Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Junior High School Students in Rwanda: A Case of Huye District

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges that the English teachers face while teaching junior high school students in Rwanda based on contextual factors that are believed to affect second language acquisition (SLA).

Based on the findings of the research resulting from the questionnaires, observations, and interviews, the researcher identified the challenges for both the teachers and the students in teaching and learning English at Huye junior high school. These challenges stem from teachers' educational backgrounds because most current teachers acquired their education in the French language as a medium of instruction as a second language which results in code-switching while teaching English. Those challenges include also a lack of student enthusiasm in learning English, a lack of basic knowledge of English classes, and the usage of the mother tongue when learning English. It is also found that both the teachers and students code-switch easily to their mother tongue as English lessons are taking place. Furthermore, educational facilities and teachers who are unfamiliar with technology provide formidable hurdles, thus teachers should adopt the use of effective teaching tactics to help students comprehend. Despite these challenges, teachers must be more innovative in the teaching-learning process in order to ensure that students learn effectively.

Keywords: TESL, Teachers' challenges, Teacher qualification，Junior High School Students in Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

Learning English is one of the most important things a person can do nowadays. (Oder and Eisenschmidt, 2018) emphasize the value of learning English as a tool for gaining new knowledge and possibilities in a global setting. In their research (Fiona Compland, 2014) discussed reasons for this trend that include economic globalization as it has resulted in the widespread use of English and many governments believe it is crucial to have an English-speaking environment for the sake of competence. As a result, non-native English-speaking countries strive to establish an English environment in every school as the first step in teaching English to children at a young age. However, English instructor faces numerous problems when instructing students in both English and teaching skills Faez & Valeo (2012). When it comes to the English language teaching in Rwanda, things become even more pathetic because Rwanda's educational system has always been dominated by French until 2008, when the government decided to phase out French as a language of instruction and embark on English Sibomana (2010). This basically means that competent English teachers are still very scarce which has a negative effect on the student's level of English. The Rwandan education philosophy, on the other hand, is to ensure that a young teacher for a student who is preparing to become an excellent primary school teacher achieves his or her full potential in terms of relevant knowledge, skills, and appropriate attitudes and values that prepare a young student teacher to be well integrated into society and to take advantage of employment opportunities through their teaching career REB (2020).

According to Mohammed (2018) teachers should apply the appropriate approaches and strategies if they want their students to be able to use the language. As a result, teachers must choose effective teaching methodologies for foreign language learners in order for students' future output to be of higher quality. Because there are many aspects to consider when teaching English to students at junior high school in Rwandan schools in order to create an effective teaching-learning process.

This article explores the challenges that English teachers face while teaching junior high school students in Rwanda based on contextual factors that are believed to affect second language acquisition (SLA). It investigates how these factors hinder the acquisition of English in the context of Rwanda.

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So, the researcher entitles the research as "Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Junior High School Students in Rwanda: A Case of Huye District." Hopefully, both teachers and students will be able to benefit from this research in the future, since it will help to improve the teaching-learning process.

Review of Literature

The term "challenge" comes from the word "challenge," which means "anything that requires a considerable deal of mental or physical effort to complete successfully and hence puts a person's ability to the test (Cambridge Dictionary, 1995). It is clear that challenges denote anything or a problem that is difficult to solve and necessitates greater work and competence. Thus, in this study, challenges refer to the obstacles or problems that teachers face when teaching English to EFL students.

For something to be successfully done, it requires effort both mentally and physically, and it does not negatively affect the teaching and learning process. To develop an effective learning environment, numerous factors must be considered during the teaching and learning process Amidon, Edmund J. (1967). Something like this necessitates a wide range of tactics and strategies that are tailored to the curriculum and the needs of the students. Furthermore, a skilled teacher must be capable of developing lesson plans. In teaching English, the teacher may run across a number of challenges that affect the teaching and learning process (Kachru, Y. ,2005).

According to Songbatumis (2017), teachers may confront the challenges of school infrastructure and students. Some of those challenges include teaching methods. Teachers will struggle in developing teaching methods that are effective for them because they may only receive basic training in supporting theory and practical applications (Bulter, 2005; Littlewood, 2007). It's difficult to use inappropriate teaching methods and techniques because teachers are not only concerned with how they teach four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Teachers must, however, consider ways to boost and motivate students in learning English.

According to Ansari (2012), teacher efficiency and competency are critical in learning EFL. When teaching, teachers do things like start the lesson without asking about the students' moods, explain the entire lesson, and assign tasks to students. The teacher should stay away from this situation. As a result, method knowledge is critical for instructors, as it serves as their foundation in the classroom (Ukessay, 2018). According to Pande (2013), teachers can develop an effective teaching-learning process by matching the teaching technique and learning.Moreover, while

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teaching English, teachers are challenged by code-switching. In line with the school context, Milroy and Musyken (1995) define code-switching in education as the alternating use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same classroom. The cause of unknowingly incorrect English performance, according to Fatiloro (2015), is when the student and teacher converse fluently in their native tongue. Grammatical errors, mispronunciation, semantic, and morphological issues can all cause mother tongue interference (Fatiloro, 2015). (Malana, 2018) agrees, stating that first language interference is a crucial factor affecting English language ability and competence.

Not only code-switching can challenge English teachers but also students 'motivation. If a student's motivation is strong, he or she can obtain good results in class (Yulia, 2013). Aftermath, most students consider the English language to be the most challenging subject. Students are solely concerned with passing the course and avoiding remedial work. According to Abrar's journal (2016), when teaching-learning English, some students opted to engage in other activities such as playing and conversing with friends. When students have no desire or are hesitant to get involved in learning the language fluently, this indicates a lack of drive (Abrar, 2016).

On the other hand facilities in teaching and learning are reflected differently. In this case, facilities refer to the technologies that are used to facilitate the English teaching-learning process (Songbatumis, 2017). The success of the English teaching-learning process will be influenced by the facilities. According to Songbatumis (2017), the teaching of English will not fulfill its objectives if the tools used in the classroom are inadequate. When teachers want to educate about music or movies, they will need a projector to show the visuals and a speaker to provide the audio. How can the teacher tell the students about it if the projector and speaker are not available? (Roinah, 2019) also suggested that without any learning facilities in the school, the teaching-learning process cannot operate optimally and maximally.

Methods

According to Moleong (2000), qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or verbal words from people and observed behavior. The study's target demographic is public English teachers in secondary schools at the junior high school level. Thanks to the qualitative method, some of these teachers were interviewed in person about the English teaching issues they experience in the classroom while other teachers filled in the questionnaire for empirical evidence.

According to Easwaramoorthy and Zarinpoush (2006), "an interview is a conversation for gathering information." The researcher adopted a descriptive qualitative design in this study because it focuses on the issues that English teachers confront.

In this study, the researcher gathered data from participants using interviews and questionnaires (regarding the obstacles of teaching English), which were supplemented by observation to prevent subjective viewpoints. All of the information on the participants in teaching English courses that was studied in this study came from primary data. Interviews and observation provided primary data sources in the form of written or spoken words, as well as the behavior of the subjects (informants) related to the challenges in teaching English. The primary data sources for this study were five English teachers who teach seventh, eighth, and ninth-grade students at Huye District Junior High Schools.

This research applied three instruments: Questionnaires, Observation, and interviews. The research identified the teachers and students.

According to Polit et al. (2001:223), research methodology refers to the approaches to be used to plan a study as well as gather and analyze data during the research investigation, and it consists of a set of orderly, disciplined procedures for acquiring information.

According to M. Rueda (2016), a good data collection procedure is crucial to ensure that the reliability estimate is trustworthy.

The researcher used the following approaches to collect information:

The researcher collected the data through the questionnaires. A questionnaire is a document that contains questions and other types of items that are used to collect data for analysis (Babbie, 1990). In research, using a questionnaire or a set of questions is a common practice. The research questions are carefully crafted to elicit responses that are relevant to the variables being studied.

Within this research, questionnaires were shared to English teachers of junior high school in the Huye district as well as to the students and provided responses. The purpose of this technique is to know the teachers' challenges in teaching English to junior high school students.

During the interview, the researcher gathered data. The researcher performed a face-to-face interview with all English teachers from five schools in Huye District who had experience teaching English to junior high school students. In total, 40 English teachers and students from various classes were interviewed by the researcher. Each participant's interview lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. The goal of this strategy is to learn about the challenges that teachers have when teaching junior English to junior high school students as well as students' challenges while learning the English language.

The observation was simply utilized to supplement the participants' interviews regarding the issues they face as teachers. The researcher examined the situation in the classroom to see what was going on while the teacher was teaching. In this study, the researcher used non-participant observation. The term "non-participant observation" refers to an observation in which the researcher is merely an observer and not a participant in the process (Sugiyono, 2013). The researcher made note of the circumstance and method of the English teacher when teaching English to junior high school pupils as a result of the observation.

As a result, five classroom observations were conducted in one class at each of the participating schools in this study. Classroom observations were used to examine both student and teacher participation. The major goal was to learn about the issues they encounter, the methodologies they adopt, and the languages they utilize. The information acquired in the classroom was supplemented by observations in the classroom.

Finding and Discussion

Throughout the teaching-learning process, data was collected from several English teachers and students. As a result, the study discovered the challenges experienced by English teachers to junior high school students.

Findings are from five secondary schools within Huye district. In this chapter, all the data collected are going to be presented, discussed, and systematically analyzed. To obtain the data regarding teachers' challenges in teaching English to junior high school students, the researcher conducted observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

Findings

The findings of this study are based on observations, interviews, and questionnaires done by the researcher at Huye Junior High School. As a result, the researcher discovered the following challenges faced by English teachers as well as students while teaching-learning English to junior high school students.

Facilities in the Teaching-Learning process

The first question in the questionnaire was about the teaching and learning equipment and facilities in schools. Respondents provided answers to the following question:

"*Does your school consist of sufficient teaching-learning equipment and provide enough facilities? Why?*"

The results from the teachers showed that there is a scarcity of teaching and learning types of equipment. The teaching-learning process in the classroom is influenced by the classroom facilities. If the teacher has good facilities, he or she may be able to deliver an excellent lecture. According to the researcher's observation, when teaching listening, for example, the teacher requires a speaker and a laptop to play the audio. During the teaching-learning process within this research, the teachers present the subject relying only on textbooks and chalkboards. There are no other media that the teacher used during the teaching-learning process. The teacher did not use electronic media such as a speaker or projector in the class.

Furthermore, the students also argue about facilities in their schools. The researcher asked if the teacher ever used the media, and student X responded:

"*The teacher did not use electronic devices or media while learning English*".

On the other hand, teacher A of junior high school students stated the challenges of insufficient English books in the classroom as well as technological tools.

Lack of students' prerequisite knowledge of the English language

The researcher asked a question in the questionnaire about the teaching and learning English challenges at junior high school. Teachers provided answers to the following question:

"What challenges do you encounter while teaching English to junior high school students?"

Teacher B said: "*Challenges are many and I may say that learners do not have prerequisite knowledge in the English language.*"

Since English is a foreign language in Rwanda, students hardly speak it in their daily life and they start studying in English when they reach year three of elementary school. Thus the teacher mostly used Kinyarwanda when Teaching English in the class.

Code-Switching in the classroom

As mentioned, English is still a foreign language in Rwanda. Almost every Rwandan use their mother tongue in daily life when talking to others even in the teaching-learning process.

The classroom observations confirmed that students like to use a mixture of English and Kinyarwanda while responding to the teacher's instructions. For example, in one class a teacher asked learners to remind them about what they studied previously. Some of them repeated the following sentence, "Ubushize twize adjectives!" [We previously studied adjectives!].

In a different class, a teacher asked learners to take their textbooks, go to a certain page and do exercises in pairs. Some students shouted and asked the teacher, "Turahera hehe teacher?" [Where are we supposed to start, teacher?]. The next day, the teacher entered the class and asked students to take pieces of paper. Students thought that they were going to pass improvised test and some of them responded by saying, "Ntabwo turi muri primaire teacher" [We are not in primary, teacher]. This last example involves the use of three languages: Kinyarwanda, French ('primaire'), and English. It was also observed that when teachers are teaching, most learners keep interacting with themselves in Kinyarwanda.

Furthermore, it was noted that teachers rely on the use of code-switching, even when giving directions about what is going to take place in the class. In one class, when the time to perform a task arrived, the teacher addressed the students in Kinyarwanda and said, "ndabasaba gutuza" [please stop shouting].

Due to Rwandan teachers' use of code-switching, it was observed that students tend to ask all their questions in Kinyarwanda instead of making an effort to express the meaning in English. Hence, taking into account that teachers are generally taken by learners as their models, one might suggest that such a practice by teachers may hinder learners from developing fluency in the target language, as they may regard code-switching as the normal way to learn English.

Students' interest and motivation in learning English

Making the students feel enthusiastic during the teaching-learning process is not easy. Based on the result of observation, the researcher found that the students were not enthusiastic about the lesson. Some students were playful in the class while the teacher was explaining the lesson. Therefore, some students were quiet in their seats during the class of English lesson.

Furthermore, thanks to questionnaires, teachers provided the answer to the question about students' interest in English lessons: "Students are not totally interested in English lessons

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because of lack of didactic materials".

On the other hand, one of the students responded to the question about their interest in the English lesson: "No, because English is not my mother tongue and I cannot speak it as I cannot find one to practice with. You cannot know English unless you have friends with skills in the English language.

In addition, the researcher interviewed the students, and student X said that he is not interested in English due to the methods that teachers use to teach English that do not motivate students.

Based on the above explanation, students believe that English is a tough subject because it is a foreign language; hence they are less interested in learning it. While learning English, you should be interested in it. Thus, these factors were classified by the researchers as a lack of students' motivation in learning English.

Unfamiliar with information and technology

The teacher should be able to operate electronic tools to support the teaching-learning process. However, in this era, the teacher should be able to operate the electronic tools to build students' interest in learning the language. At this point, the researcher asked about the teachers' ability in teaching English on electronic devices.

Here is the interview question: "*Are you familiar with electronic devices for teaching?*" According to the interview, the teacher can only use a few electronic devices and perform basic tasks such as recording and creating PowerPoint lesson slides or videos. The teacher is unable to create animation on their own. Hence, the teacher should be able to create their own teaching-learning environment that motivates learners and lead them to effective communication in English.

Limited time

It takes longer to familiarize students with the language, especially when English is a second language. The researcher went to an English class in person to observe the teaching-learning process. As a result, each session of the instruction lasted one hour. In addition, the researcher disputed English teaching time in an interview with teachers.

Respondents provided answers to the following interview question: "*Is the time for teaching English lessons enough for you?" Why?*

Little time did neither allow the teacher to assess students nor to practice English in the class. Therefore, the teacher did not incorporate any other creative way of teaching English such as using some electronic devices to help them listen to the audio. She only managed a little time using textbooks. Teaching-learning process was not smooth enough.

Discussions

This study was undertaken in Huye Junior High Schools during the academic year 2021/2022. Teachers and students are both present. Thus, in junior high school, there are fifteen teachers (10 men, 5 women) and twenty-five students (10 boys, 15 girls). The goal of this study was to discover what challenges teachers have when teaching junior high school students English. In this section, the researcher attempts to elucidate the findings of this study by comparing them to related theories and previous research on teachers' challenges in teaching English to junior high school students. The following are some of the research's discussions:

In the academic year 2021/ 2022, the researcher analyzed the challenges in teaching English to Huye district junior high school learners. According to Deocampo (2020), a teacher should first understand the problems and obstacles that students face when learning English so that he/she can effectively teach with patience and hard work using the appropriate method for the students.

In his research, Abrar (2016) found that English foreign language (EFL) teachers confront numerous challenges when teaching English. There are three key issues in English teaching: a lack of student enthusiasm, limited time, resources, and materials, and overcrowding in English classes. There are some distinctions between the researcher and prior researchers who looked at the same case. However, the data gathered from the researcher's observations, questionnaires, and interviews at Huye District Junior High Schools revealed several unique obstacles that English teachers experience when teaching English to junior high school students.

Facilities in the Teaching-Learning process

Classroom facilities have an impact on the teaching-learning process. According to Songbatumis (2017), the teaching of English will not achieve its objectives if the teaching instruments are inadequate. Huye junior high schools, on the other hand, lack projectors and have a limited number of learning resources. No teacher was observed using those devices in these schools, according to the observation. During the teaching-learning process, they all used

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textbooks. Students A and B confirmed that during the teaching-learning process, their teachers never used a projector or speaker to practice listening skills. One of the variables in learning English that might help people avoid problems throughout the learning process is the availability of suitable facilities and infrastructure (Roinah, 2019). It is the obligation of the school to meet the teaching needs in order to create an effective teaching-learning environment.

Lack of students' prerequisite knowledge of the English language

One of the reasons why foreign language students struggle to understand English is because they lack English background knowledge (Souriyavongsa,2013). Teacher A and teacher B claimed in the interview that kids did not learn English properly in elementary school, making it difficult for the teacher to explain lectures in junior high school. The teacher must explain the material from beginning to end, teaching them English language prerequisites. Teachers must re-explain content that learners should have learned in elementary school, which teachers claim is a waste of their time. That issue is comparable to that of Susiyanti (2019), who discovered that students did not receive basic English lessons, causing the teaching-learning process to become disorganized.

English lessons should begin at the primary level of education, such as kindergarten and elementary schools, to ensure that kids are familiar with the English language.

Code-Switching in the classroom

Speakers engage in code-switching for a variety of reasons, according to Husin (2011), which might be either discourse- or participant-related. (Husin, 2011) found that code-switching performs a variety of roles, including signaling topic shift, providing and clarifying explanations, enacting social interactions, and mitigating signals, in her research of content-based lectures. According to Husin (2011), the influence of science and technology in education is a major role in code-switching behavior in the classroom. According to (Tabaro, 2013), code-switching can be used to fill a conceptual gap or for a variety of communicative goals. In general, code-switching can be thought of as a conversational tactic in which a speaker alters a linguistic code in order to establish, maintain, or demolish group borders, and it's also utilized to form or transform interpersonal relationships.

Talking about challenges English teachers meet at junior high school, teachers said that they must mix both Kinyarwanda and English languages while learning English because students at junior high school have very low basic skills in the English language. Based on the observation

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before, the teacher used the mother tongue which is Kinyarwanda more than English during the class. At the same time, when the teacher asked the students to make the sentence, the students missed some English vocabulary to use. Those things can be indicated that code-switching is applied while teaching English in Rwanda.

Grammatical errors, incorrect pronunciation, and semantic or morphological issues are all examples of mother tongue interference problems (Fatiloro,2015). These findings are similar to (Malana's,2018) study of mother tongue interference in Cultural Groups' attitudes toward the English language, in which the researcher discovered that students performed poorly on an oral test, particularly in terms of intonation and pronunciation.

Students' interest and motivation in learning English

If a student's motivation is strong, he or she can accomplish good results in school (Yulia, 2013). When students do not follow the activity during the learning process, they may demonstrate that they are not engaged in the lesson by engaging in other activities in the classroom instead of listening to their teacher. It is also said (Abrar, 2016) that learners' lack of motivation is shown when they have no desire or are hesitant to become involved in learning the language comfortably. When pupils simply learn English in class, they can get bored and sluggish. As a result, this can be a difficulty, and teachers must be capable of managing them in the classroom. To pique students' interest in studying English, English teachers should present the lesson in a creative way. When teachers are unable to capture students' attention and make a positive effect on learning, learners are less likely to be interested in following the English lesson in class.

Unfamiliar with information and technology

To assist in the teaching-learning process, the teacher should be able to operate electronic tools. According to Simin Ghavifekr (2015), a teacher's educational and personal abilities should be prioritized. Using technology to aid the teaching-learning process is one of the pedagogical abilities. In order to avoid a boring learning process, the teacher should be able to create their own learning material. The challenges in teaching English to junior high school students in Huye as discussed above are primarily due to the students and the classroom circumstances, such as facilities and hours.

However, the teachers are also supposed to always equip themselves with the changes in curriculum, knowledge, and technology to make them able to create an interesting and effective

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teaching-learning process. Hence, the teacher should be more creative in the teaching-learning process.

Limited time

For both teachers and students in junior high school, limited time for English classes is a significant barrier. Teaching English, according to Lynch (2008), requires extra time in order to get pupils to speak the language, especially if English is not their first language.

Teaching English as a foreign language requires more than two hours each week. Teacher A and teacher B agreed that the instruction hour is too short based on their interviews and observations. The teacher had limited opportunity to assess students or practice English in class while performing this research. As a result, the teacher did not use any additional innovative teaching methods, such as using electronic gadgets to assist students in listening to the audio. She only managed a little time using textbooks. Teaching-learning process was not smooth enough and was a big challenge for them.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that students and teachers reflected on the challenges of not getting facilities that can influence the English teaching-learning process in the classroom. Based on the results of observation the researcher found that students are not interested and motivated in learning the English language. Moreover, due to the fact that English is not taught in the majority of state primary schools, students performed poorly in English communication in class. The researcher also found that English is the foreign language in Rwanda which makes teachers mix the Kinyarwanda language with the English language in the English class. Thanks to the interview with teachers and students, English lesson has also a few hours to be taught in class and it is an optional lesson in some classes. Therefore, some teachers are not able to operate the electronic tools to build students' interest in learning the language.

According to Thomas (2002) schools should strive to implement programs that are closely linked with what is known about what makes a school effective. I suggest several additional features be added to the Rwandan education board list including a fully qualified teacher in every classroom. In the case of language education, this means that teachers should be certified, skilled, and knowledgeable in the requisite content areas, and fully proficient in the English language, teachers should improve their skills in teaching English as well as adapt their strategy to this condition in order to make learning fun and effective, teachers must choose effective teaching

methodologies for foreign language learners for students' future output to be of higher quality, the ministry of education should work with publishers of learning materials to develop more creative materials and avail them to teachers and students.

To make children more competent in English communication, there should be a variety of creative co and extracurricular, increase the number of funds available, not only for English language education but also for research and in-service training related to the English language.

The English language method of teaching should be the updated technique for teaching students exposing them to all aspects of the language. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and all stakeholders in education through its support should install smarts classrooms and provide all assisting materials to schools and use paraprofessionals and educational assistants to enhance the teacher's ability to provide appropriate instruction to students.

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