

Investigating Factors Affecting Final Year Students' English Performance in TVET Schools of Muhanga District, Rwanda

Philogene MANIRAHARI¹, Precious Nyoni^{2,*}, Martin NDAKIZE³,
Zaituni Abubakari Salum⁴, Sylvestre NIYONKURU⁵

¹Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

²Education, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

³International College, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

⁴Confucius Institute, University of Dodoma, Dodoma, Tanzania

⁵Education, University of Rwanda, Kigali, Rwanda

*Corresponding author: preciousnyonij@gmail.com

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Abstract Rwanda's education system, English serves as the primary language of instruction, making proficiency in the language essential for students' academic success. This study investigates the factors affecting English language performance among final-year Level 5 students in TVET institutions within Muhanga District, Rwanda. Using a qualitative approach and a case study design, the research identifies critical challenges, including low student motivation, gaps in the English curriculum, insufficient instructional time, ineffective teaching methods, limited teacher expertise, inadequate resources, and an assessment system that undervalues English in TVET education. To address these issues, the study advocates for a comprehensive reform in English instruction within TVET schools. This includes integrating all four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing into curricula, increasing instructional time, improving teacher training, and refining assessment methods. Strengthening English education in TVET schools is crucial for students' academic and professional success.

Keywords: English performance, TVET schools, factors, final year students, Rwanda

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1. Introduction

English is the most widely used language globally, serving as a vital tool for communication, access to information, and opportunities, particularly on the internet. It dominates numerous industries, including trade, tourism, medicine, engineering, and technology, and facilitates access to scientific knowledge, literature, and diverse cultures [1]. As the first global language, English is essential for social and economic development, playing a central role in politics, business, security, media, entertainment, and education. Its significance makes it a critical subject in school curricula worldwide [2].

In 2008, the Rwandan government declared English as the sole medium of instruction from primary to tertiary education. According to various government officials, this decision aimed to equip learners with English proficiency, enabling active participation in global activities [3]. The rationale behind this move was grounded in the increasing prominence of English in global communication, with the

potential to become a global lingua Franca [4]. However, the adoption of English as the medium of instruction (MOI) has not yielded the anticipated levels of language proficiency. Fourteen years later, proficiency in English among Rwandan school leavers remains limited [5]. This issue persists as a concern and holds a top priority for the Rwandan Ministry of Education [6]. The labor market increasingly demands both soft and hard skills, with TVET graduates playing a vital role in national development. However, concerns persist about their workforce readiness, particularly in English proficiency. Employers prioritize effective communication alongside technical expertise [7]. Language is crucial in education, acting as the medium for learning [8]. TVET graduates often lack critical workplace skills, particularly communication, problem-solving, and collaboration. Teachers must adapt their teaching methods to prepare students for a global, technology-driven workforce [9].

Problem Statement

Language reforms in Rwanda have significantly influenced education. Between 1948 and 2008, French was the primary medium of instruction, but in 2008, the

government adopted English. Due to low teacher proficiency, Kinyarwanda was reintroduced for lower primary education in 2011, before English was reinstated in 2019 [10]. Many Rwandan teachers possess only basic (41.8%) or intermediate (43.4%) English skills, negatively affecting student performance [10]. Improving teacher English proficiency is crucial for better outcomes.

Rwanda Education Board (REB) surveys highlight that TVET graduates lack soft skills like communication and interpersonal relations, limiting employment opportunities [11]. Similarly, [12] identifies most overlooked skills in ICT industry are; time management, communication, and logical thinking. English proficiency remains a critical issue, with 58% of respondents noting that graduates without English skills struggle to secure employment or start businesses [13]. For final-year TVET students, English proficiency is essential for success in exams and employment opportunities.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to investigate factors affecting English performance for final year students of TVET Schools in Muhanga District as it is not only the taught and examined course but also play a big role in learning of other courses and therefore suggest the recommendations to TVET stakeholders for improvement. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current performance of final year students in English language learning?
2. What factors influence the effective acquisition of English language competencies?
3. What should be done by educational stakeholders to help final year students increase performance in English?

Conceptual Framework

This study employs [14] model of evaluation as its theoretical framework due to its relevance in analyzing the teaching and learning processes and their impact on students' performance in English language classes. The model comprises three components: **Causal factors**, **Auxiliary factors** and **Performance**. According to [14], high-quality Causal and Auxiliary factors are critical to fostering effective teaching and learning processes, ultimately leading to improved performance in English communication skills speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

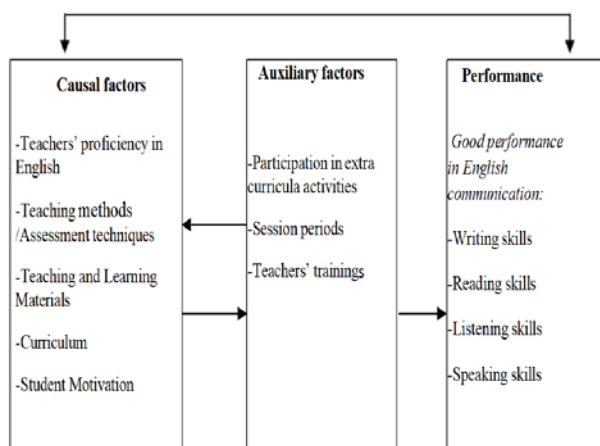


Figure 1. A Model for explaining factors affecting students' performance in English

The conceptual framework highlights factors influencing students' English performance, emphasizing the role of well-qualified English teachers skilled in second-language instruction. Effective teaching methods, adequate materials, assessments, a strong curriculum, and student motivation are essential components to language learning success. A supportive learning environment at school and home enhances English performance and other subjects taught in English. Students' attitudes toward English and their frequency of language use, both in and outside the classroom, session period and teachers trainings are also played key role to achieving proficiency. English communication is defined as a multidimensional construct involving writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills, which collectively determine proficiency and academic success.

2. Literature Review

TVET in Rwanda has evolved through significant reforms. Initially, vocational training was offered by institutions like Écoles Familiales for females and CERAR for males in the 1970s. By 1980, CERAI centers, run by districts or religious organizations, provided two-year programs for students ineligible for secondary education. From 1979 to 2009, École Technique Officielle (ETO) institutions offered technical education and awarded A3 and A2 certificates. Post-1994, additional ETOs were established to expand technical education.

In 2008, the government established the Workforce Development Authority (WDA) to address skills development. WDA introduced competency-based training (CBT) in 2015, aligning curricula with labor market demands. CBT-based curricula were rolled out across trades up to level 5 by 2019. By 2018, WDA's functions were restructured under Rwanda Polytechnic (RP), which supervises Integrated Polytechnic Regional Centers (IPRCs). Further reform in 2020 replaced WDA with the Rwanda TVET Board (RTB), responsible for TVET up to level 5, while RP oversees levels 6-8.

Causes of Poor English Performance among Students

Several factors contribute to the poor English performance of TVET students. Many come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, limiting their exposure and proficiency in the language, which hampers communication and comprehension [15]. Challenges in English instruction, such as a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate resources, and ineffective methods, further hinder language skill development.

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom through literature, media, or conversations impedes language acquisition [16]. Additionally, low motivation and interest in learning English negatively affect performance. Overcrowded classrooms and insufficient individual attention exacerbate the issue, reducing opportunities for personalized instruction and feedback [15]. Socioeconomic factors also play a role, with limited access to resources, lack of educational support at home, and financial constraints affecting students' ability to enhance their English proficiency beyond school.

Addressing these challenges is critical to improving English language outcomes in TVET education.

Factors Affecting Students' English Performance

Student Factors

Effective learning relies on active student participation and a dynamic, goal-oriented process [17]. In language acquisition, students play a central role, and a positive attitude strongly correlates with successful outcomes, while negative attitudes hinder progress [18,19]. Researchers highlighted that learners with a positive outlook are more successful, while negative attitudes impair language learning [20].

[21] found that TVET students often prioritize practical knowledge and hands-on skills over language learning. However, language proficiency is vital for understanding course materials and excelling in academic tasks like discussions, presentations, and examinations [22]. Students with limited proficiency in the language of instruction face significant challenges in comprehending teachers, answering questions, completing assignments, and performing assessments effectively. Language skills are therefore indispensable for both academic success and professional development.

School Factors

Teachers Proficiency in English

English language teachers are critical to student learning, bridging the gap between learners and the curriculum. Their professionalism is reflected in teaching methods, communication skills, and approachability. Fluency in English entails effectively conveying ideas and concepts [23]. In Rwanda, teachers face challenges due to limited English proficiency, as they were abruptly required to teach in English after using French. A British Council study (2019) revealed 66% of secondary school teachers lacked sufficient English skills, with many having only basic or no teaching experience in English. Furthermore, only 35% of teachers received formal English training, while 65% relied on informal methods. Teachers often use informal language to help students understand, compromising education quality [24]. Insufficient English skills hinder teachers' instructional goals, negatively impacting student performance and the education system.

Techniques Used to Teach and Assess English Skills

Methodology is crucial to the teaching and learning process. Students like studying from teachers who employ excellent teaching tactics, which results in enhanced performance and learning. A technique is a tool in a teacher's competence that informs them on how to transfer information and skills; the approach they choose will determine their capacity to achieve their goals and their personal success as educators [25]. There are different techniques or method used to teach English and each one can be suitable depending on kind of English taught and its purpose. The following methods are commonly used around the world:

Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is a traditional, teacher-centered approach that emphasizes translation between the native and target languages. Students focus on memorizing extensive vocabulary lists and mastering complex grammatical rules [26]. GTM prioritizes reading and writing while neglecting oral skills

and pronunciation [27]. Although widely used for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), it is criticized for not fostering verbal communication or real-world language use, focusing instead on accuracy over fluency [28].

Natural Approach/Direct Method

The Direct Method, also called the Natural Approach, focuses on immersion in the target language, prohibiting the use of the students' native language in class [29]. Unlike GTM, it prioritizes oral proficiency and real-time communication. Translation is avoided, and students learn language through speaking and listening. However, its application is often limited due to teachers' insufficient English proficiency.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT emphasizes real-world tasks, such as interviews or ordering food, to teach language skills [30]. It is particularly effective in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where the curriculum is tailored to specific technical or professional needs. However, its implementation in technical schools is limited due to teachers' lack of training in task-based methods, hindering its potential to develop subject-specific English communication skills.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is a learner-centered approach that emphasizes using language for real-world communication [31]. It focuses on both grammatical accuracy and communicative competence, engaging students in interactive activities such as role-playing and inquiry-based tasks. CLT is particularly effective for teaching ESP, as it prepares learners for professional communication within specific fields.

Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)

ALM focuses on speaking and listening, with language taught through drills and repetition [31]. Audiovisual resources enhance learning by illustrating complex concepts, making ALM effective for ESP contexts [32]. However, its emphasis on rote learning and the exclusion of the native language limits its applicability in modern classrooms.

Computer-Assisted English Learning (CALL)

CALL leverages digital tools to enhance language learning, engaging students through interactive resources and fostering motivation [33]. It is widely adopted due to its flexibility and alignment with modern technological advancements.

Availability of Teaching/Learning Materials

[34] established a positive correlation between the availability of teaching resources and students' academic performance in technical education, demonstrating that a 100% increase in resources leads to a 28% improvement in performance. In a study of Rwandan public secondary schools, [35] identified physical resources as key determinants of student achievement, highlighting a persistent shortage of essential educational inputs. [36] highlighted the importance of instructional resources such as dictionaries and course books in enhancing language learning and communication skills. However, technical secondary schools in Rwanda often face significant resource gaps, including a lack of electronic devices for listening practice, insufficient course books, and unreliable internet access, compelling students to rely heavily on teachers as their primary learning resource.

School Management

Effective school management, driven by visionary principals, is critical for academic success. [37] emphasized principals' roles as mentors and highlighted how administrative experience and training shape school culture and problem-solving. [38] noted the importance of disciplinary expertise in creating a conducive learning environment. A strong academic culture that values learning enhances student achievement. Principals play a pivotal role in managing instructional programs and driving educational success. [39] identified key leadership responsibilities, including shaping academic vision, fostering a supportive climate, and improving instruction. High-performing schools demonstrate leadership behaviors such as high expectations, professional autonomy, and achievement recognition. Visionary leadership, a supportive school culture, and effective management significantly impact students' English performance.

Government Factors

English as Medium Language of Instruction

In 2008, Rwanda adopted English as the language of instruction, replacing French, to align with regional integration goals and global labor market demands [24]. English proficiency is essential for career opportunities, cultural engagement, and socioeconomic mobility [40]. [41] highlighted English fluency as critical for workplace success, especially in roles like marketing, customer service, and management. Effective communication skills, including email writing and public speaking, are increasingly vital for graduates [42]. However, proficiency gaps persist due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom and insufficient skilled teachers. Addressing these gaps is crucial for preparing students to navigate global opportunities.

National Curriculum

The term "curriculum" derives from the Latin "currere," meaning "to run," symbolizing an educational journey [43]. The researcher described curriculum as a dynamic teaching and learning process, encompassing content, pedagogy, and evaluation. [44] emphasized curriculum relevance to daily life, integrating activities, textbooks, and learning objectives. In Rwanda, TVET curricula focus on equipping learners with skills aligned to labor market demands. However, gaps persist, particularly in English instruction. Current curricula do not differentiate between English for General Purpose (EGP) and English for Specific Purpose (ESP), with limited classroom hours hindering comprehensive language skills acquisition. Additionally, some teachers lack proficiency in English, affecting student outcomes. Enhancing the curriculum to address these challenges is essential for achieving learning objectives.

Environment Factors

Parental and home environmental factors significantly impact academic achievement, particularly in language acquisition through positive interactions at home. In Rwanda's monolingual society, Kinyarwanda's dominance limits English exposure, hindering students' proficiency and motivation [24]. Teachers transitioning from French to English instruction face challenges, compounded by a shortage of skilled English teachers. Early language experiences, such as parent-child interactions, reading, and consistent routines, play a critical role in developing

linguistic and literacy skills [45]. Family contributions, including those from siblings and grandparents, further enrich children's language environments [46]. Parents' educational backgrounds also influence children's academic success, with educated parents ensuring better access to resources, while uneducated parents value education for career prospects. A language-rich home environment is vital for improving English proficiency and academic outcomes [47].

3. Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore participants' perspectives and experiences within specific contexts. Qualitative research focuses on interpreting the meaning of social or human issues through data collected from participants' environments [48]. A case study design was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews, structured observations, and document reviews as primary data collection methods.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth conversations with English and technical subject instructors, as well as Deputy School Managers overseeing studies in four TVET institutions [49]. Observations methodically documented interactions, notices, and classroom activities to evaluate English usage in these schools. Document reviews examined students' English performance in the 2019, 2021, and 2022 TVET national exams [50]. This comprehensive approach enabled a thorough understanding of English usage in four TVET schools within Muhanga District.

Study Population and Sampling Methods

The research focused on teachers and Deputy School Managers from four TVET institutions in Muhanga District, chosen for its high concentration of TVET schools (14) and its role in piloting the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2015. The selected schools represented diverse contexts, including rural and urban areas, public and private ownership, and collectively offered 47% of certified trades or programs (16 out of 34).

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants capable of providing relevant insights [51]. The sample comprised 16 teachers (eight English and eight technical subject instructors) and four Deputy School Managers. English teachers were chosen for their role in language instruction, while technical teachers offered perspectives on English's importance in technical education. All participants had at least three years of professional experience to ensure familiarity with CBC implementation, as the first cohort under this curriculum was examined in 2019. Deputy School Managers, responsible for overseeing teaching and learning activities, provided expert viewpoints. Document analysis included students' English results in TVET national exams (2019, 2021 and 2022) and ministerial instructions governing national examinations, ensuring a balance of qualitative insights and performance data.

Data Collection Tools and Analysis

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 16 teachers and 4 Deputy School Managers, allowing for detailed and flexible questioning. The interview guide

underwent pilot testing for accuracy and consistency. Direct observations recorded natural behaviors, including dialogues with graduating students and participation in English lessons, using a structured observation form to ensure systematic data collection. Document analysis encompassed national test scores and ministerial directives, providing insights into students' English performance and addressing certain ethical considerations. Data analysis followed thematic methods involve the organization and categorization of information from interviews, observations, and documents to extract meaning.

Validity, Reliability and Ethical Consideration

Validity ensures research instruments accurately measure intended variables, experts reviewed instruments for alignment with study objectives [53], and the clarity and relevance of interview guides were pre-tested on teachers and a Deputy School Manager. A standardized formula ensured consistent analysis of students' English performance across schools. Reliability was reinforced by piloting interview guides with 10% of the sample population, who were excluded from the study. Triangulation and the half-split technique further enhanced reliability.

Ethical standards prioritized anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy. Participants signed consent forms, were free to withdraw at any time, and findings were transparently presented without manipulation. Coding protected respondents' identities, minimizing potential harm. A research clearance letter from Muhanga District Administration confirmed compliance with ethical guidelines and facilitated access to schools for data collection.

4. Findings

Current Status of Students' English Performance

To gain insights into the English language proficiency of final-year students, the study examined the TVET national written examination results for the years 2019, 2021 and 2022 using a specific framework established by NESAC. The framework categorized students' English performance as follows:

Table 1. The Standards Based Grading (SBG) applied for the year 2019 & 2021

Category	Description	Percentage range (%)
A	Excellent	70-100
B	Very good	65-69
C	Good	60-64
D	Satisfactory	50-59
E	Adequate	40-49
S	Fair	20-39
F	Fail	0-19

To calculate the average English performance of students in the TVET national written examination for a specific trade, we used the formula: Sum of (Number of students in a category * Value of that category based on the minimum limit) divided by the total number of students in that trade. Competence in English is considered a crucial factor with a positive impact on

students' performance. Upon analyzing the TVET national written examination results in 2019 and 2021, it became evident that English language performance was subpar. The study's findings encompass the results from three TVET schools and are presented as follows.

Description of Students' Performance in School A

The analysis of English performance at School A (Figure 2) highlights its performance across various trades: Crop Production, Accounting, Business Services, Animal Health, and Forestry for the years 2019 and 2021. In 2019, the average performance percentages in these trades were 30%, 32%, 37%, 38%, and 38.8%, respectively, all rated as "Fair." Performance remained relatively stable in 2021, with Crop Production at 34%, Accounting at 34%, Business Services at 36%, Animal Health at 29%, and Forestry at 32.8%. Notably, English performance among final-year students in the National Examination was a concern, with average scores consistently below 50%.

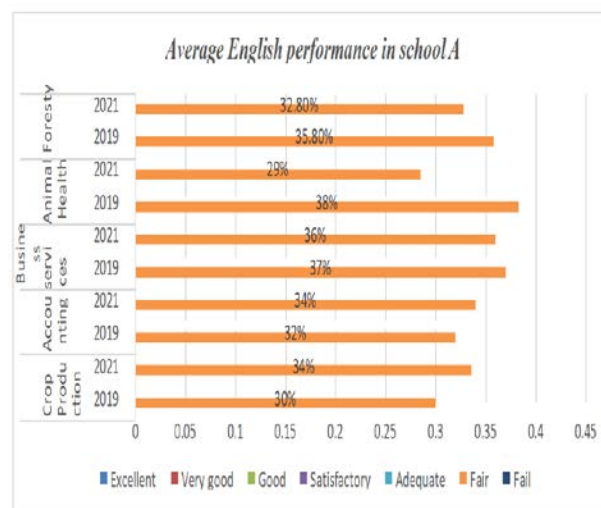


Figure 2. Graph represents the average English performance in school A

Description of students' performance in school B

The graph (Figure 3) illustrates School B's English performance in the Accounting and Networking trades for 2019 and 2021. In both years, the school averaged 49% in Accounting, rated as "Adequate" (E), while Networking averaged 53%, classified as "Satisfactory" (D). In 2021, Accounting's average slightly decreased to 45.7%, whereas Networking increased to 54%, indicating stagnant English performance overall.

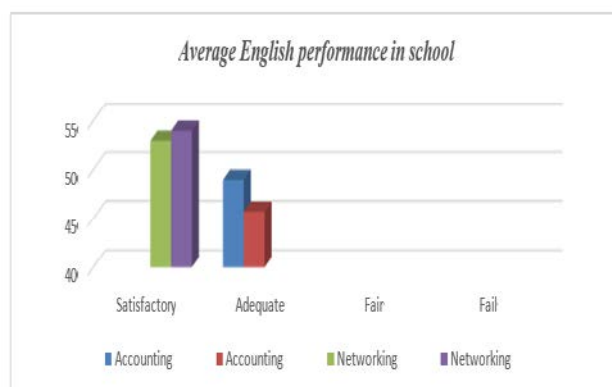


Figure 3. Graph shows the average English performance in school B

Description of students' performance in school C

School C (Figure 4) specializes in Automobile Electricity & Electronics and Industrial Electricity trades. In 2019 and 2021, the school maintained an average performance of 32.6% in Automobile Electricity & Electronics, classified as "Fair," and 24% in Industrial Electricity, also rated "Fair." By 2021, performance slightly improved to 35% in Automobile Electricity & Electronics and 27% in Industrial Electricity. Despite these improvements, the overall proficiency level remains low, highlighting the need to enhance English performance among TVET students.

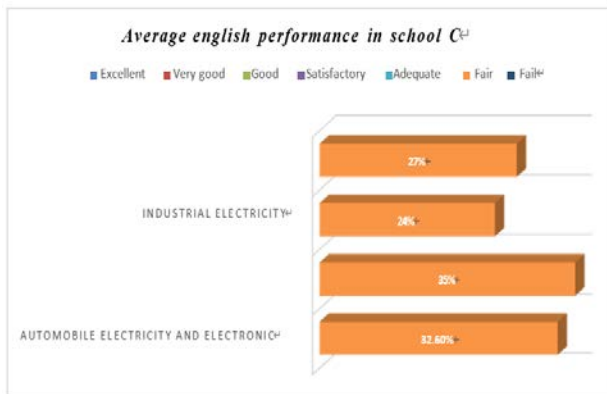


Figure 4. Graph presents the average English performance in school C

While analyzing the 2022 examination results, we faced challenges due to the NESA's shift to a new reporting format that only provided total marks for candidates, obscuring subject-specific performance insights crucial for identifying improvement areas.

Factors Contributing to Students Poor Performance in English

The findings have unveiled various factors that contribute to the current state of English performance. These factors are categorized into four main groups: students' related factors, school factors, government factors, and environmental factors. The discussion delves into the specific aspects within each category, providing insights into the multifaceted influences that shape the overall proficiency in English.

Findings Related to Students Factors

Low Student motivation

Motivation plays a crucial role in academic performance, particularly in language learning. Research indicates that positive attitudes significantly enhance language acquisition, while negative attitudes hinder it, as noted by [20] this correlation was similar views among respondents:

"Unfortunately, TVET students were attributed less value to English language by assigning low importance when compared to other technical courses. This results in the lack of interest in learning English which, in turn, prompts absenteeism during English class sessions."(Respondent A1T2)

Additionally, some respondents claimed that language preference and spirit was very low as the prevailing language preference is Kinyarwanda, which hampers the enthusiasm for using English.

"English is not commonly spoken in Rwanda, with only

15% of the population using it. As a result, students prefer Kinyarwanda, their native and widely spoken language, for daily interactions, avoiding the use of English in their everyday communication." (Respondent E1D1)

"Students try to utilize English throughout class, but when it comes time to break, everyone puts down the burden of speaking English and feels more at ease communicating in Kinyarwanda." (Respondent N1T1)

According to Skinner's behaviorism theory [53] language is learnt through habit formation, repetition and drills. Therefore, students who do not practice English regularly tend to fail in English skills acquisition. [14] observed that learning outcome maximization requires combination of skills that are gained through the involvement in different activities.

Ineffective students' effort to learn English

The researchers found that students show limited engagement in extracurricular activities aimed at improving English language skills, with low participation indicating a lack of initiative to enhance their proficiency. Despite the availability of school-organized English clubs, student involvement in these programs is still insufficient.

"According to recent school statistics on club activities, we noted that the number of students who decided to join the language club was still below 5% among the total students enrolled in the school which shows how students tend to avoid speaking English with their peers"(Respondent E1D1)

In addition to the perspectives shared earlier, another respondent offers valuable insights on the matter, supporting and complementing the previously expressed opinions.

"Even during class period students often resort to quick recollection of memorized content for presenting, rather than engaging in meaningful language use. Some students may not fully engage during class presentations, potentially reflecting challenges in effective language communication." (Respondent A1D1)

English language learning faces challenges related to its perceived value, the dominance of Kinyarwanda, students' motivation, and classroom dynamics.

Findings Related to School factors

Low English proficiency for teachers

English language teachers must be proficient in the language [54]. They need to have some proficiency in the language to teach English effectively. For English education to be effective, teachers' proficiency in the language is crucial.

Unfortunately, among 8 English teachers interviewed had no English proficiency certificate which can expressed low level of English skill therefore impacted performance of students in English.

The presence or absence of English proficiency certificates among teachers impacts their teaching effectiveness such as having challenge of limited methods familiarity among the top 6 techniques used to teach English.

Respondent E1T2 stated, *"I primarily use the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method"*. While another respondent N1T2 mentioned their preference for the Grammar- Translation Method (GTM). Interestingly, one of the interviewees A1T1 reported using

both methods.

Despite TVET trainer certificate courses provided to many teachers, gaps in English designed training are challenges, as mentioned by respondents.

“While the Rwanda TVET Trainers Institute (RTTI) does offer pedagogy training programs like the TVET trainer course and Senior TVET trainer course, there is a deficiency in addressing English specificity with the required standards.” (Respondent N1D1)

“We aspire to enhance our support for students, enabling them to acquire additional skills and become proficient in using English. Unfortunately, our ability to achieve this goal is constrained by our current level of English, which still requires improvement. We have encountered challenges in the education system, particularly due to changes in the language of instruction.” (Respondent P1T1&A1T2)

Shortage of teaching and learning materials for English

Learning materials are essential for English language acquisition, supporting content delivery, practice, real-world application, cultural competence, self-directed learning and diverse instructional needs.

“We don’t have English books in our TVET School since I have started the teaching job in 2018, the only arrangement to get books is to borrow from colleagues who own their books.” (Respondent A1T1)

The scarcity of teaching and learning materials for English has a profound impact on the quality of educational practices.

Ineffective school administration

The findings on school management in TVET schools highlight persistent challenges despite existing accountability structures. Key issues include weak collaboration with teaching staff, limited teamwork in problem-solving, and insufficient promotion of School Teaching-Based Research (STBR) initiatives.

“One notable area of concern is the insufficient emphasis on building strong cooperation with teaching staff, whereby teachers are still working independently in subject session planning, delivery, and evaluation. This lack of collaboration leads to communication breakdowns, impedes the implementation of educational strategies, and hinders the overall effectiveness of the school.” (Respondent E1T1&A1T3)

Findings Related to Government Factors

Curriculum deficiencies in English language skills acquisition

The current English curriculum in TVET schools lacks alignment with the specific needs of various technical trades, diminishing student engagement. The uniform English complementary module is taught across all 34 trades, disregarding the unique communication requirements of each sector.

“The English curriculum does not cater to the specific needs of different technical trades, which hampers student engagement and interest. The national exam's general nature is more suitable for linguistic topics rather than technical trades. Therefore, it is recommended that English curriculum be tailored to the requirements of each technical trade, aligning with trade specifications. This would enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the

curriculum”. (Respondent E1D1)

Interviews revealed key challenges in the current English curriculum, emphasizing its lack of trade-specific focus, which reduces student engagement. Participants noted that the curriculum's general linguistic orientation, especially in national exams, disconnects from students' technical trades.

Misalignment of curriculum content with available time

Some respondents pointed out that there is short time to adequately cover all the required material because the curriculum's content doesn't match the amount of instructional time provided.

“The curriculum's content present mismatch with the available time for instruction, resulting in a shortage of time to cover all the necessary material effectively. We only focus on knowledge and skills that are mostly assessed in Nation examination which is mostly grammar”. (Respondent A1T1&N1T1)

The participatory observation supports interview findings and highlights concerns in Rwandan TVET English assessment, which heavily emphasizes writing and grammar over reading, speaking, and listening, limiting students' overall language competence in vocational settings. Another issue is the grading system under NESA, following Ministerial Order No. 001/MINEDUC/2021, where a revised scale since 2019, including a 30-point "A" range (70–100), raises concerns about grade inflation and accuracy. For auxiliary subjects like English, introduced in 2022 TVET exams, a separate system assigns an "S" (value 1) for scores $\geq 40\%$ and an "F" (value 0) for lower scores, sparking debates on fairness and proficiency representation.

5. Discussion

Students Motivation toward Performance

Motivation significantly influences students' engagement, dedication, and academic success. In second language acquisition, self-motivation, driven by perceived competence and autonomy, is crucial [55]. However, TVET students often undervalue language proficiency, perceiving English as a barrier rather than a resource. Since English is treated as a prerequisite rather than a core subject in TVET curricula, its instruction faces challenges [56]. Many students prioritize technical skills over language learning, which can further reduce motivation [21]. Positive attitudes toward language learning are essential for academic success, whereas negative perceptions hinder progress. This is evident in students' low participation in English clubs, frequent use of their mother tongue, and reluctance to engage in class presentations, all of which contribute to poor motivation and performance.

The link between motivation and academic achievement aligns with Bloom's Taxonomy, as motivated students engage more with higher-order thinking skills. Teachers who understand this connection can create stimulating learning environments that support cognitive development, encourage lifelong learning, and improve overall academic outcomes.

Effective English Language Teaching and Assessment

The methodology used in teaching English greatly influences student performance. Effective teaching methods lead to improved comprehension and better outcomes [25]. Several approaches are used to cater different aspects of language acquisition. However, the implementation of these methods is constrained by limited resources, as well as teachers' insufficient training in these techniques [57]. Many TVET schools lack the necessary materials and qualified teachers to deliver high-quality English language instruction. As a result, English instruction often becomes inadequate.

In addition, assessments play a critical role in motivating students to perform well. In TVET, English assessments focus mainly on writing, neglecting the other essential skills listening, speaking, and reading which are crucial for effective communication [20]. This limitation in assessment design contributes to graduates' inadequate language skills, which affects their employability. A comprehensive assessment approach like IELTS and TOEFL assessment techniques is needed, aligning with all four language skills, which is necessary to testify students' language proficiency.

Proper Recruitment Mechanism and Professional Training in English Language Teaching

Teachers' self-perceptions of their language abilities are vital for their confidence and effectiveness in teaching [58]. However, in Rwanda, the recruitment of English language teachers for TVET schools often focuses solely on academic qualifications and experience, without considering the required proficiency in English [59]. This is compounded by the historical shift in the language of instruction from French to English in 2008, which left many teachers unprepared for teaching in English, further affecting students' language learning.

Professional development for TVET teachers, particularly in English proficiency, is limited. This lack of training prevents teachers from achieving the necessary English language standards required for effective teaching [59]. Moreover, there is a need for English proficiency programs, such as IELTS and TOEFL, to help teachers improve their language skills. A robust recruitment and training system that emphasizes language proficiency and teaching effectiveness is crucial for fostering a positive language learning environment.

Curriculum Alignment

A well-designed curriculum is essential for facilitating student learning and achievement [45]. In TVET, however, there is a misalignment between the English curriculum and the needs of vocational programs. The English module is often given insufficient instructional time, limiting students' ability to fully grasp the necessary language skills. Additionally, the curriculum does not always align with the cognitive levels outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy, which impedes students' progress in language acquisition. The integration of language skills into the curriculum at all cognitive stages ensures that students not only acquire language proficiency but also develop critical thinking and communication skills essential for success in the global workforce.

Comprehensive Grading System

A transparent and well-understood grading system can significantly impact student motivation and performance. Research has shown that when students are unclear about

how their performance is evaluated, they may not put in the necessary effort [60]. Unfortunately, in many TVET schools, students and teachers lack awareness of the grading system (Standard based grading applied from 2022 for subsidiary subjects), which leads to a lack of motivation to improve performance in English courses.

A comprehensive grading system that includes clear expectations for learning objectives and assessments at different cognitive levels enhances student motivation. Through aligning grading criteria with Bloom's Taxonomy, teachers can encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills, which are vital for academic and professional success. This transparent system can help students understand the relevance of their learning and improve their engagement with the subject matter.

English Language Environment Reinforcement

A strong English language environment is crucial for reinforcing language skills outside the classroom. In TVET schools, there is currently a lack of initiatives to encourage English use in daily interactions, limiting students' opportunities to practice the language [61]. To address this, schools can create English language clubs and encourage teachers to integrate English into their everyday interactions with students [62]. Furthermore, incorporating English into daily activities, such as announcements and signage, can help normalize the language and provide students with consistent exposure. A systemic approach to reinforcing the use of English in all aspects of school life can promote language development and create a culture of English language proficiency. By addressing cultural barriers and providing diverse opportunities for English practice, TVET schools can better prepare students for success in a globalized job market [63].

6. Conclusion

The study on factors affecting English performance among final-year TVET students in Muhanga District, Rwanda, highlights an urgent issue. Findings align with global trends, where English proficiency is crucial for career prospects and Rwanda's development goals. Rwanda's membership in the East African Community (EAC) and the Commonwealth expands opportunities for collaboration and employment, reinforcing the need for strong English skills. Additionally, the government's success in attracting foreign investment exposes a proficiency gap among technicians, hindering business operations. Without strong language skills, TVET graduates face barriers to global opportunities.

7. Recommendations

To address the low English proficiency among TVET students, a comprehensive strategy is needed. Teachers must focus on developing students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills using diverse teaching methods tailored to student needs. Technical teachers should improve their English proficiency to effectively teach technical terms and prepare students for workplace demands. Professional development, including refresher

courses and certifications like TOEFL or IELTS, is crucial for English teachers to improve teaching quality.

TVET schools should establish an English-friendly environment through language clubs, debates, and activities encouraging English usage. Drawing inspiration from Shanghai's School-Based Teaching Research (SBTR) model, collaborative research among English teachers can help to improve curriculum implementation and instructional quality based on students' needs. Curriculum should integrate trade-specific needs while ensuring balanced language skill development. Teaching materials and methods must align with technical education's unique demands. Exam systems should evaluate all language skills using international standards like TOEFL and IELTS assessment model.

Motivating students through extracurricular activities, individualized coaching, and academic competitions can enhance oral proficiency and confidence. Collaborative efforts between schools leaders and teachers should foster a supportive environment encouraging active English use. Additionally, team teaching and specialization reduce teacher stress linked to linguistic insecurities. The government must allocate sufficient resources to TVET schools and recruit qualified English teachers with recognized certifications. This promotes English language use and improved communication skills, thereby increasing TVET graduates' employability and workplace success.

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