



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reflection on Teaching English to Primary School Pupils as a Second Language in Tanzania: Teaching Methods for Developing English Communication

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ABSTRACT

Effective teaching and learning involve appropriate use of methods to increase communication opportunities. Teaching and learning methods that promote meaningful communication are vital for developing English as a second language proficiency among pupils. This study investigated the methods used by primary school teachers in Tanzania to develop pupils' ability to communicate in English. The study was guided by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. It employed a mixed-methods design, using pragmatic and interpretivist research approaches. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 94 English subject teachers. Qualitative data were collected through observation of 94 lessons across 17 district councils in 11 regions from the Tanzania Mainland between 01 May and 15 June 2026. Likert scale questionnaire items and open-ended questions were used for data collection. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analysed thematically. Findings revealed that teachers widely use group work, pair work, real-life contexts, songs, storytelling, functional language teaching, integrated language skills, and digital tools to develop English communication skills. School leaders support these methods through Teachers' continuous professional development (MEWAKA) sessions, provision of materials and constructive feedback. The study concludes that primary school teachers in Tanzania use a variety of communicative strategies that can substantially develop pupils' English communication ability when these methods are systematically supported. It recommends sustained teacher professional development and provision of better resources, including audio and audio-visual resources.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teaching strategies, English as a second language, primary education.

INTRODUCTION

English has a significant impact on Tanzanian pupils' long-term educational and socioeconomic opportunities. Although Kiswahili is the medium of instruction in most public primary schools, English becomes the medium of instruction at the secondary and university levels, creating a critical transition that requires a strong foundation in communicative English built during primary schooling. The Education and Training Policy of 2014, 2023 Edition has strengthened English learning in primary education by

introducing it from Standard One in primary schools that use Kiswahili as the medium of instruction, contrary to the Education and Training Policy of 2014, where English was taught from Standard Three (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023a).

However, research constantly indicates that many primary school leavers cannot communicate confidently in English, and that secondary school students experience what researchers term a 'language shock' when required to learn all subjects in English, a language they only

studied as a subject at primary level (John, 2025; Kitalima, 2026). The theoretical basis for effective English language teaching is well-established. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) positions language as a tool for social interaction rather than a grammatical system to be memorised, and directs teachers to design lessons around genuine communicative tasks (Hymes, 1972; John, 2018).

Krashen (1982) argues that acquisition requires meaningful, comprehensible input that is slightly above the learner's current level. Vygotsky (1978) emphasises that language development is fundamentally social, requiring interaction with more knowledgeable others who can scaffold learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Likewise, Cummins (1979) adds that primary school teachers must develop both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) that pupils will need to cope with English-medium secondary schooling. These theories converge on a common message: effective English teaching is interactive, meaningful, contextualised, and progressive in its language demands. The extent to which Tanzanian primary school teachers actually use these communicative strategies in every lesson has not been documented at a large scale. Previous empirical research is predominantly single-district and often focuses on barriers rather than on a positive account of the strategies teachers normally use, and their implications for developing pupils' English communicative competence (Hasani, 2023; Elibariki, 2017; Kotira & Shizhou, 2022). Large-scale, multi-region evidence on which methods teachers use and their implications for pupils' communication across different contexts remains scarce. This gap is what the present study addresses.

Despite the emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Tanzanian curriculum, many primary school pupils lack the confidence and ability to communicate in English across settings, including at school, at home, in the community and in their future academic and professional lives. To inform teacher training, school leadership and national policy, there is a need for a systematic, multi-region account of methods teachers use to develop pupils' English communicative ability, focused on both quantitative and qualitative evidence from diverse rural, peri-urban and urban contexts. The present study fills this gap by documenting the teaching methods used by teachers across 17 district councils in 11 regions from the Tanzania Mainland. The purpose of the study was to investigate methods used by

Tanzanian primary school teachers to develop pupils' ability to communicate using English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) theoretical bases.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching, grounded in Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, argues that the purpose of language is communication, and that learners develop proficiency through purposeful, meaningful interaction rather than through drilling grammar forms. Communicative competence involves grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence (the ability to use the language appropriately in context), and strategic competence (the ability to manage communication breakdowns).

In the Tanzanian context, CLT is used in language subjects in the implementation of the 2023 revised curriculum. However, Ringo (2025a) urges that many Tanzanian primary school teachers lack competence due to limited in-service training, low language proficiency and limited awareness of CLT principles. For this study CLT provides a framework about methods that promote purposeful interaction, contextualised language use and integrated skills development that directly develop pupils' communicative ability.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory urges that language learning is inherently social: higher-order cognitive and linguistic abilities develop first in the social space between learners and more competent others (teachers, peers) before being internalised as individual competence. The Zone of Proximal Development defines the space between what a learner can do alone and what he or she can do with support; scaffolding, which is any instructional strategy that bridges this gap. This theory aligns with the study because group work, pair work, peer correction, teacher questioning and guided storytelling are all scaffolding strategies: they create the social interaction through which language is practised and gradually internalised.

Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) extends CLT by organising instruction around real-world tasks rather than

linguistic forms. A task is any communicative activity in which language is used to achieve a real-world outcome, such as finding out information, making a request, telling a story or solving a problem. TBLT is particularly relevant for Tanzania's primary English teachers because it requires them to use activities that rehearse actual communication and move away from grammar exercises. Omidire and Muhammed (2026) show that across four Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, and Botswana, teachers implement informal task-based practices through activity-inspired lesson planning, structured questioning that incorporates home languages, and play-based methods like skits that incorporate various cultures and languages. In the context of the present study, TBLT is used to explain why methods such as morning speech, debate, dialogue, cooperative problem-solving, and storytelling are powerful for developing pupils' communication skills.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Current studies in Sub-Saharan Africa consistently identify a range of communicative and participatory methods used by primary school English teachers, often creatively adapting them to low-resource, multilingual and overcrowded classrooms. Songs, stories, role-play, group work, question-and-answer, drama, debate, real objects and functional language activities are all used in classroom practices across Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria (Albaladejo et al., 2018; Wijethilake, 2026; Makhdoomzada et al., 2026; Omidire & Muhammed, 2026; Stoffelsma, 2019).

Tanzania-based literature provides important context on English language teaching and learning. John et al. (2020) examined contextual and pedagogical challenges facing English language teachers when implementing CLT in Tanzanian primary schools, identifying lack of subject specialisation and mastery among teachers; inadequate time for CLT implementation; inadequate teaching and learning resources; lack of regular in-service training for English teachers; and the presence of crowded classes.

John (2024) points out CLT strategies that teachers implement with varying degrees of fidelity to the CLT framework. These include role-play, pair work, group discussion, and integrated skills tasks. Ringo (2025b) assessed the effectiveness of teachers' classroom pedagogy. The findings revealed that teachers use participatory and communicative teaching and learning methods unevenly, calling for stronger in-service training. Hasani (2023) asserts that in Morogoro Municipality, teachers use communicative methods but class size and

a shortage of materials limit the depth of communicative practice.

Songs, stories, and drama are well-evidenced strategies for building vocabulary, phonemic awareness, listening comprehension, and communicative motivation in young second-language learners. In a rigorous experimental study, Albaladejo et al. (2018) contend that combining songs and stories for preschool EFL learners enables them to acquire vocabulary to a greater extent than using either method alone. Stoffelsma (2019) explains how South African Grade 3 teachers use songs, phonics activities, and culturally familiar stories to bridge the transition from Zulu or Xhosa to English, showing the effectiveness and contextual appropriateness of culturally embedded communicative methods.

Role-play is consistently identified as one of the most effective communicative strategies for ESL and EFL learners. In the systematic review conducted by Wijethilake (2026), it was confirmed that role-play develops communicative competence in all four language skills, reduces anxiety and increases retention by providing a safe rehearsal opportunity, and allows learners to practise language functions appropriate to real situations, including greetings, requests, directions, purchasing, problem solving, and storytelling. In addition, Makhdoomzada et al. (2026) provide quantitative evidence that role-plays (scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted formats) are flexible across different classroom conditions, reduce anxiety, and increase attention among learners. The implication for primary classrooms in Tanzania is relevant: role-play can develop pupils' ability for everyday social interactions, such as greeting, asking for help, describing something, giving and asking for directions, and asking for information.

Group work and peer-assisted learning are particularly useful in large classes in African primary schools because they provide opportunities for learners to collaborate and communicate. Barnes-Story et al. (2026) provide evidence of primary teachers in Malawi with 120 or more pupils using group leaders as assistant teachers, providing scaffolding interactions emphasised by Vygotsky's ZPD. Krashen (1982) and Barnes-Story et al. (2026) argue that group work provides an opportunity for every pupil to speak during the lesson, even if briefly.

Authentic materials, real-world texts, audio, video, images, objects, and digital content that are not prepared for teaching, play a great role in building relevant communication. Kambey et al. (2026) contend that Tanzanian teachers consider authentic materials as important but not easily accessible due to resource

scarcity. Besides, Latifa and Mulyono (2025) explain that using project-based learning with authentic materials has a significant effect on improving EFL learners' motivation to speak and reducing their learning anxiety. Real objects, local photographs, puppets, community items, songs from Tanzanian radio, or audio recordings link classroom English with the pupils' actual communicative settings.

The use of digital tools, as emphasised in Tanzania's 2023 revised curriculum, is increasing among primary school English teachers, but use remains uneven. The Jolly Phonics digital application significantly improves pupils' phonics skills (Almansoori et al., 2024). Additionally, Nshimbi et al. (2020) indicate that technology can improve literacy skills among both children and adults in rural Zambia. Smartphones help low-resource African learners to access English content beyond school. In South Africa, it was evident that mobile phones extend pupils' contact time with English outside school hours (Kakulska-Hulme et al., 2023; Ngesi et al., 2018).

However, Taolane and Jita (2024) claim that the integration of ICT in teaching and learning can succeed only if supported by infrastructure, training, and communities of practice. The situation in Tanzania in this study is that some classrooms across 17 districts in 11 regions have access to digital tools and use them, while others do not, resulting in uneven integration of ICT into English teaching and learning in the country.

Currently, formative assessment and feedback are increasingly recognised as pedagogical strategies in their own right, not merely measurement tools. Arrafii and Sumarni (2018) highlight five components of effective formative assessment that directly support language learning: clarifying learning intentions, sharing success criteria, strategic questioning, feedback, and self-and peer-assessment. Likewise, Kang and Lam (2024) argue for an 'assessment for learning' approach that enhances learner self-regulation, while Hidayat and Purnawarman (2024) describe formative assessment literacy as a multidimensional competence that teachers need to develop.

In Tanzania, Kigwilu and Mokoro (2022) argue that limited training adversely affects communicative, competence-based assessment, while Suherman et al. (2025) indicate that, globally, pre-service EFL teachers have good knowledge of the concept of formative assessment but struggle to implement it in the classroom. The present study also investigates how teachers in 17 districts of Tanzania use assessment and feedback as active components of communicative teaching.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-methods research approach, including quantitative questionnaire and qualitative structured observation data. The study required both measurable patterns in the prevalence of teaching methods across 17 districts and contextual explanations of how the teaching methods work, what meaning teachers and school leaders assign to them, and how institutional support influences their implementation (Mitchell et al., 2024). The research approach was simultaneously pragmatic and interpretivist. It was pragmatic because its central focus was practical: understanding which methods work for developing pupils' English communication ability in real Tanzanian classroom conditions. It was interpretivist because teaching methods are not just technical choices; they are influenced by teachers' beliefs about language, their understanding of pupils' multilingual backgrounds, available resources, school leadership, and policy expectations (John, 2019; Nanai, 2023).

The questionnaire sample consisted of 94 respondents from 17 district councils across 11 regions. Of those, 81 (86.2%) were English subject teachers, 11 (11.7%) were heads of schools who completed the questionnaire and two (2.1%) had other roles. In terms of gender, 57 (60.6%) respondents were male and 37 (39.4%) were female. There were 21 (22.3%) respondents from urban areas and 73 (77.7%) respondents from rural areas. Teaching experience ranged from 0-5 years (31 respondents, 33.0%), 6-10 years (22, 23.4%) and 11-15 years (22, 23.4%), to 16 or more years (19, 20.2%). Class sizes ranged from 12 to 354 pupils, with many classes accommodating between 80 and 160 pupils. The observation sample comprised a separate group of 94 respondents, each being observed in one lesson. The observation sample was essential for triangulating self-reported questionnaire data.

The study area covered 17 district councils across 11 regions in Tanzania Mainland, namely Meru District Council in Arusha; Kigamboni in Dar es Salaam; Iringa Municipal and Kilolo District Council in Iringa; Mpwapa in Dodoma; Mpanda and Mpimbwe in Katavi; Kakonko, Kibondo, Kasulu DC, and Buhigwe in Kigoma; Kilwa in Lindi; Tarime TC in Mara; Songea in Ruvuma; Bumbuli and Lushoto in Tanga, and Singida Municipal in Singida. This huge coverage captured areas with diverse socio-linguistic and resource contexts. Data were collected between 01 May and 15 June 2026.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages of each Likert item

and observation indicator). The approach was appropriate because the study aimed to describe the prevalence of teaching methods rather than test causal hypotheses. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed thematically. All responses were read and reread, initial codes were generated, related codes were grouped into themes such as participatory methods, real-life contexts, songs and play-based learning, speaking encouragement, error treatment, digital tools, MEWAKA support and assessment practices. Selected direct quotations were retained to illustrate each theme. Quotations were attributed by respondent role, district, month and year of data collection. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation and anonymity in reporting

(respondents are identified only by role and district to avoid individualizing systemic problems). Validity and reliability were enhanced through triangulation of questionnaire data with independent observations, wide geographic coverage, and transparent descriptive analysis, with verbatim quotations as evidence.

FINDINGS

Findings of the study are organised under method-focused themes corresponding to the methods/strategies Tanzanian primary school teachers use to develop pupils' English communication ability. Table 1 presents the full Likert-scale questionnaire results, and Table 2 presents the structured observation checklist results.

Table 1. Questionnaire Likert-Scale Results (n = 94).

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	SA+A
I use group work to promote communication in English.	24 (25.5%)	55 (58.5%)	10 (10.6%)	4 (4.3%)	1 (1.1%)	79 (84.0%)
I use role-play activities in my lessons.	9 (9.6%)	19 (20.2%)	61 (64.9%)	3 (3.2%)	2 (2.1%)	28 (29.8%)
I encourage pupils to speak English during lessons.	29 (30.9%)	57 (60.9%)	4 (4.3%)	2 (2.1%)	2 (2.1%)	86 (91.5%)
I use real-life situations/contexts when teaching English, for example, buying goods, asking for directions, asking for information.	32 (34.0%)	54 (54.7%)	6 (6.4%)	2 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)	86 (86.9%)
My pupils actively participate in English lessons.	19 (20.2%)	57 (60.9%)	16 (17.0%)	2 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)	76 (80.9%)
I use authentic materials to teach English, such as audios, videos, and texts.	21 (22.3%)	50 (53.8%)	15 (16.0%)	8 (8.5%)	0 (0.0%)	71 (75.5%)
I use assessment results to improve learning, not as a tool for judgment.	24 (25.5%)	60 (63.8%)	6 (6.4%)	3 (3.2%)	1 (1.1%)	84 (89.4%)
I accept my pupils' mistakes as part of learning.	44 (46.8%)	43 (45.7%)	6 (6.4%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	87 (92.6%)
I integrate language skills into my teaching of English. For example, my pupils may listen to a conversation or story, discuss it, and then write about it.	22 (23.4%)	54 (57.4%)	14 (14.9%)	4 (4.3%)	0 (0.0%)	76 (80.9%)
I teach my pupils based on the function of language, for example, giving advice, apologizing, and requesting, not just grammar structures.	23 (24.5%)	60 (63.8%)	8 (8.5%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.1%)	83 (88.3%)
I use digital resources in teaching English.	14 (14.9%)	29 (30.9%)	25 (26.6%)	24 (25.5%)	2 (2.1%)	43 (45.7%)
Pupils have access to English learning materials,	10 (10.6%)	48 (51.1%)	29 (30.9%)	5 (5.3%)	2 (2.1%)	58 (61.7%)

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; SA+A = Combined frequency and percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree.

Overall, the data presented in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that participatory and communicative teaching methods are most widely reported among the study's respondents. Combining the strongly agreed and agreed responses, 79 respondents (84.0%) reported

using group work to promote communication in English and 87 observers (92.6%) confirmed the use of pair or group work in the observed lessons. Teacher encouragement of pupil participation was unanimously observed, where 94 observers (100%) reported that

teachers actively encourage pupils to participate in lessons, and 91 observers (96.8%) reported that classroom activities promote communication. However, role-play appeared to be infrequently used by teachers: when combining strongly agreed and agreed responses, only 28 respondents (29.8%) reported using it, and only 7 observers (7.4%) reported its use in the

observed lessons. Similarly, the observation data indicate that teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils' self-assessment: only 6 observers (6.4%) reported that teachers provide such opportunities, while 88 observers (93.6%) reported a lack of this practice in the observed lessons.

Table 2. Structured Observation Checklist Results (n = 94).

Indicator	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
The teacher uses English as the medium of instruction.	21 (22.3%)	73 (77.7%)
Pupils speak English in class during the lesson.	53 (56.4%)	41 (43.6%)
Role-play activities are used to develop speaking skills.	7 (7.4%)	87 (92.6%)
The teacher encourages pupils' participation.	94 (100%)	0 (0.0%)
The teacher uses pupils' mistakes as a learning opportunity.	82 (87.2%)	12 (12.8%)
The teacher uses authentic materials; Video and audio clips and newspaper texts.	57 (60.6%)	37 (39.4%)
Pupils ask and answer questions.	80 (85.1%)	14 (14.9%)
Activities provided promote pupils' communication.	91 (96.8%)	3 (3.2%)
Pupils do pair/group activities.	87 (92.6%)	7 (7.4%)
Textbooks are used by pupils during the lesson.	93 (98.9%)	1 (1.1%)
Teaching aids are used during the lesson.	93 (98.9%)	1 (1.1%)
Digital tools are used during the lesson.	45 (47.9%)	49 (52.1%)
The classroom has enough English materials.	29 (30.9%)	65 (69.1%)
The class size is manageable.	68 (72.3%)	26 (27.7%)
The teacher manages the class well.	85 (90.4%)	9 (9.6%)
The teacher asks questions during the lesson.	92 (97.9%)	2 (2.1%)
The teacher gives appropriate feedback to the pupils during the lesson.	88 (93.6%)	6 (6.4%)
The teacher provides opportunities for self-assessment to the pupils.	6 (6.4%)	88 (93.6%)
The teacher uses assessment results to improve learning, not as a tool for judgment.	90 (95.7%)	4 (4.3%)

Note: for the medium of instruction, of the 73 teachers who reported not using English as a medium of instruction, 68 (72.3%) reported mixing English and Kiswahili; 3 (3.2%) teachers reported using Kiswahili; while 2 (2.1%) teachers reported using three languages as a medium of instruction: English, Kiswahili and local vernaculars.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion is grounded in the belief that teaching strategies are not isolated techniques, but integrated communicative events that, when properly understood and enacted, progressively develop pupils' ability to use English for real communicative purposes beyond the classroom. The study's findings are discussed based on themes as follows:

Participatory Methods and Their Implications for Everyday English Communication

Both questionnaire and observation data consistently indicated that group work, pair work, and question-and-answer are among participatory methods used by teachers in teaching English. Combining the strongly agreed and agreed responses, which indicate that 79 respondents (84.0%) use group work to promote pupils' English communication, and that 87 observers (92.6%)

confirmed the use of pair or group activities in observed lessons, indicates that participatory methods are deeply practised by teachers. The observation data from all 94 observed lessons (100%) in which teachers encouraged pupils to participate, combined with 91 observers (96.8%) confirming that activities promoted communication, suggest that a communicative purpose is a genuine feature of English lessons across diverse regional contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, participatory methods are in accord with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which proposes that group and pair work are not merely organisational devices; they are communicative engines of the lesson. They offer what Hymes (1972) called 'sociolinguistic competence': the ability to use language appropriately in different social roles. When pupils practise questions and answers in pairs, discuss

a story in groups, debate a topic in teams or conduct a shared task together, they rehearse the interactive competences which they will need for everyday English communication. Odimire and Muhammed (2026) confirm that African primary school teachers who use 'structured questioning incorporating home languages' and 'activity-inspired lesson planning' produce richer communicative participation than those who rely on teacher-fronted recitation. Barnes-Story et al. (2026) confirm from Malawi that even in classes of more than 100 pupils, teachers who appoint group leaders as assistant teachers extend English-speaking opportunities to every pupil.

Besides, participatory methods align with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasises that group work creates the social interaction in which language development is scaffolded: more proficient peers scaffold less proficient peers within their ZPD, and the group context offers multiple sources of comprehensible input and peer modelling. As one teacher stated that:

"I normally teach my pupils through pair and group work, games, storytelling and real-life examples." (English Teacher, Kakonko, May 2026).

This statement highly aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory as through pair or group work, pupils develop social interaction and more knowledgeable ones on particular content scaffold less knowledgeable one on it.

Real-Life Contexts and Authentic Materials to Build Communication Relevance

Combining the "strongly agreed" and "agreed" responses, 86 respondents (91.5%) reported using real-life situations and contexts in English teaching, and 57 observers (60.6%) confirmed the use of authentic materials. This indicates that contextualisation is widely spreading for English teaching practice. Teachers listed a variety of authentic materials that are broad and locally resourced, including real objects from local environment, photographs, picture cards, newspapers, sentence cards, audio recordings, educational videos, and storybooks. The finding aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which proposes that authentic materials (materials prepared for real-world communication rather than language teaching purposes) provide comprehensive input that reflects genuine language use rather than simplified, decontextualised drill exercises (Krashen, 1982). When a teacher uses a photograph of a Tanzanian market to teach vocabulary for buying and selling, the image provides visual

scaffolding that makes the English comprehensible and connects the language to a familiar real-world context. When a teacher plays an English language song, the audio provides both vocabulary and phonological input. Kambey et al. (2026) report that Tanzanian teachers regard authentic materials as essential for reflecting real-world language use, while Latifah and Mulyono (2025) state that authentic materials in EFL contexts significantly improve English feel relevant rather than arbitrary. From a CLT perspective, real-life contexts give language its communication ability. When pupils learn to name objects in the classroom, describe actions at the market, give directions to a familiar location, or describe family roles, they are learning language that is immediately applicable outside the classroom (Hymes, 1972). One respondent in the study illustrated that:

"When my pupils go back home, I normally assign them a task to listen to news on the radio or watch an educational program on television. When they come back at the next day, I ask them to narrate it to others" (English Teacher, Bumbuli, May 2026).

This explanation is evidence of the use of authentic materials to develop language skills, particularly listening and speaking skills. Omidire and Muhammed (2026) note that African primary school teachers who use locally produced, culturally relevant materials achieve stronger communicative participation than those who rely on materials that do not connect with pupils' lives.

The implications of everyday communication in real-life contexts are substantial. Pupils who learn English vocabulary through real objects, such as a mango, a school bag, a banana, an avocado, an apple, and a water bottle, can use those words immediately in English conversations at home or in the community. Pupils who listen to real English audio, such as songs, short recordings, and digital applications, develop listening comprehension of the natural rhythm, intonation, and English phonology that they will encounter in real interactions. Gavell (2021) and Gilmore (2007) argue that in EFL contexts where English is limited to the classroom, authentic materials bridge the gap between classroom language and real-world language use. As a result, the use of authentic materials in ELT has frequently been associated with enhancing students' communicative competence and overall language development (Mishan, 2005).

The challenge noted in the study where 65 observers (69.1%) reported classrooms without English materials does not negate the positive finding, but rather

contextualises it. Teachers are using whatever available authentic and real-life materials, and many are improvising creatively under scarcity. One respondent acknowledged:

“English materials are not enough at our school compared to the number of pupils in classrooms. However, we do our level best to improvise some teaching aids and other resources” (English teacher, Kakonko, May 2026).

This improvisation in itself reflects a strong pedagogical orientation in Tanzania: teachers who understand the value of real-life context will find ways to bring them into lessons when produced materials are absent or insufficient. This implies that teachers need both sustained training on how to prepare locally-relevant authentic materials and systematic resource provision so that improvisation is supplemented rather than relied upon exclusively (World Bank, 2023; Kambey et al., 2026).

Encouraging Speaking, Error Correction and Building Communicative Confidence

The study revealed teachers encourage pupils to speak (91.5% of questionnaire respondents) and accept pupils' errors as part of learning (92.6% of questionnaire respondents). Besides, strong observation evidence of question-asking (97.9%) and error-as-learning-opportunity use (87.2%) indicates that the affective aspect of communicative English teaching is well understood by the respondents of this study. Teachers who encourage speaking without fear, who accept mistakes and use pupils' errors as teaching and learning opportunities are operationalising the affective filter management component that Krashen's (1982) theory requires for language acquisition. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which describes the teacher as a more capable other who creates space for language practice.

Fear of speaking is the primary obstacle of many Tanzanian pupils who use English as a second or third language, and therefore, encouraging them to speak and accepting their mistakes as part of learning develop their learning confidence. One teacher elaborated:

“I encourage them to speak, and when they make mistakes, I let them speak without interrupting” (English Teacher, Singida, May 2026).

This quotation demonstrates the teacher's understanding that fluency develops through speaking practice with tolerance, and that interrupting a speaker mid-utterance disrupts the flow of communication and reduces the speaker's confidence. Another teacher elaborated as follows:

“I congratulate my pupils when they use English during the lesson, and I appreciate when they request to go out using English” (English Teacher, Meru, May 2026).

This quotation implies a comprehensive positive-reinforcement strategy in which the use of English is praised and rewarded across academic and social domains, from the lesson to the toilet request, reinforcing the idea that English is a language for real communication, not only for formal exercises.

From a CLT perspective, the management of error correction is very crucial for communicative development. Explicit, immediate error correction during fluency activities disrupts communicative flow and reinforces anxiety. By contrast, implicit error correction through recasts (where the teacher reformulates the pupil's error correctly in a natural, conversational reply) provides the correct form without disrupting communication. In the present study, the teacher who reported “I make them speak English frequently and correct them immediately when they make a mistake” (English Teacher, Meru, May 2026) may be describing immediate recast correction, which disrupts communicative flow and reinforces anxiety among the pupils. But the teacher who reported, “I encourage pupils to speak English regularly, correct mistakes politely, use group work and songs” (English Teacher, Mpimbwe, May 2026) may explicitly integrate correction with group work and songs, thereby embedding accuracy work within communicative practice and creating low-anxiety contexts among pupils. Arrafii and Sumarni (2018) identify feedback as one of the five essential components of formative assessment that drive language learning (as presented earlier). Besides, Kang and Lam (2024) argue that effective feedback should be actionable and self-regulatory, building learners' capacity to monitor their own English use over time.

The everyday communication implications of this finding, speaking encouragement and positive error management, are profound. A pupil who has been consistently encouraged to speak English without fear, whose mistakes are treated as learning events rather than shameful failures, and who has received constructive feedback on his or her communication is likely to attempt English in the community, at home, and in social settings. By contrast, a pupil whose every error is publicly ridiculed or harshly corrected will silence himself or herself the moment English is required outside the classroom, regardless of his or her grammatical knowledge.

Integrating Language Skills for Holistic Communication

Combining the “strongly agreed” and “agreed” responses, the finding indicates that 76 respondents (80.9%) integrate language skills in their teaching, reflecting an understanding of language as a holistic communicative system rather than a collection of isolated sub-skills. Teachers reported activities that combine listening, speaking, reading and writing. One teacher illustrated that:

“... I read a story, ask my pupils to listen to it and answer questions. Sometimes I ask them to retell the story...” (English Teacher, Kakonko, May 2026).

This quotation implies integrating the language skills in the lesson. The theoretical underpinnings of integrating language skills are grounded in the CLT perspective, which holds that authentic communication is always multi-skilled: Listening and speaking are inseparable in dialogue; reading and writing are inseparable in correspondence; understanding a story requires listening or reading; and retelling requires speaking or writing. When teachers design lessons that integrate language skills, they create authentic communicative tasks rather than artificial sub-skill exercises (Hymes, 1972).

The implications of this finding for everyday communication are direct: A pupil who has practised all four skills around a common theme, such as market transactions, community health, school events, and environmental topics, acquires vocabulary, structures, and discourse patterns that are applicable across all communication modes in that domain. For instance, if the integrated skills lesson is on greetings and introductions, the pupil who has listened to a model dialogue, read it in a text, practised it in pairs, and written it in an exercise is far better equipped to conduct a real introduction in English than a pupil who has only drilled the phrase 'How are you? I am fine' in isolation. From the study, one teacher reported:

“I use daily speaking activities; group discussions; incorporate storytelling” (English Teacher, Lushoto, June 2026).

This quotation implies that the teacher is systematically developing integrated communicative competence that will serve pupils in their social, academic, and professional lives in English.

Functional Language Teaching and Its Implications for Social Communication

Combining the “strongly agreed” and “agreed” responses, the finding indicates that 83 respondents (88.3%) teach based on the function of language. This

reflects an explicit orientation towards CLT among the teachers who participated in the study. One teacher (English teacher, Kakonko, May 2026) specifically named these approaches: “Communicative Language Teaching and Grammar Translation Method”, acknowledging both the target and the persistent reality of grammar translation practice. Other teachers reported functional language activities as follows: “By practising duologue and conversation” (English Teacher, Meru, May 2026); “via morning speech, debates and class dialogue” (English Teacher, Kilwa, June 2026). These activities focus on language functions: introducing oneself, expressing an opinion, asking for information, debating a proposal, rather than on grammatical forms..

This finding aligns with Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, which is the ability to use language appropriately for social function. Teaching language functions (greeting, requesting, apologizing, describing, narrating, arguing) develops pupils' sociolinguistic competence; the dimension of communicative competence that enables them to select appropriate language for the right contexts. A pupil who knows how to make polite requests in English can apply that skill in different scenarios, including asking a teacher for help, requesting a bus ticket, asking a shopkeeper for a price or a discount on an item, or enquiring at a government office. John (2024) emphasises that CLT's distinctive contribution is precisely function-oriented: it prepares pupils for the range of communicative demands they will encounter in real-life, not just for examination responses.

Role-Play as a Bridge between Classroom and Real-Life Communication

Despite its great role in developing communicative competence, role-play emerged as one of the less strongly evidenced methods in the dataset: combining the “strongly agreed” and “agreed” responses, only 28 respondents (29.8) reported that they use role-play in teaching and learning, and only 7 observers (7.4%) confirmed its use in observed lessons. It should be noted that role-play is not an occasional supplementary activity but a regular, central pedagogical tool in developing pupils' communicative competence. However, in this study, role-play seemed to be of less emphasis by teachers during English teaching and learning.

The finding misaligns with CLT (Hymes, 1972), which argues that role-play is a communicative task that requires learners to use language for real purposes,

such as greeting, buying goods at a market, introducing oneself to a new classmate, and reporting a problem to a teacher. In each scenario, a learner has to select appropriate vocabulary, use correct social register, manage conversational turn-taking, and apply strategies to handle communicative breakdowns. Similarly, the finding misaligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which contends that role-play in pairs or small groups provides social interaction, including peer modeling, prompting, and correction, all of which contribute to the Zone of Proximal Development.

The implications of role-play for everyday English communication are uniquely direct. Unlike abstract grammar exercises, role-play rehearses the exact social scenarios that pupils will encounter in real life outside school. A role-play in which one pupil assumes the role of a shopkeeper and another the role of a customer prepares pupils for actual market and shop transactions in English-speaking contexts. A role-play in which pupils introduce themselves prepares them for social encounters with English speakers at community events, tourist sites, or border crossings. This rehearsal function is the key mechanism through which classroom role-play builds real-world communicative English ability (Makhdoomzada et al., 2026; Wijethilake, 2026).

Digital Tools and Technology in Extending English Communication beyond the Classroom

The finding that 45 of the 94 observed lessons (47.9%) featured digital tools, and that 43 of the 94 questionnaire respondents (47%) agreed or strongly agreed with their use, suggests that digital technology is a present and growing feature of English teaching in primary schools in Tanzania. The digital tools described, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, computers, Jolly Phonics App, and GCompris, serve distinct communicative functions, such as pronunciation practice and phonics (Jolly Phonics), interactive games and problem-solving in English (GCompris), audio and visual input via video and images, and access to online materials through smartphones, computers, or tablets.

This finding, using technology through applications such as GCompris and the Jolly Phonics App, aligns with evidence from Almansoori et al. (2024) and Nshimbi et al. (2020), who argue that phonics applications significantly improve early literacy and phonological awareness, which is the foundation for all spoken and written English communication. One respondent from the study highlighted that:

"I use my tablet and smartphone for my pupils

to play games and pronounce sounds and words, to listen to songs like in the Jolly Phonics App, and show the pupils some objects on the computer" (English Teacher, Meru, May 2026).

This quotation from the respondent also aligns with the 2023 revised curriculum in Tanzania by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2023b), which emphasises the integration of ICT in teaching and learning across all subjects and education levels. The everyday communication implications of digital tool use are multidimensional. Phonics applications equip pupils with the decoding skills needed to read English words independently outside school: on signs, in newspapers, on social media and in correspondence, which extends English communication capability beyond face-to-face interaction. English-language games on computers, tablets, or smartphones expose pupils to spoken and written English in interactive and motivating formats, building vocabulary and contextual understanding that transfer to real communicative encounters.

Audio-visual materials showing English-speaking contexts (such as markets, hospitals, schools, government offices, and playgrounds) provide pupils with cultural and contextual knowledge that helps them communicate appropriately in those settings when they encounter them. Kukulska et al. (2023) confirm that young people in low-resource contexts in Africa and Asia use smartphones to access English-learning content outside school, thereby effectively self-extending their communicative English development through mobile technology. Uneven use of digital tools evidenced within the study's dataset, in which digital tools were observed absent from 52.1% of observed lessons, does not undermine the positive finding, but contextualise it. When digital tools are available, teachers use them thoughtfully and innovatively. One respondent reported that:

"Lack of resources, when I want a projector for my pupils to watch something I have prepared, I fail. So I use my smartphone or sometimes borrow a laptop from my fellow teacher and use it to show my pupils what I want them to see, but it takes time for a large group of pupils " (English Teacher, Kigamboni, May 2026).

This quotation describes a creative workaround that demonstrates both the desire to use digital tools and the structure of inadequate infrastructure. This finding aligns with Taolane and Jita (2024), who argue that ICT integration requires institutional support, such as devices, electricity, projectors and training, not merely

individual teacher initiative.

Formative Assessment and Feedback as Drivers of Communicative Growth

The questionnaire finding that 84 respondents (89.4%) use assessment to improve learning rather than judge pupils, that 87 respondents (92.6%) accept pupils' mistakes as part of learning, and that observation data showing 90 of 94 observed lessons (95.7%) featuring teachers using assessment results to improve teaching and learning indicates that formative assessment principles are deeply embedded in the professional orientation of the teachers who participated in the study. This finding is significant because formative assessment is not just a measurement tool; it is an active pedagogical strategy that drives communicative language development. When a teacher treats pupils' errors not as evidence of failure but as data for instruction, he or she is enacting what Arrafii and Sumarni (2018) call 'assessment for learning': using evidence of current competence to scaffold the next step in development.

This finding also aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which argues that formative feedback serves as scaffolding by identifying precisely where the learner is in the ZPD and providing the support needed to move to the next level. One respondent elaborated that:

"I give my pupils constructive feedback on how best they can improve their work"
(English Teacher, Singida Municipal, May 2026).

This quotation indicates that the teacher is applying formative assessment principles to improve teaching and learning. From a CLT perspective, self-assessment and peer-assessment are communicative competences in themselves. However, in this aspect, the finding indicates that only 6 observers (6.4%) reported that teachers provided opportunities for self-assessment and peer-assessment. A pupil who cannot evaluate his or her own speaking performance, identify errors, and plan improvements has not developed the metalinguistic awareness and self-regulatory capacity that will serve him or her in subsequent English communication encounters. Oscarson (1997, 1989, cited in Alibakhshi & Sarani, p.120) contends that assessment is not the sole responsibility of the teacher but rather a shared responsibility of both learners and teachers. This shared responsibility will result in a democratic educational system and learning context, benefiting learners, teachers, and the institute. King and Lam (2024) argue that assessment literacy,

the ability to understand and use assessment information to improve own learning, is a crucial component of autonomous language learning. For Tanzanian primary school pupils who need to continue developing English largely through self-directed engagement after primary school, this self-assessment capacity is of particular long-term significance.

The everyday communication implications of formative assessment practices are subtle but important. A pupil who has developed the habit of noticing his or her own errors and reflecting on how to correct his or her communication for accuracy and appropriateness is a fundamentally different communicator from a pupil who has only experienced summative assessment. The former will notice when a real-life communication fails and seek to understand why; whereas the latter will simply fall silent. In the study, one teacher pointed out that:

"One challenge I face is the different levels of English understanding among pupils. I address this by using varied teaching methods and providing additional support to ensure all learners can progress effectively"
(English Teacher, Lushoto, June 2026).

This elaboration describes individualised formative responsiveness by adapting instruction to each pupil's communicative development. This responsiveness is particularly important in multilingual classrooms, where pupils' starting points differ significantly depending on whether English is the second or third language. Hidayat and Purnawaman (2024) confirm that formative assessment literacy in EFL teaching must address the socio-emotional dimension - teachers must be able to respond to the affective and the cognitive dimensions of learners' language development.

Conclusion and Areas for Further Study

The study investigated the methods used by teachers in primary schools to develop pupils' ability to communicate in English as a second language across 17 district councils in 11 regions in Tanzania Mainland. The findings revealed a high level of communicative methods in use, such as group work and pair work, real-life contexts, authentic materials, songs and stories, speaking encouragement with positive error management, integrated language skills, functional language teaching, digital tools, and formative assessment and feedback. The methods align with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Hymes, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978; John, 2024; Omidire & Muhammed, 2026).

The findings indicate that each method contributes distinctly yet inter-connectedly to pupils' development of communicative English. Real-life contexts create language-life bridges; songs and stories provide low-anxiety, multimodal input that builds vocabulary and phonological competence. Speaking, encouraging, and positive error management reduce the affective filter and build communicative confidence, which is the prerequisite for all real-world English use. Integrated language skills instruction builds the holistic competence needed for academic English; functional language teaching develops the socio-linguistic competence to use English appropriately in different social settings; digital tools extend English input and practice beyond the classroom. Formative assessment builds self-regulatory communicative awareness. Thus, to sustain this, school leaders, District Education Officers, and all responsible authorities should support teachers through professional development, provision of materials, and collaborative learning. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to use role-play, as it rehearses real social interactions, which are essential to communication.

Generally, the study concludes that Tanzanian primary school teachers are not passive recipients of policy directives but active, inventive practitioners who deploy a sophisticated array of communicative methods in multi-lingual classrooms. Their methods are not isolated but integrated communicative events that, when combined and sustained, progressively build the English communication ability that pupils need for school, community, home and future life.

Areas for further study include the following: Longitudinal studies on how the methods demonstrated here affect pupils' long-term English communicative competence across the Standard One to Six classes; comparative rural-urban studies of the same methods to understand how context shapes implementation and effectiveness; experimental or design-based research on specific high-impact methods, particularly phonics applications; investigation of differential effectiveness of MEWAKA for English communicative teaching development; and research on how multi-lingual and tri-lingual backgrounds can be strategically used as communicative resources rather than treated as obstacles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study submits the following recommendations for different education stakeholders.

For the government, through the responsible ministries and institutions, should strengthen investment in sustainable digital infrastructure for English teaching, including offline-capable phonics and story applications, shared devices, and projectors. Teachers should not rely on their own individual smartphones as the primary digital resource. It should also provide training on Jolly Phonics instructions to all Standard One and Two teachers across all district councils in the country, as empirical evidence indicates its effectiveness in developing pupils' literacy – ability to read and write, which are among the key components for communicative competence.

The government must also, ensure adequate provision of English resources, including textbooks, teacher's guides, graded readers, storybooks, audio materials, audio-visual materials, picture cards and digital devices. Other initiatives should be strengthening monitoring and evaluation for MEWAKA by ensuring that, in some sessions, English experts (more knowledgeable ones) attend the communities of learning (CoL) to provide scaffolding to teachers in the areas where they may face challenges. And provide training to teachers on how to enable pupils to make self-assessment, as it promotes intrinsic motivation, empowers pupils to guide their own learning and internalise the criteria for judging success.

Teacher training institutions are recommended to build on teacher trainees' own English communicative proficiency through spoken English clubs, debating societies, English-medium tutorial groups, and peer monitoring. A teacher cannot provide CLT-quality communicative input if he or she lacks confidence in English. Also, they have to introduce or strengthen training in creating authentic materials using locally available resources: photographs, community objects, locally recorded audio, locally relevant stories, and contextually meaningful role-play scenarios. This equips teachers to provide comprehensible input in resource-scarce environments.

Heads of schools, academic teachers and English teachers, should provide systematic institutional leadership for English by scheduling dedicated MEWAKA sessions focused on communicative strategies, sharing successful lesson designs, and collaboratively preparing contextually relevant teaching and learning aids as a school team.

They are also to support English teachers through provision of materials, constructive feedback, motivation and facilitation of team teaching. The

evidence shows that school heads who provide team-teaching opportunities create measurably better conditions for communicative English teaching. Lastly, they should create English-rich school environments where English is used for real communication beyond English lessons: at assemblies, in school notices, in learning corners, on classroom labels, and in school clubs. This reinforces the everyday English communication that teachers are building in their lessons.

English teachers should systematically incorporate role-play scenarios drawn from pupils' real-life environment, such as the market, the health clinic, the school office, greeting visitors, giving directions, asking for directions, buying goods, and making introductions. Design each role-play with a clear communicative function and a real-world application and discuss with pupils how the language practised can be used outside school. Also, they are supposed to integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing around authentic communicative themes rather than teaching skills in isolation. An activity on 'asking for help' that combines listening to a model dialogue, reading it, speaking it in pairs and writing a short exercise develops all four language skills and build integrated communicative competence applicable across all settings.

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