

Analysis of language of instruction-related challenges encountered by Rwandan primary school pupils and teachers at Cyuve School (G. S.CYUVE)

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Abstract

It is by the end of 2008 that the government of Rwanda declared English the solely language of instruction at all levels of education. Few months later, in January 2009 the implementation of policy started despite that most teachers in service were educated either in French and/or Kinyarwanda and were certainly not well trained to teach in English. Teachers and learners faced a lot of challenges in different aspects, especially those in rural areas which were lacking qualified, competent and professional teachers; and in most of the cases with limited access to teaching resources. Now nine years have passed and both teachers and learners are still facing different problems. This paper attempted to explore challenges faced by teachers and learners in Rwandan rural areas, particularly at Cyuve school (G.S.CYUVE), a school located in Musanze district, western province of Rwanda. Participants involved all teachers from the school and selected learners from P5 and p6. To gather information, two questionnaires were designed and addressed to teachers and concerned learners respectively. Hence, respondents involve 12 teachers and 42 learners. Later, collected data were transcribed, statistically analysed and interpreted accordingly. Results revealed that learners and teachers face both socio-linguistic related problems, and local environmental-related problem that is non-conducive to learning second and/or foreign languages. They also revealed that there is a serious problem of limited exposure to foreign languages; English included which can help them improve their communication skills and vocabulary in the language of instruction. The lack of relevant and updated teaching aids was also highlighted as a serious hindrance that schools in rural areas face. However, despite such challenges and many more others, teachers claimed that they strive to cope with the demands of the new language policy, and learners are also making their best though it is not easy to attain educational expected objectives.

Key words: challenges, language of instruction, analysis, primary school pupils

1. Introduction

In many countries, there may be different studies that focused on the difficulties that pupils and teachers face while learning in a language other than the mother tongue. The situation becomes more complicated in a country like Rwanda where the population share one language in common and the environment remains not really conducive to using foreign/second languages while citizens are interacting. Since January 2009, in line with the government decree of using English as the sole medium of instruction, teachers and pupils shifted from using Kinyarwanda and French which were used in the teaching of different subjects and started implementing the new language policy whereby all the subjects were to be taught in English. Teachers in-service, who most of them had gained their education in French and Kinyarwanda, were obliged to implement the policy despite the fact that they got no relevant prior training in English. Although some years have already passed, when addressing pupils and teachers one finds that they claim of facing a lot of problems, mostly related to lack of the command of the language of instruction. Moreover, recently the Ministry of Education through Rwanda Education Board has introduced a competence-based curriculum whose tasks and activities are planned to maximize pupils' opportunities in learning. One can then ask oneself, how the teaching/learning process can bear positive fruits when interactions are limited and learners cannot work and share views in that language. How can teachers and pupils benefit from the competence-based curriculum introduced a year ago if they are not able to express their views due to the complicity of the language of instruction? In few words, as Uwambayinema (2013) claimed, the abruptness and comprehensiveness of the change created problems for teachers and students, especially in rural areas largely devoid of English in print forms or everyday communications. Hence, reviewing available literature and analysing data collected by means of both teachers and students' questionnaires, this paper aims to examine the problems encountered by Rwandan rural primary school pupils and teachers in the teaching/learning process. The study explores how both pupils and teachers in Rwandan rural areas strive to cope with the new language policy. It also highlight strategies relied on, if any, for teachers to help learners using English while interacting; what are teachers' limits up to now and what they may suggest for improvement.

2. Background information to the Study

The study of second or foreign language teaching has passed through different shifts and fluctuations for many years (Kuhn, 1970); and it seems difficult and daunting to many learners after one had acquired the first language (Wang, 2007). People learn foreign language for many years but still they are not fluent in it and in spite of the time devoted in learning it, sometimes, it seems frustrating (Wang, 2007). Even many people who claim to have succeeded in mastering foreign language to certain degree level are sometimes found of having deficiency in one skill or the other (Hansen, 1999). In 2008, the government of Rwanda declared English to be the sole medium of instruction at all levels of education in Rwanda. Note that up to that time most teachers in-service had got their education in French and or Kinyarwanda where English was given little importance and not taught in many secondary school options. Since English was introduced in Rwandan schools in 1960s, it was taught from secondary school, grade 2 with One or two hours per week in some options with exceptions to those following language options, who could go up to 6 hours per week. Note that there was a shortage of qualified secondary school teachers to teach different subjects all over the country, and particularly in rural areas. Hence, though the curriculum was planned in such a way, no effort was made to get teachers of English as it was done for some subjects and learners could spend some years without having a teacher of English while they were supposed to have it. Interacting with a friend of mine who did Teacher Training College at the time known as ‘Normale Primaire’ he told us that even though English was allocated 1 hour per week on the timetable, they did not get a teacher of English in grade 4 and grade 5 and got that teacher in their final year-grade six of secondary education only. In such astonishing situation, the abrupt policy of using English as the sole medium of instruction at all levels came in, and teachers mostly educated in French, if not in Kinyarwanda had to embark on its implementation.

Writing about such a situation in Rwanda, the World Bank (2004, cited in Deforche, 2015) claimed that in general most teachers were inadequately prepared to teach in English. As highlighted by Anderson & Rusanganwa (2011) the problem was not of primary teachers only, but also for those teaching in higher education. They asserted that even on the tertiary level it is reported that teachers tend to explain the learning material in Kinyarwanda, the situation which according to Freedman & Samuelson (2010) teachers teaching in a language they do not

command very well, are easily likely to switch to Kinyarwanda, which leads to underdevelopment of literacy in both languages.

Briefly, there was no relevant transition was planned and those teachers did not get sufficient prior-training in English since the decision passed on in October, 2008 and the new language policy started to be implemented by January 2009 despite passive resistance on behalf of some teachers-in service still questioning on why such a sudden change in language of education.

Learning a foreign or second language in the community where that language is not widely used or seem to be non-existent at the village becomes more complicated and assigned goals are likely not to be achieved. According to Sibomana (2015), in Rwanda, Kinyarwanda is one and only mother tongue for more than 99% of the population while all other languages (mainly English, French and Kiswahili) are virtually acquired or learnt as second/foreign languages. The situation becomes seriously complicated when even teachers are not fluent in that second or foreign language where the school setting should be an asset for learners to practice such a language. In 2009 when English started to be used as a medium of instruction, the British Council (cited in Uwambayinema, 2013) conducted a survey on teachers` proficiency in English, which revealed that 85% of primary teachers and 66% of secondary teachers had only beginner, elementary, or pre-intermediate levels of English proficiency based on the Common European Framework for languages.

Despite some years that have passed since the new language policy got its implementation in Rwandan schools, one can claim that in many Rwanda rural primary schools teachers remain of the same proficiency since government trainings in English to all teachers did not continue as they were organised in the beginning of the implementation of the policy, and there are no independent English Training centres that teachers can attend in the evenings, if they can afford paying. Moreover, in Rwanda, the problem is not only in line with learning English as a second/foreign language, but being taught all the subjects in English, the language that both learners and teachers do not master. In such a situation, while learners and teachers in urban places like Kigali city where most Rwandan highly educated people are found, learners may get some other supports in familiarizing themselves with English, the new language of education, in rural areas it is not the case. Teachers have no access to up-to-date teaching aids, learners have

nobody to support them in improving skills in English language as most parents are not educated, and those who managed to get limited education did it in Kinyarwanda and have some limited knowledge in French while they know nothing about English. Taking into account such a situation, bearing in mind that the Rwandan environment is not conducive to English as daily communication is concerned, one can wonder how many challenges teachers and learners in Rwandan rural schools are facing implementing the policy of English-medium of instruction.

Such a situation has motivated us to undertake this research on “Analysis of language of instruction-related problems encountered by Rwandan rural primary school pupils and teachers at G.S. Cyuve, which aims to highlight (i) the environmental impacts on the problems of primary school pupils in learning English language in Rwandan rural schools (ii) the school impacts on the problems of primary school pupils in learning English language, (iii) the impacts of family background on the problems of primary school pupils in learning English language, and finally (iv) the impacts of Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue, on the problems of primary school pupils in learning English language.

3. Literature Review

Second language is the language a person learns after his or her first language. It is also “a language other than the mother tongue that a person or community uses for public communication, especially in trade, higher education, and administration”. It can be also defined as “a non-native language officially recognized and adopted in a multilingual country as a means of public communication” (Collins English dictionary, 2003). Though the focus in this paper is on English in Rwandan context, second language does not necessarily imply English language alone but it includes any other language that is learnt and spoken as second language in any community.

3.1. The importance of English language

English language as the most widely spoken language in the world is very important to any nation. Thus, the importance of English language has been highlighted by various researchers. One is that it is a means of communication used in daily activities such as in business transactions, offices and unique medium of communication among different races. Competency in English language will also help a nation to partake and compete in international economy; and

makes it to progress in industrial and technical fields and thus boost the morale of its workforce (Mohammad, 1991).

Similarly, acquisition of English language would make learners to understand other subject areas, such as sciences, arts and even mathematics (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001), which are of paramount importance in a knowledge-based economy like Rwanda. . This is a clear indication of the significance of learning English in primary school, as the understanding of other subjects remain superficial without the knowledge of English language used as a medium of instruction. Even mathematics which is more concern of numerals requires the use of English language to interpret questions, especially in word problems related-topics. In addition, English language is very crucial in primary school; without reviewing paper and pencil works, one could realize the need to emphasize on learning English language in primary school. For instance, even in countries like Rwanda where Kinyarwanda, the native language is remains to be the dominant language in people`s communication, English has become very important since 2008 when the government of Rwanda declared it a sole medium of instruction at all levels of education. This is because there are a lot of terminologies especially in science which do not have direct translations in many native languages.

3.2. Problems in learning second language

Various research studies were done to investigate the obstacles that impair the progress of learning second language after the acquisition of the first language or mother tongue. According to research studies, problems in learning second language are associated with environmental factors. In a situation where a child is in an environment where English is not spoken after the school hours, there is tendency for such child to find learning English and learning other subjects in English very difficult due to disuse of the language for certain periods of time (Wang, 2007).

In the same manner, problems in learning second language have also been attributed to the influence of the first language. The ways the first language is structured and pronounced have great influence on the second language. For instances, English language and German language are closely related, as such it would be easier for a German to learn English faster and conveniently than a Chinese due to differences in language structures and pronunciation between

English and Chinese languages. Moreover, in a study carried out by Alli (2003) in Malaysia to find out the problems of learning English as second language, the findings revealed that home and interaction outside classroom did not encourage primary school pupils to learn English better. This is almost similar to what takes place in Rwanda where the environment is not conducive to learning and using English due to different sociolinguistic and environmental factors.

3.3.1. Teachers` challenges in the implementation of English-medium instructional policy

Depending on the contexts of teaching in many African countries where English has no base in people`s daily activities, teachers and learners face numerous challenges in implementing English-medium instructional policies.

Talking about the situation in Kenya, Anyiendah (2017) highlighted that teachers face numerous challenges in and out of the classroom. Core among those challenges is the limited classroom language opportunity for the learners to practice the language whereby in upper primary classes, the learners` only opportunity to use English is limited to daily 35-min English lesson (KIE, 2002, cited in Anyiendah, 2017). The author went on to claim that despite those 35-min lesson provided per day, learners are not given ample opportunities to practice the English language in the classroom when learning other subjects because of switching from one language to the other. Teachers of other subjects keep changing the language of instruction from English to either Kiswahili or Mother tongue either because they are incompetent in English language or in order to have the learners understand the subject matter. As Rwanda is concerned, the situation becomes worse since teachers and learners share one common language, Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue and this affects a lot those teachers and learners in rural areas where there are no other place one can get exposure to English apart from the classroom. This can be justified by the fact that Rwanda presents a rare case of English being introduced as an official language in an economically developing country with no roots in the British Empire (Hayes, 2017).

The other challenge is linked to learners` negative attitude toward English, which according to Anyiendah (2017) poses a great barrier for effective teaching. According to Uso(2006, cited in Anyiendah, 2017), such a challenge emanates from the fact that learners have limited

competence in the language, which prevents them from actively participating in classroom activities. Writing about this aspect, Tella et al. (2010) (cited in Anyiedah, 2017) claimed that English lessons have minimal learner participation because learners do not have the necessary competence which was not developed during their formative years. This minimal learner participation can be linked to the learners' negative attitude towards the subject which eventually leads to significant levels of underperformance in the English language. Therefore, the primary school teacher in my context struggles to help learners achieve the expected proficiency.

The other challenges have a base in students-teacher ratio in many African countries, Rwanda included where the introduction of free primary education witnessed an influx of learners in the primary schools, thus increasing the class size (Muchiiri, 2009). Anyiedah (2017) reinforced this challenging factor asserting that the challenges of handling large classes compounded by the acute shortage of teachers puts a strain on the teachers' ability to provide quality language work to the learners because the teacher-learner ratio is not proportional. Moreover, according to Glasson, 2009 (cited in Anyiedah, 2017), the policy demands of inclusive learning poses a challenge in the already swollen classrooms since it compromises individual attention because of the diverse needs of the learners vis-à-vis teachers workload. Note that there is also a problem of effective resources which are not availed in many African countries while teachers are also not eager to design their own, even those who must have got training in designing teaching materials with reference to what is available in the school environment. Many of teachers are likely to mention that they cannot get time to make those teaching aids since the curricula are overloaded and takes much of their time to cover all that is in its content.

Briefly, teachers and learners' lower background in English, negative attitude towards English, over-crowded classes and lack of effective resources, among others remain some of the challenges that teachers and learners face in the teaching and learning process in Africa where English is the medium of instruction in primary schools.

3.3.2. Challenges related to English as a medium of instruction in Rwandan schools

According to Kyeyune (2010, cited in Kagwesage, 2013), a language of instruction is assumed to be an enabling tool which facilitates the learning of content subjects. This means that both learners and teachers should be of a considerable mastery of the language of instruction for an

effective teaching and learning process. However, as Tamtam et al.(2010) highlighted ,the current globalization phenomenon has pushed many nations to adopt English as the language of teaching and learning (Tamtam et al. 2010), even in contexts where English is a second or foreign language to learners. In principle, using English, when it is a second/ foreign language, as a language of teaching and learning might not be an obstacle to the full development of learners' conceptual abilities, provided they are fully conversant in the language of instruction (Webb 2004, cited in Kagwesage, 2013). However, quoting different authors, with reference to the African context, Kagwesage (2013) asserted that extensive research have showed that many African learners are not proficient enough in English to be able to use it appropriately as the language of instruction (Alidou and Brock-Utne 2011; Brock-Utne, Desai, and Qorro 2004; Kyeyune 2010; Mwinsheike 2002; Rubagumya 1997; Rugemalira 2005; Vavrus 2002; and Webb 2002, 2004, cited in Kagwesage, 2013).

Briefly, difficulties and or challenges faced by both teachers and learners have been confirmed and strongly evidenced by different authors when the teaching and learning process takes place in a language that both are not very familiar with. As Rwanda is concerned, Kinyarwanda the mother tongue dominates both teachers and learners communication, and outside the classroom its almost Kinyarwanda that is only used. Hence, according to Uwambayinama (2013) such a situation has led teachers to consistently use their mother tongue-Kinyarwanda rather than English in class and renders them unable to modify lesson content to accommodate their students as the use of English is concerned.

4. Methodology

This paper relies on library-based documentation. By this, data was gathered by means of reading through available literatures, reviewing findings of other researchers in the areas of Rwandan sociolinguistic context, policy education and language planning. However, to get hands on information, two questionnaires were set and addressed to teachers and learners of Cyuve primary school whereby 12 teachers irrespective of their teaching subjects and 42 learners from P5 and P6 participated.

The questionnaire items were set to get information from respondents on the influences of the sociolinguistic environment, school and family background on problems they face in the process

of teaching and learning in English. The questionnaire involved the Likert scale (A = agree, SA = strongly agree, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree), open and close items. It also aimed to gather respondents' personal information. To facilitate the comprehension, both teachers and learners' questionnaires, a version of Kinyarwanda translation for each question was provided.

4.1. Method of administration

For teachers, the questionnaire was distributed to them and they got a one week to plan and respond to the questions at their free time allows. 12 questionnaires were distributed and all of them were later collected back filled in.

As learners are concerned, their questionnaire was administered by the class teachers and the researcher was there following the activity and ready to intervene and give clarification whenever needed. Learners were given 60 minutes of time-span to go through the questionnaire and provide responses to the set questions. 42 learners participated and all the questionnaires were collected.

4.2. Data analysis

Collected data were transcribed and subscribed to the qualitative style of analyzing. However, where deemed important, the responses from questionnaire were interpreted quantitatively by the use of simple percentage accompanied by the researcher's comment, and sometimes reinforced by what other previous researchers have revealed on the aspect examined.

5. Findings from teachers' questionnaire

To collect appropriate data on the challenges faced by both teachers and learners in the implementation of the English medium of instruction in Rwandan rural schools, a questionnaire containing fourteen question items was given to teachers. The questionnaire aimed to come up with information on teachers' language use; faced challenges in using English in the teaching/learning process; accessibility of teaching aids, trainings and other supportive programs in the implementation of English-medium of instruction, and teachers' suggestions for success in this educational language policy. Results revealed many problems which are in line with pedagogy, teaching material, lack of fluency in English and Rwanda sociolinguistic and non-conducive related environment.

5.1. Teachers` use of languages and teaching experience

The three first questions aimed to find out the language most used by teachers at different places. It was found out that eleven teachers out of twelve are Rwandans and share Kinyarwanda as their mother tongue. Sibomana (2015) highlighted the use of Kinyarwanda claiming that Kinyarwanda is one and only mother tongue for more than 99% of the population while other languages (mainly English, French and Swahili) are virtually acquired/learnt as second/foreign languages by Rwandans through formal education. The one who makes an exception use English and this is foreigner working as a VSO volunteer. Hence, the eleven teachers asserted that at home they all prefer using Kinyarwanda, while nine out of twelve teachers claimed that they mostly use Kinyarwanda when they address learners outside the classroom. All these present an image of how Rwandan environment remains non-conducive to acquiring or learning English language.

Another item of the questionnaire was to find out the teachers experience in teaching and it was revealed that teachers` experience range from five years to 33, which shows that no one of the teachers is a beginner in teaching. If experience were a base for one to successfully accomplish his/her duties, these teachers should be performing well in their teaching profession. Responding to the other item aiming to find out how teachers feel are well trained to teach in English, seven teachers (58.3%) out of five claimed that they are not well trained and suggested yearly and regular trainings and many follow-up to find out how teachers are improving teaching skills in English.

In general, the lack of proficiency in English, the language of instruction remains one of their barriers in maximizing their help to learners while teaching, which leads to pupils` failure in mastering English and content of different subjects, taught in English.

5.2. Challenges faced in teaching/learning process done in English

Teachers` views showed that they face a lot of challenges ranging from the Rwandan non-conducive environment to learning and/or acquiring foreign languages, limited resources, no trainings in English, etc. Findings are presented and interpreted accordingly in tables below.

Table 1: Teachers` challenges in achieving assigned educational goals

| Reasons | Respondents (N=12) | |
|--|---------------------------|------------------|
| | | Frequency |
| (i) Learners` dominant use of Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue everywhere | | 5 |
| (ii) Poor performance and learners` limited speaking and listening skills in | 3 | |
| (iii) Shortage of relevant and updated teaching aids | | 3 |
| (iv) Irregular change in curriculum and insufficient trainings for teachers | | 2 |
| (v) Short time (40 minutes per session) allocated to an English lesson | | 1 |
| (vi) Lack of cooperation between teachers and educational leaders | | 1 |

The information provided by teachers responding to the item testing challenges they face while striving to achieve goals assigned to the education provided in English in Rwandan primary schools highlighted among others, the dominant use of Kinyarwanda by learners in and outside the classroom, poor performance and learners limited speaking and listening skills; shortage of relevant and updated teaching aids, etc. As it is presented, Kinyarwanda being the only language for all Rwandans, educated and non-educated ones remains a big challenge for both teachers and learners to stick to the use of English as they interact. Note that analysing the questionnaires, it was observed that majority of teachers (7) responded to this item in Kinyarwanda , which is also an indicator of how Rwandan teachers are still kin to the use of Kinyarwanda instead of English or probably an indicator of their low confidence in using English to act as models to their learners.

Responding to the questionnaire item testing how Rwandan local society may be an obstacle to learning and performing well in English by learners, seven teachers (58.3%) supported the idea that the Rwandan society present challenges to learners` learning in English, while five others find no problem in that. Responding to the other item in line with this, most teachers (75%) claimed that Rwandan learners are not mentally and psychologically well equipped to learn all the subjects in English Teachers, who take Rwandan society as an obstacle to learning English, justified their position claiming that members in most families in Rwandan do not know English and cannot help their children learning in English. The other problem is in line with lack of infrastructures supporting modern teaching; poor living conditions and lack of time to revise taught materials since arriving home, learners from rural areas are asked by parents to help them doing household works. Contrarily, those who opposed the idea claimed that if learners were

given sufficient support and time to study they can overcome the environmental challenges. They said that parents should give all that learners need as school equipments. Moreover, learners should study the whole day instead of following shift programs while the government should be careful in making change today and tomorrow.

Responding to the problem of teaching aids which are of paramount importance, most teachers (58.3%) claimed that adequate teaching materials in English are not availed at schools while 5 teachers (41.6%) stated that they manage to get them. To solve the problem in line with non availability of teaching aids, teachers who claimed that their schools dispose no relevant teaching aids asserted that they try to find out in the environment what can help them on their own though sometimes they fail to get relevant ones. Hence, they request authority in charge to equip all the schools in Rwanda, especially those in rural areas with relevant and updated teaching aids.

Teachers were also asked to present problems they face while teaching English and findings are presented in Table 2 below, followed with a brief interpretation.

Table 2: Teachers' views on problems encountered while teaching in English

| Question | Yes | Reasons | No | Reasons | Not Sure |
|--|-----|--|----|---------|----------|
| <i>Do you think both Rwandan society and Environment are obstacles to learning in English? Give reasons (N=12)</i> | 12 | .Kinyarwanda (8) .French (3) .Lack of motivation (1) .Lack of literary works (1) .Absence of reading culture (1) | 0 | | 0 |
| <i>Are there any other obstacles that hinder learners from being fluent speakers of English? (N=11)</i> | 11 | .Kinyarwanda (3) .Lack of materials (3) .Environment (2) .Lack of qualified teachers (2) .Students' non-usage of English (1) .Limited function of English (1) | — | — | 1 |

All twelve teacher-respondents agreed that Rwandan society and environment in general might be obstacles to the process of teaching/learning and using English in Rwandan schools. Among other things, the prevalence of Kinyarwanda takes a high position on the list of influencing factors. In general, when asked what are the other obstacles outside the non-conducive environment that might influence the teaching and learning of English, six factors were mainly

highlighted and they include (a) the dominance of Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue; (b) interference of other languages; (c) societal-related problems; (d)insufficiency of teaching aids; (e) low level in English and finally, (f) curriculum related problems.

Most of the teachers consider Kinyarwanda as one of the most challenging factors for Rwandans to accommodate English as both a second language and a language of instruction. They claimed that Rwandans like their mother tongue; they are proud of it and find no reason to use another language when talking to other Rwandans. One of the respondents said, “*Rwandan common mother tongue that influences them to use that language everywhere and in whatever they do is one of the obstacles to develop English while there is no force behind the use of English in Rwandan community*” (Tr4). Moreover, one of the teachers confirmed that Rwanda is a monolingual country and most of the parents speak Kinyarwanda while another teacher is of the view that Rwandans are not familiar with the use of English, hence, they prefer using Kinyarwanda in most of the cases. The teachers’ viewpoints on the dominance of Kinyarwanda as a hindrance to developing English language skills among Rwandans are as follow:

Table 3: Graded statements measuring teachers` obstacles in teaching English in

Rwandan Schools

| Statements | <i>Alternative and Number of respondents per each alternative (N=12)</i> | | | | |
|---|--|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <i>1. Kinyarwanda dominates Rwandans` daily communication and this has a negative impact on learners` learning and using English. (N=12)</i> | 3 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| <i>2. Teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in English (N=12)</i> | 0 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| <i>3. It is very difficult for Rwandan pupils sharing one local language to interact and internalize the materials when all is taught in English.(N=12)</i> | 3 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| <i>4. Teachers have no time to think and make choice of appropriate teaching aids. (N=12)</i> | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| <i>5. Class size remains a big challenge for teachers to maximize the control of</i> | 2 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

the class.(N=12)

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>6.Kinyarwanda should be the sole medium of instruction in Rwandan primary schools and foreign languages 'English or French' be introduced and taught as subjects at upper primary levels. N=11)</i> | 3 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|

As it is presented in Table 3, writing on the negative impact of Kinyarwanda on learning and using English in Kinyarwanda, ten teachers (83.3%) agreed that it remains a big obstacle. This is also reinforced by nine teachers (75%) responding to item three presented above, claiming that it is still difficult for Rwanda pupils sharing one mother-tongue to interact and internalize the materials when all is taught in English. For preparedness to teaching, nine teachers (75%) were of the viewpoint that Rwandan primary teachers are not well prepared to teach in English language. As the class size is concerned, ten teachers (83.3%) took it as one of the main challenges for them to maximize the class control and manage to help each of the learners in the classroom. For the selection of teaching aids, seven teachers (58.3%) agreed that they take no time to think and make choice of appropriate teaching aids, which may lead to using non-supportive teaching aids or non-contextualized ones, and fail to be successful in their teaching learning process. Finally, to find out which language of instruction should be used in Rwandan primary, a questionnaire item was set as it appears in Table... above. Seven respondents (58.3%) suggested that all the subjects should be taught in Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue.

In the teachers` questionnaire, another item was set to gather information on what could be done to overcome some of the challenges and/or problems highlighted. Teachers` suggestions are presented below.

Table 4: Teachers` suggestions to solve problems faced in the teaching/learning process

| Reasons | <u>Respondents (N=12)</u> | Frequency |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Increasing trainings on how to teach in English | | 6 |
| Provision of sufficient and relevant teaching aids | | 4 |
| Teaching some lessons or all lessons from P1 in English | | 3 |
| Training teachers based on their performance in different subjects | | 1 |
| Emphasizing communication in language use | | 1 |
| Minimizing absenteeism helped by learners` parents | | 1 |
| Creation of media clubs at school | | 1 |
| Be devoted to using English at school by both teachers and learners | | 1 |
| Be objective in appointing teachers to attend trainings and/or to teach English | | 1 |
| Encouraging learners to read different writings in English | | 1 |

As it is presented in Table 4; among teachers` suggestions, challenges faced in teaching in English in Rwandan primary schools include among others to increase training on how to teach in English, availability of relevant and updated teaching materials, etc.

To sum up, one can claim that apart from one teacher who is a foreigner other teachers are Rwandans sharing Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue with all their learners, and this seems to be an obstacle to improving communication skills in English since they both tend to use Kinyarwanda instead of maintaining the use of English. Hence, teachers agree that the Rwandan environment is non-conducive to practicing English. They find lack or limited access teaching materials, having no regular trainings on how to teach in English as a constraint for them to achieve goals assigned to Rwandan education provided in English. However, despite such challenges teachers are committed to teach and whenever possible try to find supportive teaching aids on their own.

6. Findings from learners` questionnaire

The items set in the learners` questionnaire aimed to highlight the language most used by learners; find out how difficult they find learning conducted in English; whether they get sufficient teaching materials, and find out the extent to which their teachers are helpful in learning different subjects in English. They also aimed to reveal obstacles faced when taught in English; seek if they have other particular program to help them improve their skills in English

apart from what they are taught at school, and finally what they can suggest to overcome challenges related to English-medium of instruction that they are facing. 42 students responded to the questionnaire and findings are presented below.

6.1. Language most used by learners

To find out learners' language most used, five items were set and analysis from the answers provided revealed that all the learners share Kinyarwanda-the mother tongue and they prefer using it more than any other language in most cases. At learners' homes, according to 38 students (90.4%) it was revealed that it is still Kinyarwanda that dominates while 4 students (9.5%) claimed that there is the use of English. To interact with classmates, 39 students (92.8%) claimed that they use Kinyarwanda. However, findings revealed that when they are talking to their teachers, 23 students (54.7%) try to use English while 19 students (45.2) still opt for the use of Kinyarwanda.

Briefly, the situation shows how the Rwandan society is still Kinyarwanda-based as people's daily communication is concerned, hence, not yet conducive to practicing English language taught at school by our learners. In line with this, taking into account that the school is the main place where learners can use English, teachers have a great role to play to help learners master English and use it properly. They have to be highly innovative and more creative in designing activities involving fully participation of learners, which requires pertinent trainings since most of teachers in-service have a French-Kinyarwanda education background.

6.2. Teaching materials, challenges encountered and how helpful are teachers

Three items were set to find out whether learners are availed with sufficient teaching materials to improve skills in English; how difficult it is learning in English, and how teachers appear to be helpful in all.

For the issue of teaching/learning materials, the majority of students(31) representing 73.8% of all the learners' respondents asserted that such materials are availed while 10 students (23.8%) claimed that they do not get access to such materials. As learning in English is concerned, according to the findings, it appears that it is not a very big problem since 19 learners (45.2%) claimed to find it very difficult while 22 learners (52.3%) find no problem in it. One learner gave

no response to this question. This means perhaps that if well taught in a supportive learning environment, learners can adapt themselves to the situation.

For the extent to which learners think their teachers to be helpful, 33 students (78.5%) were of the viewpoint that their teachers are very helpful while 6 students (14.2%) claimed not to be well helped. Note that three learners gave no answer to this question. In support of their positions, some of those who claimed to be well helped by teachers highlighted the following reasons:

- ✓ Learning all the subjects in English helps me improving skills in English (1 learner)
- ✓ Slowly by slowly I gain something in English (2 learners)
- ✓ Teachers teach us well and give us clear explanations in English (8 learners)
- ✓ They give explanations in English and sometimes in Kinyarwanda (2 learners)

Those who find no clear help from teachers, they also highlighted some of their reasons which are summarized as follows:

- ✓ Two learners brought in the issue of Kinyarwanda-English code-switching, which according to them should facilitate them understand the course content. They said, “ ‘Kubera ko byose batabidusobanuria mu Kinyarwanda ntidusobanukirwa’ [Since they do not explain all in Kinyarwanda, we get nothing]”.
- ✓ The other learner reinforced the above idea claiming that s/he gets nothing.

Obviously, there are still some challenges in teaching and learning in English in Rwandan primary schools. However, teachers and learners are eager to go through the new language policy, and if they are both provided with relevant support the implementation of English language –medium of instruction can be successful since young learners can learn in any language as long as the environment remains supportive.

6.3. Obstacles, extra-curricular programs and ways to overcome faced challenges

Though three learners claimed to face no obstacles, all the remaining respondents highlighted different obstacles that they meet when taught every lesson by the use of English language only. Most of the raised obstacles include the followings:

- ✓ No clear explanations are given to help us understand the content,
- ✓ We get no clear understanding (20 learners),

- ✓ We cannot teach or help each other in English,
- ✓ We are not able to guess or interpret the questions we get,
- ✓ Almost all the teachers use some Kinyarwanda when they are teaching us,
- ✓ It's good to teachers in English though little Kinyarwanda may be needed too(3 learners).

Generally, it was found out that many learners have a problem of understanding when all is taught in English only. They also have a common problem in listening and speaking; guessing and interpreting the questions asked by their teachers, which lead them to failing to respond and interact with teachers.

To overcome highlighted obstacles, learners suggested among other reasons that teachers should teach in English, but also try to give some explanations in Kinyarwanda. They suggested that clear explanations with typical examples should be provided, and regular revisions should be undertaken before the start on of any new lesson. Moreover, learners suggested that teachers should be courageous in teaching them, hence be more devoted to their job.

As extra-curricular activities that can help learners improve their skills in English, 27 learners (64.2%) claimed to get exposure to such activities, while 15 learners (35.7%) stated that they do not. Those who claimed to get exposure to some extra-curricular activities helping them to improve skills in English highlighted the following ways , each with its frequency: I like to approach a friend good in English and I get something from him/her (3); I get help from a colleague (5); I watch TV emissions in English (5); I get a help from Compassion International (4); I watch movies in English (6); I get help from my parents (1); I get a help from a graduate student (1)

7. Conclusion and suggestions

The study undertaken at G.S. Cyumve aimed to find out how teachers and learners are coping with the new English-medium of instruction in Rwandan schools; problems faced through the teaching and learning process ; how they strive to solve them and what they would suggest for a successful teaching learning process. Findings revealed that though teachers and learners are trying to cope with the language policy, they are still facing a lot of challenges. The dominant ones are related to the fact that apart from their school and local community, Rwandan linguistic

community is generally dominated by the use of Kinyarwanda, which remains one of the biggest hindrances for learners and teachers to make quick positive progress in the use of English. Moreover, Rwandan being a non-conducive environment to accommodating foreign language and the fact that rural schools are not equipped with relevant and update teaching materials also presents many problems to both learners and teachers as teaching/learning facilitation is concerned. Both teachers and learners highlighted the issue of having a very limited access to teaching aids. For learners, it was pointed out that most of them have no other exposure to English apart from the school setting and they also have nobody else to help them improve their English language skills since being at home means using Kinyarwanda.

As suggestions are concerned, teachers and learners highlighted the issue of devotion in the teaching/learning process, timely availability of updated teaching aids, and taking measures to help learners and teachers to using English creating clubs where English can only be used. Teachers insisted on increasing trainings on how to teach in English and helping them get access to current teaching materials.

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