CHALLENGES OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS IN RWANDA

Hategekimana Aloys[i],
Bihira Innocent,
Ngendahayo Gaspard,
Hagumimana Phocas
The Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences,
Rwanda

Abstract:

English language is a compulsory subject at all levels of education in Rwanda. This paper aims to discover the challenges of learning English as a second language in secondary schools. It sought to investigate students' perceptions of their fluency in the English language, to find out students' perceived ability to talk about lessons in English, to investigate students' perceived feelings when they are learning English, to analyze students' perceived anxiety when they are learning English, and to analyze students' perceived embarrassment when they produce ungrammatical English in class. In this study, 73 learners were selected and quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire. The findings show that learners have low English proficiency. They revealed that they do not participate in English lessons as they are afraid to make mistakes, have anxiety during instruction, and fear embarrassment for committing grammatical errors, which are the main challenges of learning ESL in Rwanda. It was recommended that teachers should be trained to handle learners in English class by avoiding correcting learners' mistakes whenever they commit them because it undermines their confidence to participate in the teaching and learning process. They have to create a classroom environment where every learner can use the ESL successfully.

Keywords: ESL, learning, second language, English as a subject, English learning, challenges

1. Introduction

English is an official language in Rwanda, which is the case for many African post-colonial countries. It is important to note that Rwanda is a multilingual country with its

---

[i]Correspondence: email hategekaa85@gmail.com

language policy revolving around three languages: Kinyarwanda, the indigenous language of Rwandans, French and English: 90% of the population speaks Kinyarwanda, 8% speaks French, and 2% English (MacGeal, 2010). In 2017, the Rwandan parliament adopted a new law to make Kiswahili, spoken by 20% of Rwandans, an official language of the country, which also acts as a lingua franca of East Africa. Although English has been taught as a subject since independence (Niyibizi, 2010), and many efforts were made to enhance its acquisition and use in Rwanda. Research has shown that the proficiency in English by many educated people in Rwanda has been found wanting (Kagwesage, 2012). Sibomana (2010 in Rutabana, 2023) noted that the use of English in daily communication in Rwanda is very limited, and the proficiency in English by many of those who claim the ability to use it has been questioned.

In his research, Tabaro (2013) observed that since Kinyarwanda adequately meets the needs of the people in their everyday lives, Rwandans may not see the need to learn another language, even one that is being used worldwide. This constitutes a barrier to teachers' and students' use of English in classrooms throughout the lesson (Pearson, 2014). In Rwanda's education, information is primarily available in English. Due to this, much importance is attributed to teaching English at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. French is taught as a subject from upper primary, secondary and tertiary levels depending on school and/or departmental choice, while Kiswahili is taught as a subject from the secondary level in public and government-aided schools as the lingua franca of East Africa. In such a complex sociolinguistic situation, learners face different challenges in modifying input to optimize uptake in English as a second language (Tabaro, 2013).

A survey conducted by the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA) illustrated that the mean performance of Senior Three (S3) students in English stood at 55.25%. The biggest challenge has been to reach the set benchmark because only 42.78% of the participants (16.38% female and 26.40% male) achieved it. Respondents attributed this failure to insufficient teaching and learning resources as well as the low capacity of English teachers. It was stated that even though in-service teachers receive capacity building in English Language Proficiency; the training period is too short to give teachers the proficiency needed for instruction (NESA, 2022). Sibomana (2010) posits that when it comes to English language teaching in Rwanda, things become even more problematic as Rwanda's educational system has always been dominated by French from colonial times until 2008 when the government decided to phase out French as a language of instruction and embark on English.

2. Related Literature

2.1. The Sociolinguistic Context of Rwanda

Before the colonial period, Rwanda was a monolingual country with Kinyarwanda as the sole medium of communication (Kabanza, 2003). During colonization, Kinyarwanda was used throughout primary schools, especially in the lower primary, while French was mainly taught in the upper primary to train a few interpreters who facilitated

communication between the colonial masters and the local population. French was the only official language during Belgium's colonial period (Mutwarasibo, 2003; Niyibizi, 2010). English was introduced in the 1960s, after Rwandan independence, but it was taught only as a subject. It was given a lower status and was not taught at the primary school level (MINEDUC, 1996). English has been taught as a school subject in Rwanda primary schools since 1996 and has been used as a medium of instruction for about 20 years in some Anglophone schools. Many efforts have been made to enhance its acquisition and use as the country adopted a multilingual policy in schools. Kiswahili was adopted as an official language in Rwanda in 2017 and is taught as a subject from the ordinary level to the university level.

The Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census (RPHC5, 2023) shows that 79% of the resident population of Rwanda aged 15 and above are literate in any language. Overall, 77% are literate in at least one of the four official languages of the country: Kinyarwanda, English, French, and Swahili. Kinyarwanda is the most widespread language of literacy as 54% of Rwandan resident population aged 15 years and above are literate in Kinyarwanda only, 14% in Kinyarwanda and English, 2% in Kinyarwanda and French and 4% in Kinyarwanda, English and French. Language literacy levels vary a lot across provinces. The City of Kigali has the lowest language illiteracy rate (6.5%), which is more than three times lower than in other provinces (ranging between 22.4 and 24.9%). The pattern in the language literacy observed at the national level is the same as the one at the provincial level, with the exception of the City of Kigali, where the language literacy rate in the four official languages (Kinyarwanda, English, French and Swahili) is relatively higher compared to other provinces.

From 1996 to 2008, Kinyarwanda was used as a medium of instruction in primary schools, English as a medium of instruction in Anglophone secondary schools, and French as a medium of instruction in francophone secondary schools to university. During this period, French was taught as a subject and medium of instruction at the secondary and university levels. However, research on Rwandan teachers' proficiency in English and many educated people has been found wanting (Sibomana, 2010; Niyibizi, 2010). Kinyarwanda is the one and only mother tongue for more than 99% of the population, while all other languages (English, French and Kiswahili) are virtually acquired as second/foreign languages by Rwandans through formal education (Kagwesage, 2012; Pearson; 2014; Rutabana, 2023). Pearson (2014) illustrated that all teachers in the schools investigated were unable to use English as a medium of instruction or as a subject. When it comes to the English language, 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. This basically means that competent English teachers are still very scarce which has a negative effect on the students' level of English. It is worth noting that this problem of lack of qualified teachers can be viewed as the mother problem that students are facing while learning English (Uwambayinema, 2013; Pearson, 2014; Niyibizi, 2010; Sibomana, 2014).

2.2. Reasons for Learning the English Language in Rwanda

As the world continues to become ever more interconnected, the spread and importance of English on every continent becomes increasingly more pronounced. The link between globalization and English is tangible (Plonski, 2013). The power of the English language is seen in the global political, economic and educational spheres. Politically, English is the official or working language of most international political gatherings worldwide, and 85% of international organizations use English as the language of official communications (Crystal, 2003). Furthermore, as developing countries seek to compete in the global marketplace, English is the language in which most negotiation and marketing schemes must occur. English is also the primary language of academia, as most scientific research is done and written in English (Negash, 2011).

Today, learning English in Rwanda is very important for the youth as it offers better opportunities for communication and employment. The rise of English in Rwanda is an asset rather than a threat to Kinyarwanda because it connects Rwanda to the external world (Kayigema & Mutasa, 2017). Considering the status of English in world affairs, there is no doubt that the linguistic realities of development represented through the spread of English and the growing wealth of knowledge and intellectual capital through formal education has positive outcomes for Rwanda as it attempts to become globally competitive (Assan & Walker, 2018). The reason for Rwanda to teach English as a second language is in line with its development agenda, which seeks to connect the country and its people to the global arena. Indeed, no country has ever achieved economic success without connecting to the citizens of other countries.

In Africa, retaining the colonial language is a conscious decision and may be assumed to result from deliberate language policy and language planning. Among the factors which support the use of English as an official language and a medium of instruction are the lack of a single indigenous language that is widely accepted by the respective populations where English is neutral vis-à-vis mutually competing native languages and hence helps to promote national unity;the usefulness of English in science and technology as opposed to the underdeveloped vocabularies of the vernaculars;the availability of school books in English; the status and use of English for international communication, trade and diplomacy (Gramley, 2014). President Paul Kagame, relating English with the power of competitiveness in social and economic development, stated that: "*The kind of education we want for our children is that which is in line with the vision in place for the development of our country; we have to prioritize the language that will make them compete when they get on the labor market after completing school*" (Rwanda News Authority, 2010 in Assan & Walker, 2018).

For any country to achieve its development objectives, the language used in its education systems should be chosen and prepared to assume its role. Mesthrie *et al.* (2000) asserted that language ideology implies assumptions about what type of linguistic standard is advantageous for a nation, community and individual. Language ideology, in this case, is indeed necessary for development and meeting global demands for labor and socio-economic integration. Individuals may become implicit in such relations due

to feelings of community cohesion and forms of solidarity but may become empowered if the change offers them wider opportunities beyond what is presently available to their advancement (Bourdieu, 1986 in Assan & Walker, 2018). Kayigema & Mutasa (2017) noted that most people in Rwanda have expressed their enthusiasm in welcoming English as an asset to the existing benefits of French and Kinyarwanda. They do not consider English as a threat at all. On the contrary, Rwandans would like their country to develop into a bilingual system of English, French, and Kiswahili, as well as their lingua franca, Kinyarwanda.

3. Challenges of Learning English as a Second Language

Communicating effectively in English is essential for Rwandan students who wish to be integrated into the world community. English learning requires various skills, practices, and abilities to achieve fluency. In this case, challenges could be based on several areas or a combination of reasons for the lack of necessary and expected progress (Assan &Walker, 2018). Kayigema & Mutasa (2017) observed that English is taught and spoken in the classrooms only; however, outside the classroom, for example, at home, parents and children use the vernacular language, Kinyarwanda, which makes it hard to practice English.

3.1. Limited Vocabulary

Mofareh (2015) noted that vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication. Emphasizing the importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000) asserts that lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and acquiring a second language. Researchers (Nation, 2011; Marion, 2008) have observed that vocabulary acquisition is essential for successful second language use and plays a vital role in forming complete spoken and written text. Walters (1972 p.97) stated that *"there is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one wishes to say because without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed."*

Research done by Rutabana (2023) in Huye District in Rwanda showed that since English is a foreign language in Rwanda, students hardly speak it in their daily life, and they start studying English when they reach year three of elementary school. Thus, the teachers mostly use Kinyarwanda to teach English in the class by code-switching. In the same vein, Lim (2020) asserts that students cannot think due to the lack of vocabulary as their language proficiency is low, and Nisa *et al.* (2017) claimed that students who have insufficient proficiency in word banks find it challenging to learn a language. Tabaro (2013) also observed that due to Rwandan teachers' use of code-switching, 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 learners generally take teachers 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.

3.2. Lack of Motivation

Cook (2000 in Tengku and Sepideh, 2021) observed that language acquisition is not the same in learners and highlighted the three main factors which concern and influence second language learning. These three factors are age, personality and motivation. He further claims that motivation is the most significant factor in second language learning. Lightbrown and Spada (2001) identified motivation in second language learning as a complex phenomenon that can be defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs and attitudes towards the second language community. They believe that when learners think that they need to speak a second language to be in touch with others or accomplish and achieve specialized dedicated desires and goals, they will be stimulated and inspired to obtain expertise and skill in it. This is in line with Ellis (1994), who considers motivation as an attempt by learners to learn a second language because of their need or desire to learn it. Pandey (2005) suggests that motivation determines attitudes towards learning while, on the other hand, the attitudes that one has towards the target language influence the extent to which they are motivated to learn the language. Du (2006 pp.1) noted, "*motivation is very important if not the most important factor in language learning.*" In Rwanda, Tabaro (2013) observed that since Kinyarwanda adequately meets the needs of the people in their everyday lives, Rwandans may not see the need to learn another language, even one that is being used worldwide. This constitutes a barrier to using English as a second language in Rwandan schools (Pearson, 2014).

Rutabana (2023) posits that students believe that English is a tricky 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, the researchers classified these factors as a lack of students' motivation to learn English. Research (Ellis, 1994; Haritz, 2006) has shown that 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 students learn English in class, they can get bored and tired. As a result, this can be difficult, and teachers must be capable of managing them in the classroom. To pique students' interest in studying English, English teachers should creatively present the lesson (Lemana, 2023). When teachers are unable to capture students' attention and have a positive effect on learning, learners are less likely to be interested in following the English lesson in class.

3.3. Underdeveloped Receptive and Productive Skills in ESL

The main purpose of teaching English is to enable students to gain communicative abilities. The language skills that a student should develop for effective communication

include using English as a second language, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The more the learners develop these skills, the more quickly and efficiently they learn English (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2017). English teachers are familiar with receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (speaking and writing). However, they have not realized that integrating receptive and productive skills into an English lesson is essential for the students to achieve lesson aims (Harits, 2006). He posits that when learning a new language, learners often begin with a receptive understanding of the new items and then move on to productive use. In Rwanda, the non-development of receptive and productive skills can also be exacerbated because most Rwandan teachers do not even have intermediate English proficiency levels. The survey found that 85% of primary and 66% of secondary teachers had only beginner, elementary, or pre-intermediate levels of English proficiency. This means that in secondary schools, which are the focus of this study, 34% of the teachers have little or no grasp of English and are expected to teach all their classes in that language. The in-service training in English that the government envisages cannot help these teachers because they do not have a basic knowledge of the language upon which the training builds (British Council, 2009 in Uwambayinema, 2013).

3.4. Affective Filters

Du (2006) observed that affective factors in language learning are like filters which infiltrate the amount of input in learners' brains. Students with high affective filters will lower their intake, whereas students with low affective filters will allow more input into their language acquisition device. Krashen (1985) posits that a raised affective filter can block input from reaching language acquisition devices. A lowered affective filter allows the input to strike deeper and be acquired, and it is responsible for individual variation in second language acquisition. Lemana *et al.* (2023) noted that self-motivation is the inner power that allows learners to love to speak English, and regardless of motivation, a strong desire to succeed and excel in oral communication will increase study interest. Stark (2019) has shown that students with a strong desire to succeed are likelier to keep learning and get better grades than those with a weaker desire. Furthermore, Krashen (1985 in Lemana, 2023) noted that self-confidence or self-esteem is a crucial feeling that allows one to achieve what he has set for himself. According, self-confidence inspires positive learning and thus motivates students to learn the target language, enjoy the process, experience actual dialogue, speak whole phrases, and speak through attempts. Along the same line, anxiety is a distinct complex self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behavior related to classroom language learning that arises from the singularity of the language learning process (Horwitz *et al.* (1986). Anxiety has been deemed a significant obstacle for language learners, which is not surprising given the enormous attention that is paid to the acquisition of second languages.

3.5. Environment Which Does Not Favor English Learning

The academic success of language learners is not only determined by their level of intelligence but is also associated with the learning environment provided to them (Alfan

et al. (2019). Asif (2018) found out that most students like to communicate in English and be part of an English-only environment; however, she found some key factors that prevented them from speaking English in the classroom, such as personal, linguistic and social. There has also been a great concern over the lack of parental support in English Language education in rural areas. Parents' educational background is believed to impact their children's English Language education in rural schools. Many rural parents are not educated and are not acquainted with the importance of learning English (Sharmin, 2019). Consequently, they are less supportive of English language education. Low socioeconomic status among rural families has brought about poverty and financial difficulties, exacerbating the issue of English language education among rural students. Parents are found to be financially burdened to provide their children with learning resources and educational materials, which hinders their learning of English (Masturi *et al.*, 2022).

The Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census (RPHC5, 2023) highlight that more than half of the population have a primary education level (54%); 15% have secondary, while 3% have reached university education. Educational attendance levels vary: urban residents have a higher level of education than rural residents; 18% of people in urban areas never attended school compared to 24% in rural areas of Rwanda. This exacerbates the problem as most of the population lives in rural areas. Therefore, due to poor economic conditions in many rural families, many parents lack time and motivation to supervise their children's learning due to prolonged working hours (Khulel, 2021). Other than that, the lack of parent-teacher communication has instigated parents to be unaware of their children's performance and attitude in school.

4. Materials and Methods

This research adopted a descriptive design in which quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire. This study's target population was the public secondary school learners of three selected secondary schools in Nyamasheke District, Rwanda. The size of the population or the sample universe was 328 students of Senior Three Level (S3). These levels were chosen in line with Darlington and Scott (2002:87) statement that research participants must have "*the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of the experience under investigation and the ability to develop some significant relationship with the phenomenon under study*". As the number of students was large, the researcher relied on the sample chosen according to the formula proposed by Alain Bouchard to calculate the sample size, and 73 students were selected. According to Alain Buchard (1898), when the universe of a survey is inferior or equal to 100,000 individuals, that corresponds to the sample of 96 individuals with margin errors of 4% and a precision of 96% time out of 100, as stated below:

$$Nc = \frac{N * n}{N + n}$$

N: Size of the sample universe/ the size of the population.
n: Size of the sample determined/ confidence level = 96% (error term is estimated to 4%)
Nc: Size of the sample collected.

The above formula was applied, and the sample size of students was:

$$Nc = \frac{328 * 96}{328 + 96} = 73$$

This was a purposive sampling technique in which the researcher used his own judgment about which respondents to choose and picked those who best met the study's purpose.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Students' Perceived Oral Fluency

Promoting oral fluency is essential for improving the learners' speaking abilities, motivating them and teachers to share information in the classroom, and facilitating interaction. Jiang (2016) noted that knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure and confidence in speaking with peers in English are important factors in speaking fluently. The table below shows learners' perceived proficiency in English as a second language.

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	11	15.1	15.1
Agree	43	58.9	58.9
Disagree	18	24.7	24.7
Strongly disagree	1	1.4	1.4
Total	**73**	**100.0**	**100.0**

The results from the perception of learners on their oral fluency showed that 11(15.1%) strongly agreed that they had a strong English oral command, 43(58.9%) agreed, 18(24.7%) disagreed, and 1 (1.4%) strongly disagreed. From these results, it can be deduced that, on average, learners have an excellent oral command of the English language. They can, therefore, interact orally with peers and teachers in a classroom where the English medium is used. Bashir (2011) observed that learners at all proficiency levels, including beginners, benefit from their peers and teachers. It is more motivating and more likely to result in effective language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. Macaro (2012) asserted that effective instructors teach students speaking strategies: using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about lessons being taught or language itself. This can help them expand their knowledge and confidence in using it in oral communication.

The following table shows students' perceived expression ability in English as a second language. Expression is the ability to put words together to create thought that is meaningful and relevant to the speaker, the listener, and the topic of conversation.

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	8	11.0	11.0
Agree	42	57.5	57.5
Disagree	21	28.8	28.8
Strongly disagree	2	2.7	2.7
Total	**73**	**100.0**	**100.0**

The results from learners' perception on whether they were able to express themselves well in English showed that 8(11%) strongly agreed that they could express themselves well in English. 42 (57.5%) agreed with the above assertion, 21(28.8%) disagreed, and 2 (2.7%) strongly disagreed. Some learners can express themselves well in English and interact fully with teachers, while others do not. This is a big problem for these learners who sit in the classroom and listen passively to the teacher's talk. Heyes (2015) observed that learners' good expression in the teaching medium promotes natural acquisition. The lack of students' ability to express themselves well undermines this process by diverting attention from the object of teachers' teaching. These students struggle to respond appropriately to teachers' prompts and questions, or they cannot rephrase or clarify the queries and questions they ask teachers to facilitate their comprehension.

5.2. Students' Perceived Ability to Talk About Lessons without Difficulty in English

The table below summarizes the learners' perceptions of whether they can talk about English as a subject and as a second language. Their responses are as follows:

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	11	15.1	15.1
Agree	40	54.8	54.8
Disagree	17	23.3	23.3
Strongly disagree	5	6.8	6.8
Total	**73**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Students' perception of whether they can talk about lessons or school without difficulty in English showed that 11(15.1%) strongly agreed that they could talk about work or school without difficulty in English. 40(54.8%) agreed, 17(23.3%) disagreed while 5(6.8) strongly disagreed. These students have difficulty participating in the lesson and remain silent following teachers' talk. Learning the English language is a challenge for them. Thornbury (2005) noted that talking or speaking takes place in real-time. That is why it is considered difficult because the learners need to adapt to the context and manage linguistic and paralinguistic competencies that can represent the feelings and ideas that she/he will express.

5.3. Students' Perceived Nervousness When They Are Using English in Class

Emotions play an important role in English language learning. They compel learners to continue to learn a second language and participate in classroom instruction. Emotional learners' experiences influence ESL learners and their learning achievement. The table below summarize learners' perceived feelings when they are learning ESL.

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	6	8.2	8.2
Agree	21	28.8	28.8
Disagree	43	58.9	58.9
Strongly disagree	3	2.7	2.7
Total	**73**	**100.0**	**100.0**

The results obtained from the perception of learners on the question of whether they get nervous when they have to speak English to their teachers revealed that 6(8.2%) strongly agreed that English plays a role in their nervousness in the classroom, 21(28.8%) agreed, 43(58.9%) disagreed. In comparison, only 2(2.7%) strongly disagreed with the mentioned assertion. The above results imply that some learners fear talking to their teachers in class or the school compound. They fear, therefore, asking questions in English or discussing lessons being taught with teachers. Kurman (2001, cited by Makewa, 2013) argued that learners who fear and anticipate negative evaluation tend to avoid doing things that will cause them to be negatively evaluated. Thus, these not only affect the understanding of the content but also exclusion from the classroom community.

5.4. Students Perceived Anxiety When They Are Asked Questions in English

Anxiety is among the affective factors that impede ESL learning. Fredrickson (2003, cited in Irati, 2021) noted that negative emotions narrow an individual's repertoire of actions to cause a particular reaction, such as fight or flight: they can either avoid speaking to avoid making a fool of themselves in the classroom or memorize the task at hand. The following table summarizes learners' perceived ESL anxiety.

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	9	12.3	12.3
Agree	24	32.9	32.9
Disagree	38	52.1	52.1
Strongly disagree	2	2.7	2.7
Total	**73**	**100.0**	**100.0**

The results obtained from the perception of students on the question of whether they feel anxious when their teachers ask them something in English revealed that 9(12.3%) strongly agreed that they feel anxious when they have to speak English in class with their teachers, 24(32.9%) agreed that they feel anxious, 38(52.1%) disagreed, while only 2(2.7%) strongly disagreed. From these results, some students feel anxious in the English medium of instruction classroom. It can be deduced here that some learners get anxious when

their teachers ask questions in English. In this case, language anxiety affects learners' participation in the classroom and reduces students' levels of attainment. Since speaking is a very important skill, most learners are worried about their ability to use a foreign language, especially when asked to speak.

Namagero (2008) observed that the English language remains a silent terror in the classroom. Candidates' answers in national examinations lack factual depth and display low thinking skills. Although able to list the main points in an essay, many students fail to support them because they lack the art of communication, which amounts to a language problem. Most advanced-level learners find it a nightmare to construct sentences with correct grammar.

The findings in the table above point to Du (2009 cited by Pearson, 2014), who states that when second language learners feel unable to make the proper social impression, the fear of negative evaluation occurs. Elaine (1992, cited by Makewa, 2013) also found that anxiety and proficiency had an inverse relationship. This means that when anxiety is low, proficiency goes up, and when anxiety is high, proficiency goes down. Learners with language anxiety levels tended to do poorly because they underestimated their competence relative to less anxious students, who tended to overestimate their performance. Anxious students may focus on their perceived inadequacies, the potential for failure and the consequences of that imagined failure rather than concentrating on the task itself. In her study in Tanzania, Brock-Utne (2005 cited by Qorro, 2006) observed that students in the classroom were silent, grave and looked afraid; they learned to memorize, and some sank into apathy and became indifferent, which is a sign of anxiety that these students were experiencing. In this case, motivation is negatively affected by anxiety because highly anxious learners are less likely to take risks in class. Fatima (2012) argues that language anxiety manifests among foreign language learners in several ways, such as forgetting the answer, showing carelessness, cutting class, coming late, having low levels of verbal production, lack of volunteering in class, and seeming inability to answer even the most straightforward questions. Another affective factor explored as an impediment to knowledge of English is the feeling of embarrassment when the students produce ungrammatical English in class.

5.5. Students Perceived Embarrassment When They Produce Ungrammatical English in Class

Embarrassment or fear of embarrassment can affect ESL learners. To talk in the classroom can be a risk, which is not well managed and has no teaching standards. If a learner commits grammatical mistakes or asks comprehensible question, other learners may roll their eyes and decide to stay dumb. The table below shows the students' feelings when they speak English incorrectly in the ESL classroom.

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	12	16.4	16.4
Agree	35	47.9	47.9
Disagree	23	31.5	31.5
Strongly disagree	3	4.1	4.1
Total	73	100.0	100.0

The results obtained from the perception of students on the question of whether they get embarrassed whenever they speak English incorrectly in class revealed that 12(16.4%) strongly agreed that they get embarrassed whenever they speak English incorrectly in class, 35(47.9%) agreed with the question that they get embarrassed when they commit some mistakes in English, 23(31.5%) disagreed. In comparison, only 3(4.1%) strongly disagreed with the above assertion. The embarrassment caused by low students' English proficiency reduces their participation in the classroom. They perceive their communication skills as low and fear committing mistakes in the medium of instruction. It can be deduced here that some students do not communicate in English with their teachers and fellow students in class to avoid embarrassment caused by mistakes committed they may make in class.

Kagwesage (2013), in her research on higher education in Rwanda, observed that students' participation in classroom discussion in English remains low, often limited to single word utterances because of shyness and fear of making mistakes in English. Mchaziwe (2003), in his study on the medium of English in Malawi, observed that pupils lacked confidence in expressing themselves. To Students learning English as a foreign language, the resulting anxiety prevents learners from speaking the target language and reduces their self-confidence. In addition, Mchaziwe claims that speaking anxiety pushes learners to remain quiet and leads them to have low self-confidence. They always wanted to express themselves in the vernacular. It is, therefore, evident that they usually use the vernacular (Kinyarwanda) language in their daily interaction.

6. Conclusion

The findings showed that learners' English proficiency is low. Learners remain unresponsive in the classroom because, as research shows, they are taught in a language they do not know and understand. The outcome of this is that the use of unfamiliar language in the classroom is a teacher-centered method that requires the teacher to speak on their own while learners remain silent and passive during English sessions. It is obvious that learners got confidence and joy when the teacher allowed the use of Kinyarwanda in the lesson because it was the language students were familiar with, while English makes the lesson silent, tedious, and difficult for the learners to handle because they cannot fully understand or speak it fluently. Learners also do not manage English well as a subject, and they cannot speak it easily and accurately. It affects students because their inability to communicate effectively prevents them from contributing to the ESL classroom. The researcher recommends that teachers should motivate students by

using dialogues, sketches, and videos and avoid correcting learners' mistakes whenever they commit them. The consequence of over-correcting is that student's loose motivation and impedes the flow of the class interaction activity. However, if students were given time of preparation accuracy should be emphasized.

6.1. Recommendation

Considering the results above, the following recommendations are suggested:(a) For ESL to be a success in Rwanda, the government should provide schools with adequately qualified teachers who can manage students' negative emotions emanating from learning a foreign language(b) the ministry of Education officials should create a comprehensive scheme that enables in-service teachers to avail themselves of formal duties in the English language such as training organized by school administrators at school (c) in order to enhance the teaching of English as a subject the Ministry of Education should encourage all secondary schools to establish reading programs, teaching using dialogues and sketches; that will help students and teachers develop regular reading habits and speaking habits in ESL. Also, the school policy of speaking English on school premises should instated in all secondary schools, and follow-ups should be made to ensure students do not violate it.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

About the Authors

Hategekimana Aloys is an Assistant Lecturer of English at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences in Rwanda. He was a secondary school head teacher for 12 years and taught English and Kiswahili in secondary schools. He holds a Master of Arts in Linguistics from The Open University of Tanzania, a Bachelor of English and Kiswahili with Education from Kigali Institute of Education and a Diploma in Effective School Leadership from the University of Rwanda, College of Education. He holds other certificates in English for Teaching Purposes from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, a TESOL certificate from Arizona State University, and a Business English for Cross-cultural Communication from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. His research interests include second language acquisition, ICT in language teaching and learning, language policy, and English learning and teaching in multilingual settings.

Bihira Innocent has been an Assistant Lecturer of Kinyarwanda at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences in Rwanda on a part-time basis since April 2023. He holds a Master's Degree in Kinyarwanda Education from the University of Rwanda (2022) and a Bachelor's Degree in Kinyarwanda and English from the Kigali Institute of Education (2009). He exercised different functions, both political and academic. He was a Local Government Official in charge of Youth, Sports& Culture in Rwanda (2013-2019). He also worked as a part-time English teacher for Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) in

2010. He has also been a Headteacher of a Secondary School for three years in Karongi District (2009-2012), teaching English and Kinyarwanda in secondary schools. He was also trained as the Trainer of the Rwanda English Action Programme in 2009. His research interests include English and Kinyarwanda grammar, language teaching and learning, and multilingualism policy.

Ngendahayo Gaspard holds a Master's degree of Science in Forest Resources and Ecological Restoration from Yeungnam University, South Korea and a Bachelor's degree in Education with Geography from the University of Rwanda, College of Education, former Kigali Institute of Education (KIE). As an experienced professional in education and environmental conservation, he has a solid academic background and expertise in forest ecosystem conservation, restoration, and teaching. He has always been interested in ecosystem restoration, forest resources management and general environmental conservation and management. He has a background in teaching at different levels and is interested in education quality. He started with the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) in 2019 as an Assistant lecturer in the Faculty of Education. He taught different geography and teaching methodology modules in the faculty mentioned above, supervised undergraduate dissertations, and actively participated in different scientific weeks and seminars organized by PIASS.

Hagumimana Focas is an Assistant Lecturer at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences in Rwanda, where he teaches Mathematics in the Faculty of Sciences and Humanities. He holds a Master of Science in Applied Mathematics, Statistical Modeling and Actuarial Sciences from the University of Rwanda, a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics and another Master Arts in Education in Quality Education in Developing Countries from the University of Bamberg, Germany. His research interests include applied mathematics, mathematical modelling, statistics and mathematic teaching methodology.

References

Asif, S. *et al.* (2018). What are the factors affecting the use of English language in English only classrooms: Students Perspectives in Pakistan. *English Language Teaching*, vol.11(6)

Assan, J. K. &Walker, L. (2018). Enhancing Citizens' Capability to Compete Globally: Rwanda's Formal Language and Education Policy and Its Implications for Development. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, *Vol. 7 (1), 37-46.*

Bashir, M. (2011). Factors Affecting Students' English-Speaking Skills. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, vol. 2 (2): 181-192.

Crystal, D. (2003). English as a global language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Du, X. (2006). The affective filter in second language learning. *Asian Social Science*, vol. 5(8),162-166

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fatima, Z. (2012). Enhancing Foreign Language Students Speaking Performance Through Overcoming Anxiety. Case Study of Third Year LMD students of English at Biskra University, MA thesis, Biskra University. Algiers, Algeria.

Harits, Q. (2006). Integrating receptive and productive skills into a reading lesson. Proceeding of the second International Conference on Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University.

Horwitz, E.K. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2)125-132.

Heyes, J. (2015). Rwanda's English Education Policy. A Gateway to Employment and a Stronger Economy, or a Learning Barrier for its Citizens? Retrieved on February 1, 2024 from. www.languagedebates.wordpress.com.

Irati, D.B. (2022). "You feel a little bit embarrassed, but you get over it": EFL students' beliefs and emotions about speaking. *Porta Linguarum*, 37.

Jiang, X. (2016). The role of oral reading fluency in ESL reading comprehension among learners of different first language backgrounds. *An International Online Journal*, Vol. 16 (2), 227-242

Kagwesage, A. M. (2012). Higher Education Students' Reflections on Learning in Times of Academic Language Shift. International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 6: No. 2, 18

Kayigema, J. L., & Mutasa, D. E. (2017). The dynamism of English as a global language in post-genocide Rwanda. *Indonesian EFL Journal, 3(1), 113-123.*

Lightbrown, P.M & Spada, N. (2001). Factors affecting second language learning. In *English language teaching in its social context*. London: Rutledge.

Lim, A.T.H. (2020). Implementation of Higher-order thinking skills in the primary ESL classroom. 2nd language and communication postgraduate international seminar proceedings, 26-129.

Macaro, E. (2001). Analysing Student Teachers' Code-switching in Foreign Language Classrooms: Theories and Decision Making. *The Modern Language Journal, 85(9),*531-548.

Makewa, N. L. (2013). Students Perceived Level of English Proficiency in Secondary Schools in Dodoma, Tanzania. *International Journal of Instruction, 3(4),* 132-129.

MacGeal, C. (2010). Why Rwanda said adieu to French, Guardian Weekly, January 16. Kigali, Rwanda.

Mchaziwe, H. S. (2003). Effect of English as a Medium of Instruction on Pupils' Academic Achievement in Social Studies in Primary Schools in Malawi. A PhD thesis, University of South Africa. Republic South Africa.

Mofareh, A. (2015). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *The International Journal of Teaching and Education, vol. 3 (3) 21-34.*

Mutwarasibo, F. (2003). Dual-Medium Language of Instruction Policy and Practices in Rwandan Higher Education: The Case of National University of Rwanda. A Master of Arts Dissertation, University of Witwatersrand. Johannesburg, South Africa.

National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (2023). The Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, Main Indicators Report.

Negash, N. (2011). English language in Africa: An impediment or a contributor to development? In Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language, *Teaching English*, British Council.

NISR (2014). Rwanda general census of population and household report. Kigali, Rwanda.

NESA (2022). Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools. Executive Summary Report, Kigali.

Pearson, P. (2014). Policy without a Plan: English as a Medium of Instruction in Rwanda. *Current Issue in Language Planning, 15(1)*, 39-56.

Plonski, P. (2013). Why Are More African Countries Adopting English as an Official Language? A paper Presented at the African Studies Association Annual Conference, November 23, 2013 Baltimore, Maryland.

Stark, E. (2019). Examining the role of motivation and learning strategies in students' success in an online versus face-to-face course. *Online Learning*, 23 (3) 234-25.

Tabaro, C. (2013). Code-switching in Rwanda: A Case Study of Kigali City Secondary Schools, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Southeast Asia: *A Multidisciplinary Journal, 13(7)*, 15-24.

Tengku, S.T.M. & Sepideh, M.J. (2021). Motivation and Its Impacts in Language Learning. *International Journal of Business and Social Science. Vol. 3(24)*, Special Issue.

Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, (1996). Report on Workshop Seminar on Revising and Harmonizing the Teaching Programs of Primary Schools. Kigali, Rwanda.

Rutabana, J.C. (2023). Teachers' challenges in Teaching English to Junior High School students in Rwanda: A case of Huye District. *Global Scientific Journals*, Vol. (2).

Schmitt, N. (2000). Vocabulary in language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott. C. (2009). Talking to learn: Dialogue in the Classroom. The Digest, NSWIT (2) Retrieved on 08/12/2023 from http://www.nswteachersnswe.edu.au.

Walters, J.D. (2006). Methods of teaching inferring meaning from context. *RELC Journal, 37(2), pp.176-190.*

Qorro, M. (2006). Does the Language of Instruction Affect the Quality of Education? *Haki Elimu*, April 13. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Uwambayinema, E (2016). Challenges faced by English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in the perception and production of North American English vowels: A case of Rwandan students in various US universities, *The Rwandan Journal of Education*, vol. 3, No. 2