

# Exploring the Factors that Enhance Secondary Schools Learner's Oral Communicative Competence in English Language

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## ABSTRACT

This study has been designed to investigate the problem of poor oral communicative competence in English language among secondary schools in Gasabo District of Rwanda. The target population was 96 advanced level History Economics and Geography (HEG) students from the Groupe Scolaire Kinyinya. Using simple random sampling technique, a sampling size of 36 students of Senior Five (S5) HEG combination was obtained. Questionnaires, observation and interviews were used as data collection tools. The study findings indicate that challenges to oral communicative competence including vocabulary problems, pronunciation of the words and lack of motivation among others. These findings also show the class size is a problem in itself and recommends strategies such as increasing debates inside and outside the classroom, encouraging learners to speak English even outside the classroom, oral presentation of tasks given in front of the whole class and providing more activities that allow learners to speak.

**Keywords:** Boost, Strategies, Oral communicative competence

## I. INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Linguistically, Rwanda is monolingual country this is true because its people are able to communicate among themselves since Kinyarwanda one of the languages which developed from Bantu language family enables them to be in mutual intelligibility. From the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century when African continent was taken over by Europeans, Kinyarwanda language has progressively been in contact with different foreign languages such as French, Kiswahili and English.

Between 1957 and 2008 French was the medium of instruction in all secondary schools in Rwanda. During this time English was taught in arts and language options. Therefore, English language was considered like a mere subject. Now, Rwanda has joined various communities which use English language as priority when communicating among themselves. Among those communities we can say Common wealth which is the community of countries using English language and East African community which is the community of countries located in East of African continent.

Due to those communities, Rwanda was required to introduce and enhance the use of English language in order to maintain successful relationship with other countries. While putting much effort in teaching English, there has been a shift from French which was a language of instruction to English as a replacement. English language is an international language used in various parts of the World. This

language is used by around 380 million people as the first language or mother tongue while around 380 million people use English as L2 or FL. Jean et al., (2021). This change appeared to be aiming at being more competent in English language. Therefore, listening and speaking skills are much needed as they are the base of all communication skills of any language.

Like other languages, English can be taught using either traditional or modern technologies, through four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing (Jean et al., 2021). Improving level of learners in listening and speaking skills means to make or bring their level at a better state than it was before starting the action of ameliorating it.

Speaking is the most important among the four skills; it is the skill by which students will be judged upon in various circumstances. Lack of proficiency in English among students is often reported. This might be attributed to the kind of methodology used to teach the language. Students complain about the method of memorization through which they are facilitated in their respective classes (Jean et al., 2021)

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since English is not our native language as Rwandans, learners can't always understand clearly the meanings while listening to something being spoken and can't also put what they are thinking into words. That is why they have to keep improving their level of listening and speaking. Teaching English lesson to students when they study it in parallel with other lessons had been very challenging because some of them don't put much effort in studying it and don't give it the value that it should own by saying that it is not their option in Advanced level and they give priority to History Economics and Geography. The students of Groupe Scolaire Kinyinya especially those of Advanced level are also among others who don't consider English lesson to be valuable as it is.

The language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols, which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learnt the system of that culture, communication or to interact. By speaking, we do not mean merely uttering words through mouth. It means conveying the message through the words of mouth. This skill is also neglected in our class rooms. Students do not get any chance either in the class room or outside to speak English. Speaking is not a part of our examinations. Learning to speak also demands a lot of practice and attention. (Uwababyeyi et al., 2021)

From what have been said above, it is clearly seen that Rwandans in general and students particularly, need to keep improving in their English language skills. The purpose of teaching English in general and speaking skills in particular, should be to enable its learners to achieve acquired communicative competence to serve earning their lives on this competitive world.

During teaching and learning these learners would code switch from English to their mother tongue where they feel comfortable since it is the language in which they are fluently confident. In addition to this, Advanced level learners were gives tasks to work on and topics to debate on where every learner would participate. Surprisingly, 75% of those learners kept quiet when presenting not because they wanted to but because they had not been accustomed to such exercises.

In fact, they had not been given the occasions to express their opinions about the topics under discussion and they don't feel self-confident to use their English skills whatever would be its level. Actually, they were afraid of making mistakes as they were not initiated to the principle that practice makes perfect.

After having critically analysed the above issues, I decided to conduct this research with the topic:” **The use of Debates and Presentations as Strategies to Boost Learners’ Oral Communicative Competence in English Language.**”

### Research questions

This research will be aiming at finding answers to the following questions:

1. What are the factors that are on the basis of learners' poor oral communicative skills in English language?
2. How are the methods used in teaching and learning contributing to the improvement of learners' speaking skills in English language?
3. What are the strategies that can be adapted to solve and overcome this problem?

### Objectives of the study

- To identify the factors that influence learners' poor oral communicative competence in English language.
- To assess whether the methods used in teaching and learning contribute to the improvement of learners' speaking skills in English language.
- To demonstrate the strategies that can be adapted to sort out the learners 'problem of poor oral communicative skills in English language at Groupe Scolaire Kinyinya.

### SIGNIFICANCE AF THE STUDY

This research is significant to various people. Among those there are teachers, learners, institutions and also future researchers.

On the side of learners, it will be useful because it will discover the causes of their poor listening and speaking ability in English lesson, suggest ways of handling that problem and show the ways through which learners will recover from that weakness.

On the other side, it will be beneficial to teachers because it will show them how well they should teach learners in order to get them across from weakness in the two language skills to high level of being able to communicate fluently through English language.

In addition, this research will also be significant to the future researchers as it will be used as their reference where they will find important information concerning teaching and learning English language skills especially listening and speaking.

Lastly, this research will be significant to learning institutions because it will be used by them showing the best ways to pass through when they want to get across their learners in teaching and learning activities.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study attached to the theory of **Constructivism**.

constructivism is a theory whereby learners construct their own learning, new learning is built on prior knowledge, learning is enhanced by social interaction and meaningful learning develops through authentic tasks(Mushimiyimana et al., 2022).

Here, the main sense of constructivism is that it's a theory in which learning that individuals create their own new knowledge based on the interaction of what they already know and believe and the knowledge they meet.

### IV. REVIEW OF WRITTEN LITERATURE

#### Introduction

In this chapter of literature review, a researcher was interested in finding out what different researchers, authors and other scholars said and wrote about strategies that can be used to raise learners' ability in

English language skills especially listening and speaking. It is expected to provide readers with background knowledge for better understanding the rest of the paper.

### **What is a language?**

According to Bashir et al (2016) language is referred to as a system of conventional spoken signs or written symbols governed by grammatical rules by means of which human beings express themselves. It is such a common phenomenon that we always take it for granted. We never bother to think about it: we never try to go into the depth of the meaning of this word. Definition of language is not difficult to find. Almost all well-known linguists have tried to define language in their own way.

### **Definition of key terms**

**Communication:** Dictionary defines communication as a process by which information, idea; feeling and attitude are exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour.

Gamble and Gamble (1993) defines communication as a desirable or accidental transfer of meaning while Wilber Schramm defines “communication” as a mechanism through which human relations exist and develop or sharing of experience on basis of commonness.

**Strategy:** A strategy is a plan of action intended to accomplish a specific goal. (<http://wiktionary.org>)

**Speaking skills:** Is the active process of receiving and responding to spoken messages.

**Skill:** capacity to do something well; technique, ability.

### **Factors that influence language teaching and learning.**

#### **Environmental factors**

Teaching and learning a language is more than formal because it does not only take place in classroom. As we know, learning a language is parallel to how much it is used inside and outside of the class especially when interested to listening and speaking skills as the key skills of communication in a language.

When we say environmental factors that influence languages learning, we want to mean the society in which someone lives because it has a big influence on his language learning. As Yule (1996:175) declared, “a language is not genetically inherited; instead it is acquired in a particular language using environment”.

This means that a language is learnt by doing.

The environmental influence on language learning has also been emphasized by Davidson and Dowson (1998) where they stated that “in order to enable pupils to develop their ability in speaking, it is useful to consider the range of talk which occurs in the boundaries of the classroom.” This implies that learners should be exposed to the environment that brings them much practices and uses of English language.

#### **Interference of the mother tongue in the acquisition of the second language**

Native language is helpful in explaining complex idea and grammar rules and helps students learning new vocabulary more effectively, and preventing the waste of time in explanations and instructions (Suliman, 2014) In concurrence to previous claim, it is crucial to note that mother tongue will be helpful for an individual in understand certain concepts in the second language. However, when learning a second language, learners are likely to be faced with problems resulting from the language they have acquired before. This phenomenon is called “interference.” It is the use of elements, structures and rules from the source language (L1) in the production of the target language (L2). In time these rules and structures are similar, it helps learners to quickly retain the language and whenever they are totally different, it will affect the acquisition of the second language in a negative way. This is respectively a positive and a negative transfer.

Language teachers especially those of English should keep in mind that there is some teaching methods that anticipate learners from practicing a language for example when they don't give time to students to

express their views and that may lead to poor performance of a language to learners.

According to Penny (1996:1200) “classroom activities that develop learners’ ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem an important component of a language course” therefore, teachers should create many chances to learners that allow them to participate in teaching and learning activity maybe by suggesting many topics to discuss about and also prepare exercises that promote listening and speaking skills of English.

### **Techniques for improving speaking skills**

Language learners are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them. Instructors can help students overcome this reticence by assuring them that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction, whatever the participants’ language skill levels. Instructors can also give students strategies and phrases to use for clarification and comprehension check. (Bashir, Marriam, Muhammad Azeem, 2016)

Apart from trying to use the language as many times as possible as the best way of improving speaking skills, improvement of speaking skills is mainly facilitated by three main methods of teaching speaking skills which are Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The two previous methods are not very fruitful because they show a big number of drawbacks resulting to learners’ failure to make achievement in speaking skills but CTL which emphasizes “learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.” (Nunan, 1991, p.56) considerably enhances students’ communicative skills because in it, students are supposed to work in pairs or groups requiring negotiation and co-operation to do not only do accuracy-based tasks but also fluency-based ones.

### **Strategies of improving learners’ listening and speaking skills.**

#### **Debates and discussions**

Being active in classroom plays a big role to the improvement of the knowledge of a learner. It is in that way that preparing debates and discussions about different subjects bring positive effects on the ability of a learner because he or she learns much during that discussions like for example new vocabularies, how to pronounce words, meaning of words and ways of using some words in different occasion and this promote undoubtedly ability to speak since it will allow them to notice their mistakes, to discover their weakness and try to improve their level.

#### **Listening exercises**

Listening plays a huge part in any language learning. As we know the first thing, we did first as children was listening to what was being said by our parents and relatives because we could not talk or speak. Unfortunately, when we grew up, we tried to imitate what we heard and we became also able to speak. From this experience, what a teacher has to do to his students is to advise them to watch and listen actively movies, speeches, news, conversations and songs sung in English language, try to understand the message that they convey, imitate them having the aim of improving their speaking and check for meaning of new words if they meet with some.

#### **Storytelling**

Storytelling is also one of the ways through which learners can improve their listening and speaking skills because it is practical. When a teacher tells a story to learners, they are focused and interested to hear and that attracts their listening skills. On the other side, when it is a learner who is trying to tell a story to his colleagues, his ability of speaking starts to improve because he uses much efforts wanting to convey his message to his listeners. In fact, it is clearly seen that storytelling has much contribution in improving

one's ability of listening and speaking respectively.

### **Oral presentation.**

An oral presentation also called public speaking or simply Presentations involves an individual or group verbally expressing their opinions in front of the audience on a particular topic. The purpose is to present an argument.

## **V. METHODOLOGY**

### **Scope of the Study**

#### **The samples**

The samples were 96 students of senior four, five and six History Economics and Geography learners. (S4, 5 and 6 HEG). The target population were 36 students of senior five selected using simple random sampling technique and divided into three English proficiency levels (high, medium and low).

#### **Variable**

Dependent Variable was teaching using Debates and Presentation to raise oral communicative competence.

Independent Variables were students' English oral communicative abilities and attitude towards using English speaking skills during debates and presentations.

#### **Instruments**

The instruments used in this study were:

A test of English-speaking ability was used as pre-test and post-test

#### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is a set of questions that people are asked as a way of getting information about what they think, see things or do. In this research, questionnaire is prepared with questions asking why students are poor in listening and speaking skills of English. The way of answering questions on this questionnaire is to choose one of the answers suggested by the researcher.

#### **Interview**

Interview is like a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee where interviewer asks a question and an interviewee answer. In this research, interview was about finding out why learners senior five (S5 HEG) are poor in listening and speaking skills of English language.

#### **Ethical Issues**

Groupe Scolaire Kinyinya is a public institution which is governed by law. Thus, the researcher looked for an official permission from the Head teacher to collect data and made sure that those data provided be kept confidential and remains for the research interest not for any other purpose. Not only was this but also before calling every respondent for data collection, there a verbal consent from them.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to find out the causes of poor listening and speaking skills of the learners of S5 HEG in Groupe Scolaire Kinyinya and identify strategies that can be used to improve their level in those two skills.

This chapter presents the analysis of data presentation and research findings. Tables and percentages were used to facilitate the task. The target group was made of 36 respondents. (learners) and 8 English teacher.

**The pre-survey data**

The pre-survey data investigate the performance of senior four HEG learners in English subject in the academic year 2021-2022 when they ended their senior four studies.

**Table 1: Demographic presentation of respondents**

| Gender       | frequency | percentage  |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| Male         | 15        | 41.66%      |
| Female       | 21        | 58.33%      |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Table 2: Frequency of performance of Senior four S4 HEG learners in academic year 2021-2022**

| Question  | Answers | Frequency                               | Percentage  |
|---|---------|---|-------------|
| Were you able to understand the meaning of what teacher used to say during English lesson while you were in S4? | Yes     | 9                                       | 25%         |
|   | No      | 27                                      | 75%         |
|   |         | N= the total number of respondents (36) | <b>100%</b> |

**Source:** Primary data

The results from this table implies that S5 HEG learners had poor listening in English since only 25% of them could get the meaning of what teacher used to say while teaching, it means that the remaining 75% used to fail in getting the meaning of what teacher could be saying while teaching. This was the case when they were in S4 HEG in 2021-2022.

**Table 3: Frequency of factors of poor listening and speaking English for S5HEG learners.**

| Questions  | Answers                     | Frequency                              | Percentage |
|--|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| What is the factor which leads you to poor listening and speaking English? | Vocabulary problem.         | 24                                     | 66.66%     |
|  | Pronunciation of the words. | 9                                      | 25%        |
|  | Lack of motivation          | 3                                      | 8.33%      |
|  | Other cause                 | 0                                      | 0%         |
| Total  |                             | N=the total number of respondents (36) | 100%       |

**Source:** primary data

The table above shows that most of senior five HEG learners are poor because they have few vocabularies in English language 66.66%, pronunciation of the words 25%, and lack of motivation (being not interested to the language) 8.33% and there is no other cause other than those mentioned.

**Table 4: Methodology used in teaching and learning English lesson in S5 HEG**

| Learning process of English                                | frequency | percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Following teacher’s explanation till the end of the lesson | 3         | 8.33%      |
| Follow the teacher and often do exercises                  | 20        | 55.55%     |

|   |    |        |
|---|----|--------|
| Imitating the teacher’s examples                    | 4  | 11.11% |
| Doing the given activity and present their findings | 9  | 25     |
| Total   | 36 | 100    |

Source: Primary data

Among 36 respondents answered the questions on the way they learn English lesson. The biggest number of respondents was 20(55.55%) which indicated that the methods used in teaching and learning is that students follow the teacher’s explanation till the end of the lesson, 20 respondents (55.55%) follow the teacher and often do exercises, 9 respondents (25%) do the given activity and present their findings. Lastly, 4 respondents (11.11) stated that they imitate the teacher’s examples while learning English.

**Table 5: Activities done inside and outside the classroom related to English speaking skills.**

| ACTIVITY                | INSIDE THE CLASSROOM |       |    |       | OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM |      |    |       |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------|----|-------|-----------------------|------|----|-------|
|                         | YES                  | %     | NO | %     | YES                   | %    | NO | %     |
| Group oral presentation | 26                   | 72.2% | 4  | 11.1% | 9                     | 25%  | 21 | 58.3% |
| Debate                  | 19                   | 52.7% | 2  | 5.5%  | 6                     | 16.6 | 25 | 69.4% |
| Group discussion        | 27                   | 75%   | 6  | 16.6% | 3                     | 8.3% | 17 | 47.2% |
| Think pair share        | 15                   | 41.6% | 9  | 25%   | 2                     | 5.5% | 23 | 63.8% |

Source: Primary data

The results clarify the activities done inside and outside the classroom among group oral presentation, debate, group discussion as well as think pair share. Respondents were given the opportunity to select more than one among the proposed activities. This came out from the number of respondents more than 36 interviewed during data collection. The addition of **YES** and **NO** answers to the activities performed inside and outside the classroom go beyond 100%. This question was asked since the researcher intended to know if the oral communicative competence is facilitated by the use of **DEBATES** and oral **PRESENTATION** as strategies to boost it.

**Table 6: Learners ‘challenges during teaching and learning English lesson**

| Challenge  | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Lack of vocabularies to express their opinions             | 11        | 30.55%     |
| Overclouded class and lack of opportunities to talk        | 6         | 16.66      |
| A big number of learners in one classroom                  | 5         | 13.88%     |
| Interference of mother tongue while speaking               | 4         | 11.11%     |
| Fear of making mistakes and being laughed at by classmates | 10        | 27.77%     |
| Total  | 36        | 100%       |

Source: Primary data

As for the challenges faced by learners while learning English lesson, the highest number is composed of 11 respondents (30.55%) who said that lack of vocabularies to express their opinions is the most challenging problem faced by learners while learning English lesson. Ten respondents (27.77%) stated



that fear of making mistakes and being laughed at by classmates is another challenge which is on the high level. this issue, Du (2009) confirmed that some students fear to talk thinking that their peers will laugh at them and this may be a greater cause of language worry.(Jean et al., 2021). Five learners (13.88%) pointed out that a big number of learners in one classroom is also challenging while learning English course. Four learners mentioned that when it comes to speaking, the first language distract them and became interfered by it.

**Table 6: Strategies that can be adapted to overcome the challenges**

| Strategies   | Frequency | Percentage  |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| Normal class size (few students in class)                        | 7         | 19.44%      |
| Increasing debates inside and outside the classroom              | 12        | 33.33%      |
| Encouraging learners to speak English even outside the classroom | 10        | 27.77%      |
| Oral presentation of tasks given in front of the whole class     | 4         | 11.11%      |
| Providing more activities allow learners to speak                | 3         | 8.33%       |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>36</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Source:** Primary data

Respondents stated some strategies which could be adapted to overcome the challenges. The findings showed that increasing debates inside and outside the classroom (33.33%) could be the first solution to overcome the challenges. Ten respondents (27.77%) suggested that encouraging learners to speak English even outside the classroom, 7 respondents (19.44%) said that normal class size (few students in class),4 respondents mentioned that oral presentation of tasks given in front of the whole class and three respondents 8.33% suggested that providing more activities allow learners to speak all could be good solutions to the challenges.

**Results obtained from a semi-structured interview with teachers of English language.**

The first question from a semi-structured interview was answered by teachers of English concerned gender and age.6 respondents among 8, (75%) were male whereas 2 respondents (25%) were female. A big number of respondents was between 39 and 46 age range which occupied by 4 respondents (50%), followed by 2 respondents (25%) in 30-38 age range. 1teacher (12.5%) was found in the age range of 23-29 and finally 1 teacher (12.5%) was found in the age range of 50 above. By considering gender, we can conclude by saying that a big number of English teachers were male (6).

The respondents were good enough to answer the given questions since 7 respondents (87.5%)hold bachelor’s degrees and 1 respondent (12.5) was An A1 diploma holder and none of them had an A2 certificate as the highest qualification. In addition, 5 respondents were experienced in teaching for 7 years and 3 respondents had experience of between 3 to 5 years. This implies that English language subject is taught by experienced teachers.

The language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing were ranked basing on their importance. 6 respondents (75%) mentioned speaking as the most important skill of the four skills and 2 respondents (25%) said that listening skill is the most important. Furthermore,7 respondents (87.5%) said that listening is the second important skill among the four skills. Reading and writing were ranked by 4 respondents as the third important skills. Even if all skills complete one another, two respondents said that speaking and listening are the most important skills before reading and writing. According to respondents,

listening is very crucial in language. The more efficient a listener you are, the more successful you'll be. Listening is not just hearing but also understanding of what is heard and make the communication process successful. Student learns better when they listen better. Speaking on the other hand, is so special. It is as very important as others. When you have words, ideas and thoughts, all you need is to express your speaking skills. Therefore, good pronunciation, choice of words and building a good vocabulary should be your priority.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **General conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to find out factors leading to the poor listening and speaking English and to identify possible strategies which can be used to improve S5HEG learners' ability in those skills.

Basing on the findings and other skills benefited from the teaching and learning process; the conclusion can be taken that English teachers must know that their students can improve more and more only when they are motivated either and given enough time and support to participate in teaching and learning activity. Another point is that, many practices which allow speaking play a big role in the improvement of language oral communicative skills. Debates, much exposure to listening and class room discussions are also very crucial in handling the language skills especially listening and speaking of the learners.

Finally, it has been noticed that when students listen actively to spoken language, try to imitate the speaking and look for meaning of difficult or strange word to them in Dictionary, their level can be improved and their problem can be solved keeping in mind that teachers are supposed to support and guide them since learners themselves hold the key to their success.

### **Recommendations**

Under this point, the researcher has suggested and offered different advice to different people as follows:

#### **Recommendations to English teachers**

Teachers especially those of English should be aware of methods and strategies which can be used to help their learners to achieve the learning objectives. They should motivate their students since motivation in learners is taken as the key factor of success. Not only this, but they also should let learners express their views and prepare many practices to them because it has been discovered that learners understand and maintain materials taught through practice.

#### **Recommendations to secondary school learners**

Students should feel confident and practice English language wherever they are because this language is the key to their understanding even in other subjects since all the material delivered to them are designed in English. They should also avoid the undesirable behaviors of negligence because every course given to them has a contribution to their progress and development in English. They are indeed reminded that disruptive behaviors are to be stopped since those behaviors anticipate their achievements. Finally, they are recommended to ask questions when they get confused in the teaching and learning process.

#### **Recommendations to the school leaders**

The school leaders should provide the students with enough materials to be used in teaching and learning process. They should offer the possible support to their student if they want them to be successful in what they are intended to learn.

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