruction and how learners practice English language outside the school compound.

5. Discussion

Results to the first objective concur with the findings of Yule (2010) mentions that most of us are not exposed to a second language until much later and our ability to use a second language even after years of study rarely matches ability in first language. Sibomana (2014), observes that while the teaching of English language has been improved and several factors appear to increase Rwandan people's motivation to learn English, the context is not yet favourable to the attainment of communicative competence. Therefore, we can say that English language as one of the official languages in Rwanda is not difficult to learn and use for the learners in secondary day schools in Rwanda. It is just a matter of interest and motivation to them in the process of learning it.

These findings can be related to the ones of Tabaro (2015) who revealed that although English has been taught as a subject for more than twenty years and efforts were made to enhance its use, the proficiency in English language has been found wanting by many Rwandan people. English hardly finds its way in Rwandans daily communication. Shortly, the use of medium of instruction did not work successfully because Rwandan community is monolingual where Kinyarwanda dominates all other languages used in Rwanda.

These findings are closely related to what Nizeyimana et al. (2020) mention in their research. They say that in Rwanda, most of learners in public day schools are from poor families where there a shortage of the required school materials in their learning process. Such materials include the textbooks. In other term, the English language teaching materials such as textbooks are still few in Rwandan secondary day schools. The quantity of those teaching materials and the number of the learners who use them are incomparable. Besides, some teaching aids, especially the textbooks are old and they need to be replaced. If those teaching materials were provided in a good quantity, learners would improve on their academic performance.

Tabaro (2015) argues that the use of medium of instruction did not work successfully simply because Rwandan community is purely monolingual whereby Kinyarwanda is spoken across the country. In other words, learners fear to speak English language in public due to the lack of enough practice and exposure to the use of that language. Of course, the lack of practice and exposure affects the academic performance of the learners since they don't speak it frequently in order to discover and correct their mistakes.

Results on the level of Learners' performance in English Subject did not contradict the observation of Fareen (2020) mentions that a medium of instruction plays an essential role in knowledge and skills transfer to the learner. The teacher should talk or teach in consideration of the learner's level of comprehension and the learner should be able to understand what his/her teacher is saying while teaching. Fareen (2019) argues that if language is source to deliver the thoughts and ideas, communication is the process to engage the speaker and listener to employ the act of sending and receiving the message or any other information. Language becomes the soul and spirit of expression. Therefore, to build up necessary skills in active language learning is important for creating the cognitive ability of learners. Yule (2010) suggests that the second language should be taught systematically so that learners can gradually transfer skills from the familiar language to the unfamiliar one. When the learners are able to express themselves, teachers can easily diagnose what has been learned and what remains to be taught. As a solution, more effort is needed to help the learners to raise up their level of understanding the subject contents in English language especially in creating motivation to them and helping them to improve on the vocabulary and grammar.

Results on the relationship Between English Language as a Medium of Instruction and learner's Academic Performance demonstrated the existence of positive correlation between English as a Medium of Instruction and Learner's academic performance owing to the fact the determined the p value of .000 was < 0.05 which implies that English as a Medium of Instruction and Learner's academic performance is significant. Laxmi (2018) felt that the lack of English language proficiency of the teachers is the biggest challenge community schools are facing to implement English as medium of instruction. Most of the teachers in community schools have never studied in English and were not trained to teach in English. Relating this study to the case of Rwandan education, most of teachers are still struggling to teach in English because they find it as new language in Rwanda.

6. Conclusion

After analyzing the findings, the researcher concluded that there is a considerable improvement in the use of English in Rwandan society. Particularly, the research findings have shown that the learners' and teachers' proficiency in the use of English language as medium of instruction is still growing up gradually. The majority of learners and even their teachers are interested and committed to use English language in the academic activities. 59.8% of the learners expressed that they like studying in English while 74.1% of teachers agreed that English is an easy language for them. Although the results showed that there is a positive step in the use of English language, there are some challenges that hinder the use of English language to go at high speed. Those challenges were expressed by some respondents and included: Rwanda is a monolingual community; citizens are more comfortable when they use their mother tongue as a common language of communication. The teaching aids that are prepared in English language in secondary day schools here in Rwanda are still limited; they are not enough at all. Therefore, they fear to use that language in public places because of not being sure and confident of their pronunciation and vocabulary.

The Ministry of Education should organize some programs which can motivate the learners such as English reading, speaking, listening, writing and singing, competitions. It will also be helpful if some language centers are created in a good number in order to assist those who want to learn English language. Furthermore, some games prepared in English language could help the learners to improve their exposure to English language.

The learners' performance in English subject is yet to be improved. Therefore, the teachers concerned in this subject should make more effort to help their learners to increase the level of performance. With this regard, learners need qualified and competent

teachers in English language, enough and updated teaching aids prepared in English language as medium of instruction. In the findings the majority of teachers expressed that they need more training in the use of English language. They still have some difficulties to express themselves in that language although they use it as a medium of instruction.

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