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Perceptions of Burundian Fundamental School English Teachers about the Adequacy of Their Training

Consolation Mugisha^{1*}, Barthélemy Cimpaye², Nicolas Kirehane¹, Lucien Nahishakiye¹, Dyna Kwizera¹, Claudine Nibitanga¹, Etienne Katabirora¹, Agrippine Dukundimana¹, Daniel Nsanzubukire¹, Abraham Ntwengerabansi¹, Vénuste Niyongabo¹

¹Faculty of Educational Sciences, Hope Africa University, BI-Bujumbura, Burundi ²Doctoral School, University of Burundi, BI-Bujumbura, Burundi Email: *mconsolation1976@gmail.com

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of 5th and 6th grades English teachers in Burundi fundamental school about their preservice and in-service training and their adequacy to teach English. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected via questionnaires administered to teachers in Bujumbura, the economic capital and a focus group with teachers in Gitega, the political capital. Teachers were asked about their own skills in speaking, understanding, writing and reading English and their ability to teach these skills. Teachers were also asked what skills and resources they need to become better English teachers. Findings reveal that teachers perceive they do not have proficiency in English and are not skilled enough to teach it. There is a need to reform the fundamental school teacher-training program in English and provide adequate and continuous in-service training for all the practicing English teachers to provide them with the necessary knowledge, skills, competence and methods to teach English.

Keywords

Fundamental School, English, Teachers, Training, Burundi

1. Introduction

Burundi is a member of the East African Community since July 2010 and is located in East-central Africa between Tanzania in the east, the Democratic Republic of Congo in the west and the Republic of Rwanda in the north. It has experienced political instability and violence throughout its history. The civil con-

flict and political crisis, which exploded in the nation, has severely affected Burundian society, hindering its progress and development. These issues caused challenges in Burundi educational system including limited access to education, high dropout rates and low quality of education. The two first challenges are mainly attributable to poverty and the last one to the lack of qualified teachers, teaching materials, financial resources, inadequate teacher training and outdated curriculum.

After a long period of economic and political crisis, the Burundi government has committed to reforming its education system for a quality universal primary education. The abolition of school fees for fundamental education in 2005 is one of the main decisions aimed at promoting the education for all.

Since the 2006-2007 school year, the Burundian government has introduced four languages (namely French, Kirundi, English and Kiswahili) to teach from the first year of primary school. The initiative of introducing four languages in fundamental school can be explained, given the geopolitical environment of Burundi since joining the East African Community. As English and Kiswahili are the main working languages, Burundi had a duty to adopt a language policy through education, enabling its population to take an active part in the building of this community in order to derive all the benefits. However, a few years after, the Government realized that to teach simultaneously four languages from the first grade is not possible because of various challenges, among others, the low language proficiency of teachers, particularly in English and Kiswahili. The Government then decided to introduce these languages on a phased basis. So, referring to the decree N° 100/078 of 22 May 2019 fixing languages of instruction and phasing the languages taught in fundamental school, Kirundi is the language of instruction in the first and second cycles of fundamental education, French is the language of instruction from the third cycle of the fundamental education, English is taught from the third grade of fundamental education and Kiswahili is taught from the fifth grade of fundamental education (President Cabinet, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of 5th and 6th grades fundamental school English teachers about their initial and in-service training and their adequacy to teach English in order to establish the suitability of the training necessary for the success and effectiveness of English language teaching/learning in Burundi fundamental schools.

Burundi Fundamental school is composed of four cycles: cycle1 made of first and second grades; cycle2 made of third and fourth grades; cycle3 made of fifth and sixth grades and the cycle4 made of seventh, eighth and ninth grades. The rationale for choosing 5th and 6th grades of fundamental school is based on the fact that from these levels all of the four basic English skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are taught. In addition, the 5th and 6th grades are the transition between the second and fourth cycles. Furthermore, in the third cycle (5th and 6th grades), a class is held by one teacher who has to teach all subjects matters; note that the teachers of the third cycle didn't undergo the English teaching

program, then they are not qualified in English language teaching. Whereas, in the fourth cycle (7th, 8th and 9th grades), each subject matter has a qualified teacher.

The specialty of analysis from teachers' perception is that teachers are the only education stakeholders who know and have the special perception of the problems in the classroom. The perceptions of teachers determine the effectiveness of teaching-learning process in a positive or negative way. Considering teachers' viewpoints in curriculum changes, for example, leads to effective curriculum implementation, and thus, learner performance is enhanced. Analysis from teachers' perceptions helps identify the major challenges teachers face in the implementation of a curriculum and get their opinions about this situation. Even though so many things can be done to create a context for good teaching, it is teachers themselves who ultimately determine the success of a program.

2. Literature Review

In general, effective and successful teaching/learning has to meet some requirements, and the competent teacher is central in this enterprise. Ogunyinka, Okeke, and Adedovin (2015) say that teachers' competence will be enhanced as they have close contact and diverse interaction with its environment as well as being able to anticipate and influence factors which will bear upon teaching in the future. So this calls for teachers having mastered their various subjects to also have command over a wide repertoire of different teaching methods and strategies (pedagogy) as well as understanding of the learning process of students. This means that effective and successful teaching/learning requires a competent teacher, who is able to manage all sorts of factors likely to influence the teaching/learning process. Such a teacher has to have mastered the subject to teach, the methods and strategies to use depending on the students' learning process. In education, teacher plays as a tool to deliver what has been planned by the government for national education and applies it in the classroom. The role of this tool is very significant. No matter how good government's plans for national education, no matter how good the policy or curriculum the government has prepared, it will be meaningless if teachers do not know how to apply or develop it properly to meet the needs of students (Adnyani, 2015).

As such, it is so crucial to have teachers who have the skills and competence to organize and structure classroom activities. According to Krsmanović and Petrović (2009), core components of teacher knowledge include:

- Practical knowledge: the teacher's repertoire of classroom techniques and strategies;
- Content knowledge: the teacher's competence of the subject and the teaching theories;
- Contextual knowledge: familiarity with school context, norms, cultural and other relevant information;
 - Pedagogical knowledge: ability to restructure content knowledge for teach-

ing purposes and to plan, adapt, improvise;

- Personal knowledge: the teacher's personal belief and principles, and his/her individual approach to teaching;
- Reflective knowledge: the teacher's capacity to reflect on and access his/her own practice.

In the same vein, Shulman (1987) cited in Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor and Westbrook (2013) point out that beginning teachers need to know about the content matter to be taught and how to engage with learners and manage a classroom. But, for these two kinds of knowledge to guide actual practice, a third category is crucial: pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). This involves knowing how to represent and formulate the subject matter in a way that makes it comprehensible to students.

Cooper (1999) express the power of teachers who possess PCK saying that such teachers are able to translate the content knowledge they possess into forms that have great teaching power and that meet the needs and abilities of students. Such teachers understand the central topics in each subject, those aspects that are most difficult for students to learn, and what student preconceptions are likely to get in the way of learning. These teachers draw on powerful examples, illustrations, analogies, demonstrations, and explanations to represent and transform the subject so that students can understand it.

These are the different categories of knowledge that each effective teacher should have and which cannot be acquired anywhere but at teacher training institutions during the initial (pre-service) teacher training course program. Underlining the significance of pre-service teacher education, Akyeampong et al. (2013) state that initial teacher training remains the most powerful influence on the practice of teachers in the early part of their career. It provides the knowledge and understanding that they fall back on to justify and generate their classroom practice, even those who have taken further courses.

If educational authorities are aiming to provide quality education, then the first area that they might logically look at is teacher education, particularly pre-service primary teacher education. Since teachers are recognized as a critical factor in the provision of quality education, it is helpful to examine their professional preparation at the pre-service level. This is the initial point at which future teachers begin to shape their professional competencies. Inadequately prepared teachers will face difficulties in carrying out their work effectively (Govinda, 2004).

By all of this, it is understandable that it is the pre-service teacher training that constitutes the basis of all sorts of knowledge that a teacher receives during his/her career. That is why the teacher's pre-service training should put much more attention on the subject matters that a teacher will be required to teach at the end of his/her studies, so as to be able to provide effectively his/her lessons.

In particular, effective and successful teaching/learning of English as a second language has its specific requirements. The first and foremost requirement for the English teaching/learning to be effective and successful is the presence of trained teachers who know as much as possible about the English language. Butoyi (2010) specify that in order to be called a trained English teacher, one has to undergo professional training for the job. Moreover, he/she has to have completed and succeeded in the teacher education course in a known academic organization and be certified. It is the certificate gained successfully at the end of the teacher preparation program that will be a major ingredient for his/her self-confidence. For Ndindamihigo (2016), the teaching/learning process of English as Foreign Language rests on a good command of the productive skills (writing and speaking) and the receptive skills (listening and reading); the methods and the ability of teaching aids. Ndayizigiye (2016) espouses the same idea by stating that the only indispensable and rewarding way to teach English effectively is to give activities based on the four basic skills, which means that the teacher himself should master these skills before entering his career so as to be able to teach them on his return. He says that effective English teaching should emphasize oral, writing, reading and listening activities because language learning becomes a rewarding process when someone is able to speak, write, read and listen it.

In addition to the four Basic English skills cited above, every English teacher needs to be skilled in phonetics as well as in grammar. Concerning phonetics, an English teacher will have to make the learners able to recognize graphic symbols and produce the form of a new vocabulary item as well as understand its meaning and use. He will have to teach how the new item is pronounced and how it is written. Ndayishimiye and Niyonkuru (2015) assert that: When the task of pronouncing and spelling words is not achieved, there may raise misunderstanding between the teacher and learners. As far as grammar is concerned, an English teacher needs to know how to explain grammar concepts like conjugation, comparison and tenses. Of course, he should have the ability to explain key grammar skills clearly and effectively in target language.

In no words, it is compulsory for English teachers to know as much as possible about this language. They must have English proficiency and skills to easily deliver their teachings. They need to be fully skilled in writing, reading, listening and speaking. Besides, they necessarily need to know the English language learning process and the methods and strategies to use. Strevens (1977) claims that the general effectiveness of language teaching is heavenly dependent on the nature and quality of the training that teachers undergo before entering their profession.

Research on teacher training has also consistently stressed the need to regularly provide opportunities for teachers to improve their knowledge of the subject matter they teach and the teaching skills they learned in the pre-service courses they attended. Kabunda (2013) expresses the need for a teacher to continue to learn saying that good teachers are continually improving themselves by going back to college; joining professional organizations; attending conventions, conferences, and workshops; paying attention at in-service meetings; and working cooperatively with others on the staff to improve student achievement.

Stating this, Kabunda is affirming that if a teacher does not get the opportunity to continually receive more information about his/her career, his/her students' achievement will never be improved. It means that the knowledge acquired in schools is not enough for a teacher who wants to remain useful and effective in his/her profession. In the same light, Dorcas (2013) recognizes that an effective implementation of every curriculum must begin with strengthening the capacity of existing teaching force through in-service training and re-training. This will disseminate innovative practical skills that will enhance the teachers' effectiveness and thereby enhance the quality of learning, update the teachers' knowledge of subject matter, contribute to the development of positive attitude and self-concept by teachers, and enable teachers to make pupils perceive learning as an interesting pleasant activity that promotes self-understanding, inquiry and critical thinking. Here, the authors are making the point that in-service training is needed at the early beginning of every curriculum implementation. The change in curriculum must go hand in hand with the change in teacher training program to make sure the new curriculum will be properly implemented.

3. Methods

This study used a mixed-methods descriptive design to examine the perceived adequacy and training of 5th and 6th grade teachers to teach English in Burundi fundamental schools. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers in economic capital, precisely in Muha district; and from a focus group with teachers in the political capital, precisely in Gitega district. The choice of these two research areas was motivated by the fact that they have a high number of schools and teachers. A purposive sampling method was used to select 10 Muha schools from which 50 teachers were gathered to provide questionnaire related data. In Gitega district, the same sampling technique was used to select only 4 schools from which 4 teachers were gathered to provide focus group related data. For the focus group, the researchers did not choose many teachers because larger focus groups are normally difficult to control and limit each participants' opportunity to share insights and observations. They made this choice so that everyone gets a chance to share his/her ideas.

The researchers prepared the questionnaire to first get information about demographic characteristics of the sampled teachers: age, gender, grade they currently teach, educational background and teaching experience. Secondly, both open-ended and closed-ended questions were constructed to investigate the following research questions:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of their adequacy to teach English?
- 2) What training did English teachers have before they began teaching English?
 - 3) What training have they received after they became English teachers?
 - 4) What knowledge and skills do they need to become better English teachers?
 - 5) What resources do they need to become better English teachers?

For the closed-ended questions, the researchers prepared various statements to which the respondents expressed their views on each, using a Likert scale. They were given the choice of "strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree, agree" as answers. For the open-ended questions, the respondents were given space to express in writing their own ideas.

Concerning the focus group discussion tool, the researchers used the same open-ended questions as the questionnaire. The quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the questionnaires and focus groups were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. SPSS version 21 was used to analyze those data.

4. Findings

The adequacy of the participants to teach English first rests on their perception of their own adequacy with the English language.

4.1. Likert-Style Closed-Ended Questions

Teachers were asked about their own adequacy in speaking, understanding, writing and reading English. The results are shown in **Figures 1-4**. As it can be seen from the graphs, the teachers do not perceive they can speak, understand, write or read English well. For all of these four graphs, the percent of teachers who agree or strongly agree is less than 25%.

The researchers also viewed the data by comparing these four skills in the same graph (**Figure 5**), using the mean score for each of the four areas. The mean is a measure of central tendency, often called the "average," to get one number to summarize the response from all 50 teachers. The scoring for the items was 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. A mean of 5 represents all the teachers saying strongly agree, whereas a mean of 1 represents all saying strongly disagree. The higher the mean, the more positive the response. A mean of 3 would be a neutral response.

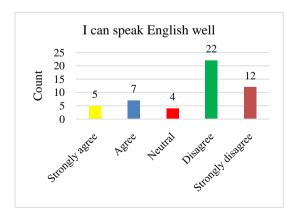


Figure 1. Teachers' perceptions of their own speaking skill.

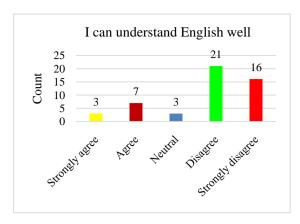


Figure 2. Teachers' perceptions of their own understanding skill.

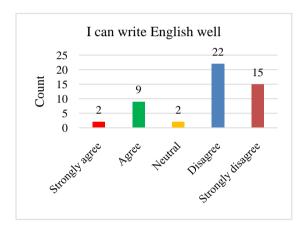


Figure 3. Teachers' perceptions of their own writing skill.

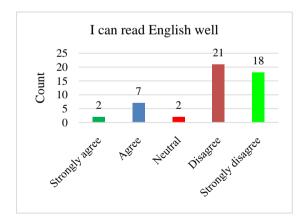


Figure 4. Teachers' perceptions of their own reading skill.

From the graph, it can be seen that the mean response of the teachers' ratings of how well they do in speaking, understanding, writing and reading are fairly similar, but are all less than 2.5; this means their average responses are between disagree and neutral, closer to disagree. From this data, it is clear that teachers

do not feel competent themselves in the English language.

Teachers were also asked about their ability to teach speaking, understanding, writing and reading English. The results are shown in **Figures 6-9**.

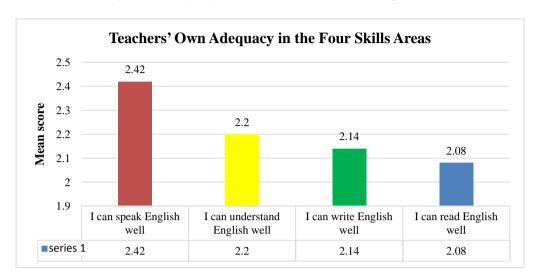


Figure 5. Teachers' own adequacy in the four skills areas.

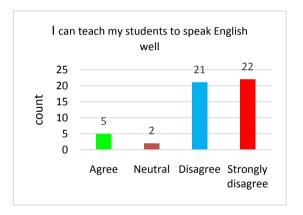


Figure 6. Teachers' perception of their teaching speaking skill.

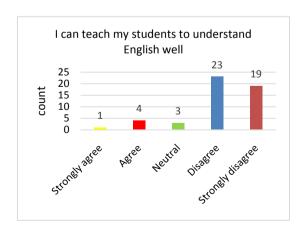


Figure 7. Teachers' perception of their teaching understanding skill.

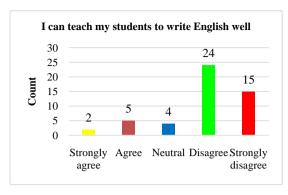


Figure 8. Teachers' perception of their teaching writing

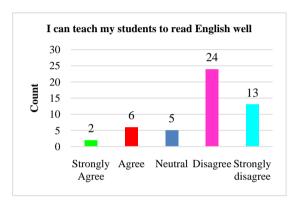


Figure 9. Teachers' perception of their teaching reading skill.

As it can be seen, less than 25% of teachers agree or strongly agree they can teach these English skills. Their perception of their ability to teach these skills is as less as their perception of their own adequacy in these skills.

As before with their perception of their own skills, another way to view the data is to compare these four teaching skills in the same graph (**Figure 10**) by using the mean score for each of the 4 areas of speaking, understanding, writing and reading. The means of the perception of their English teaching skills is 2.2 or less, indicating that they mostly disagree that they can teach these English skills well.

The results indicate that the teachers' perception of their ability to teach these skills is less than their perceptions of their own adequacy in these skills. This is understandable, given that it is difficult to teach what you do not comfortably know.

As training is regarded to be an important factor in teachers' adequacy to teach, participants were asked about the training they had before they began teaching English and after they became English teachers. The results for their pre-service and in-service training are shown in **Figure 11** and **Figure 12**.

As can be seen from the graphs, only a few of the 50 teachers agree that their pre-service training was adequate, and none of the 50 teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their in-service trainings were well organized and sufficient. Both of these graphs illustrate that teachers feel both their training during teacher preparation and in the subsequent years of teaching English is vastly deficient.

Data on teachers' trainings are also viewed by comparing these two kinds of trainings in the same graph (Figure 13) by using the mean score for each of them.

The means of the perception of their trainings are less than 2, which show that almost all teachers strongly disagree that their pre-service and in-service trainings were enough.

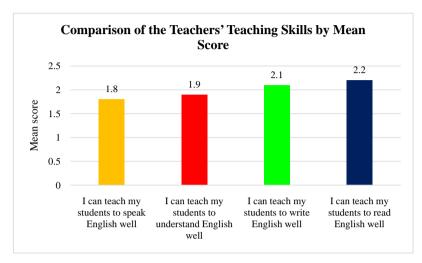


Figure 10. Comparison of the teachers' teaching skills by mean score.



Figure 11. Teachers' perception of their pre-service training.

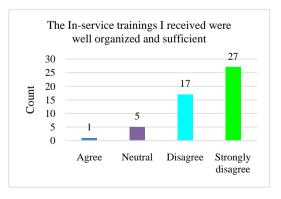


Figure 12. Teachers' opinion on their in-service training.

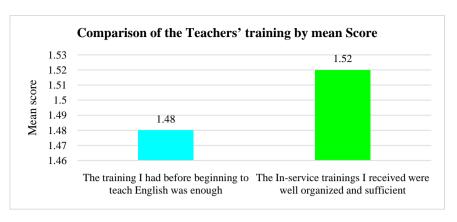


Figure 13. Comparison of the teachers' training by mean score.

4.2. Open-Ended Questions of the Questionnaire

For the open-ended questions, respondents were allowed to give more than one response. That is why the sum of frequencies does not equal 50 and the sum of percentages does not equal 100. First, the participants were asked to express themselves about the knowledge and skills they need for becoming better English teachers (Table 1).

Although these represent basic components for success in knowing and teaching a language, the teachers clearly perceive they currently lack them.

Second, teachers were asked about what resources they need, with the results shown in **Table 2**.

The majority of the participants (76%) expressed the need for adequate training for all English teachers in the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is understandable, as these skills are the foundation for English language learning.

Third, respondents were given an opportunity to express themselves about what can be done for an effective and successful teaching/learning of English language in public fundamental Schools (Table 3).

It is not surprising that the top answers involved training, both pre-service and in-service, and English teaching resources.

In a nutshell, the open-ended responses of teachers underscore the body of research that shows that teachers must have personal knowledge and skills themselves in English and have adequate training and resources to teach English.

5. The Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion was held after the researchers processed the questionnaire data. To analyze the focus group data, the researchers first transcribed the whole discussion. Then content analysis was used to identify the themes emerging from the data:

5.1. Insufficiency of Teacher Knowledge of the English Language

Teachers accept that they are not able to speak or understand English language

well. They said that the knowledge they are imparting in the English language is an empty knowledge. It cannot serve as a foundation to succeed in upper classes/grades. One of the participants said that "one gives what he/she has him/herself. You cannot impart knowledge you do not have yourself. To teach appropriately what you did not study appropriately is quite impossible."

They added that a significant problem they have is related to English word pronunciation. The same word is not pronounced in the same way by different teachers. Every teacher pronounces words the way he/she wants, whether true or wrong, which causes confusion in pupils' minds.

Table 1. Teachers' needs in knowledge and skills.

What knowledge and skills do you need to become a better English teacher?	Frequency	%
English phonetics	50	100
English teaching methodology	50	100
English grammar	49	98
English vocabulary	48	96

Table 2. Teachers' needs in resources.

What resources do you need to become a better English teacher?	Frequency	%
Accelerated, enough and adequate trainings for all fundamental school English teachers in each of the four English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing,) by qualified people	38	76
Enough and adequate <i>books</i> for both students and teachers	32	64
Audio-visual materials (computers, televisions, radios, projectors, CD, USB keys, etc.)	25	50
English-French or French-English and Kirundi-English Dictionaries	17	34
Stay in English speaking countries	4	8
Libraries with enough English reading books	3	6
Monitoring by the government authorities through regular visits in class	3	6
Support from NGO _s (Non Government Organizations)	2	4

Table 3. Teachers' Suggestions for an effective and successful teaching/learning of English language in public fundamental Schools.

What are your suggestions for an effective and successful teaching/learning of the English language in Burundi fundamental school?	Frequency	%
To organize accelerated and continuous trainings for all fundamental school English teachers	26	52
To provide good and enough English teaching aids	20	40
To reform the initial teacher training program to insert English language	15	30
To hire English qualified teachers	8	16
To increase time for English lesson	6	12
To send fundamental school English teachers in English speaking countries for a determined period for capacity building	5	10
To provide teachers with incentive bonuses	4	8
To put in place English training clubs for fundamental school English teachers	4	8
To plan intensive monitoring on the field	3	6
To make English a medium of instruction for some courses to increase the teachers' motivation	3	6

5.2. Insufficiency of Quality and Quantity of Resources to Teach English

The pupils' books and the teachers' guidebooks are the only source of knowledge at the disposal of teachers. Moreover, teachers lament that those books are not only very few, but also poorly designed. They say that these books do not contain any lessons on English phonetics while they estimate that phonetics play a crucial role in language teaching/learning. In addition, teachers say those books do not contain many and consistent application exercises whereas exercises are very helpful to motivate pupils.

A participant expressed his idea saying that before introducing English language in fundamental school, the government should make sure that teachers were well trained and that good and enough teaching aids were available.

5.3. Success Is Possible

Teachers believe that success in English teaching/learning in Burundi fundamental school is possible. For them, the first and foremost thing to do is to reform the initial teacher training program by introducing English language in that program. They said that this would help the trainee teachers acquire, during their initial training, all of the skills that are necessary to effectively teach this language, as it is the case for other courses. Thus, English language should be an integral part of fundamental school initial teacher training curriculum. Meanwhile, there is a need to create a transitional step toward this reform; teachers who are already in service should be offered adequate and intensive trainings to render them able to teach this language.

Normally, in education, before taking any measure regarding a curriculum change, concerned authorities should first ask themselves questions such as: what human resources do we have in the field? Do they have sufficient knowledge, skills and qualification to appropriately implement the reform? Are there good and enough materials to make it possible? This has not been done, but teachers hopefully think that the existing barriers can be removed and go forward.

As a whole, results from the focus group discussion indicate that the introduction of English language did not meet the prerequisites and the accompanying measures necessary for its effective teaching/learning. However, they expressed their conviction that if Burundi education authorities take time to look into the issue, success is quite possible.

6. Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the teachers' perceptions about the training of 5th and 6th grade English teachers in Burundi. More specifically, the present study sought to find out the teachers' perceptions about their own adequacy in the four basic English skills as well as their adequacy to teach them to their students. Thus, their initial and ongoing training was addressed. In addition, teachers were required to express their needs to do well their work of

teaching English language.

Findings reveal that 5th and 6th grade English teachers do not feel competent themselves in this language given that they do not possess the necessary skills. Responses provided to the research questions indicate that teachers feel both their initial and ongoing training is vastly deficient. That is why they claim for both pre-service and in service training in this language. In addition to the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the respondents also suggest adequate training for all English teachers in phonetics, grammar, vocabulary and teaching methodology.

Findings of the present study are significant in the sense that they reveal the problems English teachers in Fundamental school are facing. They actually mean that Fundamental school English teachers have been required to do something they are not able to. It is a very heavy burden to be required to teach subject you are not trained for. If no reform is operated, we could not expect for good results.

7. Recommendations

The present study suggests what the government and the teachers themselves could do for an effective and successful implementation of the program of teaching English language in fundamental schools. What follows are a number of recommendations formulated towards the government and teachers. Many of the recommendations are the suggestions issued by teachers themselves.

7.1. To the Government

In general, the government should examine this issue of requiring teachers to teach courses they are not qualified to teach as this may play a paramount role in the underdevelopment of our country. The teaching-learning of English language in Burundi should allow Burundian children to be competitive on international labour market. In particular, the fundamental school teacher-training program should be reformed so as to include English for personal and teaching adequacy. Fundamental school English teachers should acquire all of the skills necessary to teach this language during their pre-service training. As for practicing fundamental school English teachers, continuous in-service trainings have to be organised in order to provide them with the necessary knowledge, skills, competence and methods to teach appropriately this language. English teachers ought to be equipped with enough and adequate teaching materials with clear aims and objectives. These materials must be composed of the three well-known kinds of teaching materials: visual materials, audio materials and audio-visual materials. It is also a duty for the government to require English as a means of instruction for some other courses in the teacher-training institutions. This will motivate trainee teachers to learn it eagerly.

7.2. To Teachers

Teachers are crucial in implementing educational reforms in accordance with

the aspiration of the national philosophy of education. They are recognised as the critical factor in the provision of quality education; therefore, they have an important role to play in this fight for improving English teaching/learning in Burundi fundamental school. They are recommended to promote habits likely to make them feel at ease while teaching this language. They have notably to make an effort to be interested in English language so as to teach it without complaining, display positive attitude towards English language so as to stimulate children to learn it enthusiastically and also promote self-confidence. Teachers should also do their best to improve themselves. They have principally to register in English night clubs, be committed to follow English programs broadcasted on radio and on television and promote the habit of reading English books.

8. Conclusion

Although findings reveal that teachers perceive they do not have proficiency in English and are not skilled enough to teach it to 5th and 6th graders in Burundi fundamental schools, they feel reforms in fundamental school teacher-training programs could address the inadequacies in pre-service and in-service training. In addition, access to the appropriate quality and quantity of resources is needed to reach Burundi's educational goals.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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