



Original Article

Challenges Facing Primary Schools' Learners in Morogoro Municipality when Communicative Approach is used in Teaching English Language

Kasimu Bakari Hasani^{1*}

¹ Muslim University of Morogoro, P.O. Box 1031, Morogoro – Tanzania.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4090-7673>; Email: kasimubakari551@gmail.com

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A number of researches have been done in the world basing on Communicative Approach in teaching English language as a second and a foreign language, Tanzania in Particular. However, the use of this approach in Tanzania is not free of challenges. Thus, this paper tries to enlighten the current challenges that English language learners of primary schools encounter when the approach is used in teaching and learning of English language in Morogoro Municipality. The study was guided by two research questions; first, what would be the current challenges encountered by primary school learners when CA is used? Second, what would be the learners' views on the possible ways to overcome the existing challenges? The study was led by the theory of communicative competence by Hymes (1972). The data were collected through concurrent research design which is within pragmatic research approach. The data collection method used was questionnaire method of data collection. The findings revealed that, large class sizes, inadequate teaching and learning materials, learners' negative attitudes towards English language, and lack of enough time to practice English language are among the challenges of using the approach at public primary schools. Nevertheless, ensuring enough teachers and classes, adding time for practicing English, exposing learners to English language from standard one are among the suggestions of overcoming the existing challenges. Furthermore, basing on the findings of the recent study, the researcher provided recommendations for action to solve the existing challenges and for further studies including to do the same study in other municipal areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Communicative Approach (CA) is the current and most useful approach for teaching and learning of English language in the World. The approach as commented by Sauvignon (1972), aims to enable learners to make meaningful interaction with other speakers. Again, looking to its genesis, Richards and Rodgers (2014) inform that, the approach occurred in western countries when language teaching was looking for a change as a result of unsatisfactory traditional syllabus which failed to meet the need of language use. It was for assisting foreign learners of English language to know it in easier way for communication purposes. Afterwards, many nations in the world adopted the approach. In African contexts, for instance, the approach was officially introduced in early 1990s as commented by Abd Al-Magid (2006). It is to some extent differ with Tanzania where the approach was introduced in the mid-1970s as Roy-Campbell and Qorro, (1997) assert. According to Savignon (1987), the use of the approach in English language contexts like United Kingdom and North America was more successful than to non-English contexts. Savignon entails that, the application of the approach to teach learners out of English language contexts like Tanzania suffers from various challenges.

After the inception of CA in Tanzania, the Tanzanian government established a syllabus of 2005 which needs the use of CA in teaching English language to learners of primary schools in the country. This was purposely to enable learners of

primary level to have an English language competence in earlier level of education. Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) (2010) cemented that the use of the approach was purposely for enabling learners to interact in a simple way, learn through doing, construct their understanding as well as learn through asking questions and focus on critical thinking, deep understanding, independent learning, and inquiry. With such purposes, many learners' complete primary schools without achieving them. This was due to the fact that, the approach was not applied in a required state as commented by Allen (2008). Thus, Tanzanian learners of English language face various challenges towards communicative competence in the language, though the language is taught from primary to post primary levels of education in the country.

This paper presents the data extracted from researcher's unpublished Master's dissertation entitled "Challenges of applying Communicative Approach in teaching English language in primary schools of Morogoro Municipality" in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Education) of the Muslim University of Morogoro. The dissertation had three specific objectives which were first, to explore the current challenges encountered by teachers in using CA features at primary level. Second, to determine the current challenges encountered by primary school learners when CA is applied. Third, to examine teachers' and learners' views on the possible ways to overcome the existing challenges. Thus, this paper presents challenges facing primary schools' learners of Morogoro Municipality when

CA is used in teaching English language subject together with examining their suggestions to overcome the existing challenges.

Statement of the Problem

The use of CA has been indicated by English language syllabus for primary schools in Tanzania. Despite the fact that CA based syllabus has been introduced more than 16 years ago, the communicative competence to learners of primary schools is still worse. Most of them complete standard seven and leave the school while they cannot even make simple expressions using English. This is more evidenced when they joined post primary level (Levina, 2017) where the language of instruction is English language with exception of Kiswahili language. The presence of English language communicative incompetence to many English language learners of post primary level as a result of poor primary school preparations had highly inspired the present study. The present study is on the view that, learners face various problems which are not clearly known towards English language competence, which cause the purpose of using the CA approach to be less achieved.

Research Objectives

The objective of the study in general was to determine the challenges facing primary schools' learners in Morogoro Municipality when CA is used in teaching English language. The study specifically intended to:

- Determine the current challenges encountered by primary school learners when CA is used in teaching and learning English language.
- Examine learners' views on the possible ways to overcome the existing challenges.

The Study Also was Guided by the Following Questions;

- What would be the current challenges encountered by learners when CA is used at public Primary School in Morogoro Municipality?
- What would be the learners' views on the possible ways to overcome the challenges?

REVIEWED STUDIES

There are numerous studies covering issues concerning the present study. In this paper, the researcher has made a theoretical review as well as review of some studies related to the present study.

The theory used in this study was the Theory of Communicative Competence (CC) by Hymes (1972). Basing on the theory, Hymes suggests that for a person to be communicatively competent, he/she has to get both knowledge and ability to use language especially by making considerations of four types of knowledge. The four types of knowledge are whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible, feasible, appropriate, and in fact done. Thus, to Hymes, the speech community includes non – native users of language or second language learners. He proposes that, CC consists of at least two aspects, which are linguistic (grammatical) and the sociolinguistic aspects. So, the theory is relevant to this study as it gives a whole picture on how when we say learners are communicatively competent in language. Though the theory does not show at least the possible challenges and remedies in its application in different contexts, yet assisted the completion of the present study in a required manner. This is in the sense that, the theory gives a whole picture on how when we say learners are communicatively competent in language.

The use of CA in teaching and learning English language to native speakers (native contexts) has been so successful compared to non-native speakers as Ansarey (2012) comments. That is, the approach faces various challenges when it is used in teaching and learning English language to non-native like

contexts. In Asia, Takal and Ibrahim (2019) point out that lack of authentic materials with the approach, teachers' poor English proficiency, lack of confidence to teachers and limited time to complete the national curriculum were among the challenges faced the use of CA in teaching and learning process. Also, in African settings, Borti (2015) revealed that few textbooks, teachers' low level of knowledge about the approach, and domination of teachers in the classroom are among the challenges in the process of teaching under the approach. Again, in Tanzania, Rwezaura (2016) shows that the main challenges in teaching and learning of English subject include inadequacy of materials, large number of learners in one class, and teachers' incompetence towards teaching English language in primary schools. In addition, Nyinondi et al. (2016) revealed that, the challenges of using CA in University level include variation of learners' language abilities and inappropriate teaching materials.

On the other hand, some authors have shown some possible ways to ensure effective use of CA in various levels of education in general. In Asia, Alam (2016) suggests that for effective use of CA, English language facilitators should be well trained about CA, the official textbooks must focus on four language skills, and provision of reliable infrastructures. The author adds that English language classes must not have more than 40 students, teachers of rural areas should be well trained to change their attitudes towards CA methodology in secondary level. Finally, Alam recommends that rural English language teachers should be made aware on the principles and procedures of CA testing system.

In Africa, Maryslessor et al. (2012) suggest the use of resources like visual and audio stimuli to promote communication within lessons. They added that teachers need to promote student-initiated questions as they improve students' strategies for more understanding. Finally, they stress that, the

questions need to be answered by students themselves for making more interactive classrooms.

In Tanzania, Rwezaura (2016) recommends that, in order to solve various problems facing teachers in teaching English language at primary schools in Tanzania, the government should orientate teachers whenever changes in the syllabus occur for enabling them to cope with the new innovation in the syllabus. She argues that it would be possible by ensuring the provision of short courses to teachers on how to facilitate learning various topics within the syllabus innovated, motivating students of training college to learn English language, ensuring the availability of appropriate materials for teaching and learning. Lastly, she further stresses that, the government should understand that the approach is an innovation which is still unclear to majority of traditional book writers as they experienced writing books from the perspectives of content based.

However, all the reviewed literatures were more general and based on authors perspectives where someone might need to be well informed about learners' challenges and their views on the way forward. Again, the reviewed studies with the exception of Rwezaura's study were based more on post-primary level of education compared to this study. Thus, the current study aims to identify challenges facing learners when CA is used in teaching and learning English language in Morogoro Municipal primary schools where English language is taught as a compulsory subject from standard three to seven.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To gain the data and in-depth understanding of the challenges facing learners of primary schools, the researcher applied pragmatic research approach where concurrent research design had been used. The design has been used due to the fact that it combines both qualitative and quantitative research approach elements as acknowledged by Arthur et al (2012). The study area was Morogoro Municipality

in which within eight wards, eight schools were surveyed. The population of the study was English language learners as they were the main participants in applying the approach. A total of 20 learners per school to make a total of 160 learners were involved in questionnaires. They were from standard six and seven only. Such learners' involvement was due to the fact that they were more experienced to be taught using the approach compared to other learners in the school. This made them to inform appropriately to the point of accomplishing the present study.

Hence, questionnaire method of data collection was used. In this, open and closed ended questions were involved to get appropriate data for the present study. The data obtained were compared under the method used to ensure their trustworthiness. Also, the researcher ensured research ethics as he first got the consent letter from Morogoro Municipal Director to do his study. Then, he informed the

participants about the purpose of the study before engaging them to the study. Furthermore, confidentiality was also ensured to them. Lastly, the researcher ensured free will of the participants, where they were free whether or not to engage in the study.

RESULTS

This section presents current challenges facing learners when CA is used in teaching and learning English language subject at primary level together with learners' views on the possible ways to overcome such challenges.

Learners' Challenges

Learners were required to inform if they like English language subject and reasons behind their response. The results were as shown on the *Table 1* below;

Table 1: If learners like English language subject

Response	Frequency	% (Percentage)
Yes	153	95.6
No	4	2.5
Missed	3	1.9
Total	160	100

Source: Field data, 2022

The *Table 1* informs that, 153 (95.6%) learners liked the subject. Only four (2.5%) learners disliked and three (1.9%) missed the item. Those who informed to dislike the language said that they do not understand English language subject and they are unable to use it – something made them to hate it. For the majority who informed to like the subject had various reasons including; first, it will help them to interact with people of different countries and aids in their life. Second, it is a subject which is good and foreign one. Third, for understanding it. Fourth, being able to know various things and

translate various national languages. Fifth, for the purpose of further studies. Sixth, just liking it and being knowledgeable when taught well. Seventh, presence of good English language teachers who attract them to understand it well. Eighth, it is a simple subject.

Learners were also supposed to respond whether their teachers of English use Kiswahili language mostly during English language lessons. The data were as shown on *Table 2*

Table 2: Teachers' Use of Kiswahili During English Language Session

Response	Frequency	% (Percentage)
Yes	86	53.8
No	63	39.4
Missed	11	6.9
Total	160	100

Source: Field data, 2022

The findings from Table 2 show that 86 (53.8%) learners agreed that their teachers of English language use Kiswahili mostly during English language sessions. Also, 63(39.4%) of learners indicated that their teachers did not use Kiswahili most of time during English language sessions. Again, 11 (6.9%) learners missed the item. Thus, the

results indicate that, the dominant language during English language sessions is Kiswahili compared to English itself.

They were also needed to inform if they like when their teachers use English only during English periods. The findings were as follows on *Table 3*.

Table 3: Learners like in using only English language in English sessions

Response	Frequency	% (Percentage)
Yes	64	40
No	92	57.5
Missed	4	2.5
Total	160	100

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 3 indicates that 92 (57.5%) learners dislike when their teachers use only English language during English sessions. It also indicates that 64 (40%) learners like when their English language teachers use only English during English language sessions. The results show that majority of learners dislike when their teachers use only English language during English language periods.

Those who reported to like when only English language is used during English language sessions had various reasons including the following; first, for learning many things, knowing it well, getting experiences of it, and practicing it well. Second, it is a beautiful subject, they just like it and they want to understand it. Third, they want to pass their exams, being able to talk with foreigners as well as being able to cope with further studies and even to live abroad. Fourth, they are attracted from some of their teachers' teaching styles, when they speak English, writing it, and the like. Fifth, assist them in mastering pronunciation, knowing English

vocabulary, and because it is a language known in almost the whole world. Sixth, it assists them to understand, though it is difficult but when they are taught will understand faster and will be able to express themselves and directing/teaching others easily.

For those who reported to dislike when their teachers use only English within English language sessions had also various reasons including the following; First, they like when they use English and Kiswahili as other English words are not understood, they like their teachers to mix Kiswahili and English. Second, they want their teachers to translate what they teach so that they can answer questions to be asked easily. Third, for being able to speak and understand well the language which they did not know it well before. Fourth, they understand Kiswahili more than English only. Fifth, there are some issues/things in English subject they need to be told in Kiswahili for getting higher knowledge.

Sixth, English language is not their language, so it is difficult to understand without being instructed.

They were also needed to inform the challenges facing them in learning English language by

choosing various alternatives as shown in *Table 4*. They were also allowed to choose more than one response, depending on once challenges;

Table 4: Challenges facing learners

Responses	n	%
Failure to express myself using English	117	73.1
Lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials	67	41.9
Inappropriate teaching method	25	15.6
Lack of motivations from teachers	23	14.4
Lack of motivations from parents	31	19.4
No enough time to practice English	101	63.1
Teachers use a lot of time in writing	17	10.6
Teachers dislike pupils questions	9	5.6

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 4 indicates that, the first and foremost challenge mentioned by majority of learners is their failure to express themselves using English language which took 73.1% of all respondents. The second was the lack of enough time for them to practice English language which took 63.1% of all respondents. The third was lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials which took 41.9% of all respondents. It was then followed by other challenges like lack of motivations from parents, inappropriate teaching methods, and lack of motivations from teachers.

The researcher also observed language proficiency of learners as they expressed themselves during English language sessions. The results showed that learners from three classes (two from standard seven and one from standard six) were at least promising towards understanding English language while majority of learners from five classes (one of standard seven and four of standard six) were very poor. For example, in one of the classes, the

researcher asked some learners after the session at least to tell what they have studied; they just laughed and failed to respond to the asked questions. In another class, the researcher (as he was observing the ratio of English textbooks and learners) asked few learners “where is your English book?” they seemed misunderstood and showed English exercise books while wondering and laughing. Again, very few learners in most classes were able at least to try answering questions asked, but majority did not even raised their hands. For example, in one of the classes, only two to four learners out of 79 learners who were in the class session raised hands when questions asked. The results entail that the use of CA in public primary schools is still so challenging in Tanzania, Morogoro municipality in particular.

Learners were also asked if English language is important in their life or not with reasons. The results were summarized on *Table 5*.

Table 5: If English language is important

Response	Frequency	% (Percentage)
Yes	155	96.9
No	3	1.9
Missed	2	1.2
Total	160	100

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 5 indicates that three (1.9%) learners reported English to be less important in their life. They argued that, it is not important because in calculations they do not use English and some Swahili words cannot be pronounced in English. The table also indicates that, 155 (96.9 %) learners reported English to be important in their life and had various arguments. Most of them argued that, English language is important in their life as they can work in different areas, in doing business with different people in the world as well as for helping them in later studies and being able to express/communicate with natives within and outside the country. Additionally, others dreamed to be English language teachers, to know many things via English language, others like to know it only as English is an international language, wherever they go they can use it. All of such factors made them to think English language is so important in their life.

Possible Ways to Overcome the Challenges as Suggested by Learners

In this, learners/pupils had the following suggestions to ensure English language communicative competence to learners like them;

First, learners need to be careful as teachers teach and asking questions where they did not understand. Second, teachers have to teach well and both teachers and learners to have high efforts towards English. Third, adding time for English language sessions in the class, ensuring motivations from teachers, parents, and English language stakeholders, and adding supportive materials like books and dictionaries to learners. Fourth, they have to practice English more and more within the school

and even at home. Fifth, they have to ask assistances from those who know like teachers and friends. Sixth, they suggested that teachers need to voice up when they teach, as some teachers have low voices in teaching process. Seventh, majority advised teachers to mix English and Swahili for easy understanding while some advised fully prohibition of Swahili language during English language sessions.

Nevertheless, learners' suggestions prolonged as follows; eighth, learners have to like English subject and their teachers, something that will facilitate them towards English language communicative competence. Ninth, cooperation among learners themselves (assisting each other) and avoid giving up towards English language. Other learners' suggestions include; adding number of English language teachers, using English to all subjects, having tuition centres as well as having subject clubs and reducing the number of subjects per day (just three to two subjects). According to them, if such factors are solved, the communicative competence to learners like them in Tanzania will be assured.

DISCUSSION

In exploring the above challenges, the researcher asked learners of standard six and seven various questions as presented in findings section. Basing on the findings in general, learners reported that, the most current challenges they encountered when the approach is applied.

Learners' Challenges

Failure to Make Expressions Using English Language

This means that learners are unable to express themselves in various contexts by using English language. This might have been caused by their negative attitudes towards English language where they feel shy to speak English fearing to be laughed at as some teachers argued. Additionally, it might have been contributed by their teachers' poor teaching process in previous classes. Furthermore, their failure to express causes hardship when they attend secondary schools. The hardship occurs due to the fact that, the medium of instruction in secondary schools change abruptly to English while they lack competence in it from primary level with exception of Kiswahili subject. This finding relates with the assertion by Levina (2017) that most of learners who fail to express themselves in secondary schools are from ward (public) schools. Thus, it is really evidenced that learners from public primary schools face the challenge of failure to express themselves when it comes to using English language.

Lack of Enough Time to Practice English Language

According to learners, the time used for learning English language (forty minutes a day) did not satisfy them. This indicates that learners did not get appropriate and enough chance to learn or practice English language within forty minutes of classroom learning per day. This finding is in line with what is documented by Lukindo (2016) that limited time is one of the challenges facing the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in Tanzania secondary schools. This shows that the limited time is not only in secondary schools, but also in public primary schools. The level of limited time in public primary schools might be twice or more of secondary schools. This is due to the fact that English language is a medium

of instruction in secondary schools compared to public primary schools. Furthermore, Kiswahili medium contexts in public primary schools have influenced a lot to have limited time to use English language out of their classrooms.

Lack of Enough Teaching and Learning Materials

This has been observed by the researcher as even textbooks were not satisfactory to be distributed to each learner during English language sessions. This shows that the achievement of the approach is highly difficult. Additionally, learners lack materials to read at home and during weekend, something that deteriorates them towards English language communicative competence. Thus, the use of the approach to teach learners would still be problematic in public primary schools if even textbooks to each learner cannot be ensured by the stakeholders.

Learners' Unwillingness to be Taught Using English Only

Basing on the findings, majority of learners were unwilling to be taught using English language only during English language sessions. Learners argued that they liked when their teachers mix Kiswahili and English as some English words are not clear to them. Again, English language is not their mother tongue; as a result, they understood more Kiswahili than it. This indicates that, due to low understanding of English language they have, it is better for them to be taught by mixing Kiswahili and English language. Thus, their unwillingness to be taught using only English during English language sessions seems to challenge them towards achieving the goals of applying CA.

Teachers' Use of Kiswahili During Lessons

Learners reported that, most of English language teachers use Kiswahili mostly in teaching English language. According to learners, the use of Kiswahili in English periods made them delay in understanding English language throughout their

studies. This means that, teachers were needed to use only English in teaching English as language used to teach language. This entails that, if learners were taught using English only from standard three, they would have got huge communicative competence when they are at standard six and seven. In addition, teachers' use of Kiswahili several times during English sessions might have been contributed by the fact that, some learners disliked and misunderstood when their English language teachers use only English during English periods.

Teachers' Use of Inappropriate Teaching Methods

Learners reported to misunderstand their English language teachers when taught in the class. This shows that, teachers used inappropriate methods in teaching English language subject. This is because, the use of appropriate methods obvious enable majority of learners to understand. The use of inappropriate methods affects learners in the process of applying the approach which need them to be competent in the language they learn. This might have been caused by teachers' inadequate knowledge about the approach and teachers' poor preparations before the actual teaching process in the class.

Lack of Enough Motivations from Both Teachers and Parents

Learners reported that, one of the challenges they face when the approach is applied is lack of enough motivations. This means that, teachers and parents did not highly motivate their learners towards learning and understanding English language in their daily communications. In fact, motivation to people in doing anything is of great importance as it would enable them to do things in more appropriate manner. Thus, lack of enough motivation from parents and teachers made learners to be poor in English language and finally failure to achieve the intended goal of the approach.

Learners' Suggestions

To overcome the current challenges learners of public primary schools' face in implementing the approach, they suggested the following;

First, adding time for English language sessions. According to learners, in order to get enough and appropriate time for being communicative competent in English language, number of subjects to be taught per day has to be reduced. To them, five to seven subjects which are taught per day is a challenge. They suggested that, there should be at least two to three subjects per day for getting enough time to practice English language for achieving the competence needed.

Second, teachers and learners need to be motivated enough as they can increase more efforts towards teaching and learning English language. This indicates that, teachers and learners are effortless towards English language. The reason behind low efforts towards English language might have been caused by lack of motivations towards English language. That is, English language stakeholders like parents, government, and experts of the language do not put enough motivations for learning English language. In this case, learners suggested getting enough motivation to them and their teachers which will enable them to ensure enough efforts towards communicative competence in English language.

Third, to ensure enough availability of supportive learning materials like books as they evidenced to be inadequate in their schools. According to learners, inadequate learning materials found in their schools affects their learning process, especially in English language subjects. Thus, to ensure the removal of the challenge and being communicative competent in English language, enough and supportive learning materials need to be ensured by the authority and any other English language stakeholder.

Fourth, learners have to frequently practice English more and more within and outside the school. According to learners, they do not use more English language within and outside the school. This seemed to be caused by lack of English language like contexts. That is, learners lacked the contexts where English language is mostly used. Thus, for ensuring their communicative competence in the language, they suggested and emphasized learners to use English language more when they are at school and when they are out of the school like on their way home and at home places if possible.

Sixth, learners have to avoid negative attitudes towards English language subject and their teachers together with cooperation among themselves. According to learners, there are some learners having negative perspectives towards English language and teachers of the language. This makes them to see the language as a very difficult language and they cannot understand it. Again, most of learners do not cooperate in studying the language. Thus, learners suggested avoiding negative attitudes towards the language and their teachers together with ensuring enough cooperation among themselves.

Seventh, learners need to be more attentive during English language sessions as some of them seem to be careless during the sessions. It is normal for learners of primary schools not to pay attention when taught in the class, though depends on the methods used by teachers. Thus, to ensure the removal of such a challenge, learners advised the need of attentiveness among the learners during English language periods.

Eighth, teachers have to voice up as they teach during English language sessions. This means that, some teachers of English language use low voice when teaching. This might have been caused by teachers' biological makeup, less motivation towards teaching English, noises due to large number of learners per class sessions, or inadequate skills on effective teaching. Thus, learners

suggested teachers to have enough voices when they teach as learners can hear and understand easily what their teachers teach them.

Ninth, learners' have to ask assistance from knowledgeable people like teachers and friends around them. This implicates that, most of learners lacked behaviour of asking assistance from their teachers especially English language teachers to know more about the language. Thus, if learners of English language would keep asking their teachers on problems they face in language and share their knowledge among themselves, it would be easy for them to be communicative competent in the language.

Tenth, adding number of English language teachers and using English to all subjects. According to learners, numbers of English language teachers in primary level are inadequate. Due to that fact, they suggest the number of teachers to be added in public primary schools so that they can use them for their communication success in English language.

In brief, majority of learners' suggestions have based on solving various challenges they currently encounter towards full application of CA. According to them, if such views and opinions will be assured, learners of public primary schools would become competent and conversant enough in English language. That means, problems like their failure to express themselves using English language will be solved. Moreover, it will not only be solved in secondary schools as some researchers claim, but also from primary level.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges facing learners like lack of enough time to practice the language, lack of enough motivations from parents, teachers and other stakeholders cause many learners to be poor in the language though majority like to be competent in it. Majority of learners suggested to the language and education stakeholders to solve the challenges they

face which would ensure the effective use of the approach for their benefits and the country at large.

Basing on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends by remembrance to English language stakeholders that the usefulness of any language is when people (learners) become competent in four language skills; speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Being competent in four skills will enable learners for their further studies in post-primary level, life, and nation in general to cope with the current world of science and technology in easier way. Again, the researcher recommends the same study to be done in other municipal areas and districts and other languages like Chinese and Arabic to observe the existing challenges for further actions in the country. Lastly, it is recommended to investigate the extent to which CA is useful in Tanzania primary and post primary schools' contexts.

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