



Beyond Curriculum Policy: Classroom Enactment of the Competence-Based Curriculum in Lower Primary English in Kamonyi District, Rwanda

Jean Damascene Ntakirutimana, Innocent Twagilimana & Prudencienne Ugiriwabo
University of Rwanda-College of Education
Email: ndamasm1987@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study examined the extent to which lower primary teachers' classroom practices reflected Competence-Based Curriculum expectations in English teaching in Kamonyi District, Rwanda. Guided by Curriculum Implementation Theory and Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory, the study used a convergent mixed-methods design. Evidence was obtained from 12 classroom observations, 12 teacher focus group discussions, 12 head teacher interviews, and analysis of official curriculum documents. Observation data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, while qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated during interpretation. Findings showed that classroom practices reflected CBC expectations only to a low extent ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.56$). Lesson preparation and organisation were comparatively stronger ($M = 2.23$), whereas differentiation ($M = 1.70$), formative assessment ($M = 1.84$), and use of instructional materials ($M = 1.89$) were weakest. Teaching commonly relied on explanation, repetition, whole-class questioning, textbook exercises, and translation, with limited independent English use, integrated language practice, feedback, and differentiated support. These weaknesses were linked to large classes, limited lesson time, inadequate materials, limited spoken-English confidence, and insufficient practice-oriented support. The study concludes that awareness of CBC had not yet translated into consistent competence-based English instruction.*

Keywords: *Classroom Enactment, Competence-Based Curriculum, English Teaching, Lower Primary, Teacher Preparedness*

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1. Introduction

Globally, curriculum reform has increasingly shifted from the transmission of subject content towards the development of learners' ability to apply knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in practical situations. This shift has strengthened the adoption of competence-based curricula, which emphasise communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving through

meaningful learning activities (Gouëdard et al., 2020). However, the success of such reforms depends not only on the quality of curriculum documents but also on how teachers translate curriculum expectations into classroom experiences that enable learners to participate, practise, and demonstrate competence.

The existence of a well-designed curriculum does not automatically produce corresponding changes in classroom instruction. Curriculum reforms may remain

largely at policy level when teachers have limited pedagogical preparation, insufficient professional support, or inadequate instructional resources (Gouëdard et al., 2020). Effective classroom enactment therefore requires teachers to interpret learning outcomes, organise learner-centred activities, integrate continuous assessment, support learners with different needs, and use available resources meaningfully (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This distinction between curriculum policy and classroom practice is important because teachers may understand and support a reform while continuing to rely on explanation, repetition, copying, whole-class responses, and other familiar teacher-centred routines.

Evidence from African education systems indicates that the implementation of competence-based curricula is often affected by a gap between ambitious policy expectations and classroom realities. In Zambia, teachers were found to recognise the principles of competence-based education while experiencing difficulty in interpreting curriculum requirements and designing activities that genuinely developed competence (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). Similarly, research in Kenyan primary schools showed that favourable perceptions of competency-based reform did not always correspond with consistent use of active learning, formative assessment, and meaningful pupil participation (Ondo & Waweru, 2022). Such gaps are particularly significant in the early grades because limited learner participation, feedback, and instructional support may weaken the development of foundational reading and language skills needed for later learning (World Bank, 2022).

In Rwanda, the Competence-Based Curriculum is closely linked to the national goal of strengthening foundational learning. The Foundational Learning Strategy 2024-2029 identifies improved literacy instruction, teacher capacity, instructional support, and effective classroom practice as essential to lower primary education (Ministry of Education, 2024). Nevertheless, CBC implementation continues to be constrained by limited practice-oriented training, large classes, inadequate instructional resources, and difficulty moving from traditional teaching towards active and formative approaches (Ndayambaje & Ndiwokubwayo, 2025). These challenges are especially relevant to lower primary English, where teachers are expected to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing through connected, interactive, and learner-centred activities rather than teaching the language skills separately (Uwanyirigira et al., 2023).

Lower primary English teaching requires teachers to provide age-appropriate opportunities for learners to communicate, read, write, respond to questions, receive feedback, and participate in varied learning activities. The

Ministry of Education (2024) recognises English literacy as an important foundation for learners' progress across the curriculum. However, NESA (2023) reported continuing weaknesses in reading fluency and comprehension among Primary Three learners. Although learner performance is influenced by several factors and cannot be attributed solely to teachers, these findings raise questions about whether English classroom practices consistently provide the participation, formative assessment, differentiation, language-skill integration, and instructional support expected under CBC.

The difference between curriculum expectations and actual teaching practice also creates a methodological concern. Jia and Zhang (2023) found that teachers' reported confidence in learner-centred reforms may not always correspond with what is observed during lessons. This suggests that curriculum implementation should not be assessed through self-reports alone. Direct classroom observation, teacher explanations, school-leader perspectives, and curriculum-document analysis are also necessary to determine how policy expectations are enacted under real teaching conditions.

In Southern Province, school-based professional development, pedagogical supervision, and access to instructional resources have been identified as important conditions for effective CBC implementation (REB, 2022). However, limited evidence has directly compared lower primary English classroom practices with official curriculum expectations in Kamonyi District. Existing studies have often examined teachers' perceptions, curriculum understanding, implementation challenges, or pedagogical practices separately. Consequently, less is known about how learner-centred teaching, meaningful participation, integrated language skills, formative assessment, differentiation, use of English, and instructional materials are enacted within actual lower primary English lessons in the district.

Against this background, the study examined the extent to which lower primary teachers' classroom practices reflected Competence-Based Curriculum expectations in English teaching in Kamonyi District, Rwanda. The paper draws on classroom observations, teacher focus group discussions, head teacher interviews, and curriculum-document analysis to compare the intended curriculum with the practices enacted during English lessons. By concentrating on classroom enactment, the study provides evidence on the areas in which CBC expectations were reflected and the areas in which implementation remained constrained by pedagogical and contextual conditions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Competence-Based Curriculum requires lower primary English instruction to promote active learner participation, continuous assessment, differentiated support, and the integrated development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ministry of Education, 2024; Uwanyirigira et al., 2023). However, NESA (2023) reported continuing difficulties in reading fluency and comprehension among Primary Three learners, raising concerns about the quality and consistency of learning opportunities provided in the early grades. Although these difficulties cannot be attributed solely to teachers, effective foundational literacy partly depends on whether classroom instruction reflects the learner-centred, interactive, and assessment-oriented practices expected under CBC. Evidence from Rwanda and neighbouring countries indicates that curriculum implementation remains uneven, as teachers may understand CBC principles while continuing to rely on explanation, repetition, copying, whole-class questioning, and other teacher-centred practices (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019; Ondo & Waweru, 2022). In Rwanda, large classes, inadequate instructional materials, limited practice-oriented training, and continued reliance on traditional approaches have further constrained effective implementation (Ndayambaje & Ndiokubwayo, 2025). Previous studies examined teachers' interpretation of curriculum requirements, general pedagogical practices, and implementation challenges, but limited evidence directly compared observed lower primary English classroom practices with official curriculum expectations in Kamonyi District. It therefore remained unclear whether learner-centred instruction, formative assessment, differentiation, language-skill integration, learner participation, and the use of instructional materials reflected what the curriculum required. Without such classroom-based and context-specific evidence, professional development, instructional supervision, and curriculum support could fail to address the actual weaknesses affecting CBC enactment. This gap constituted the problem investigated in selected lower primary schools in Kamonyi District, Rwanda.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To examine the extent to which lower primary teachers' classroom practices reflected Competence-Based Curriculum expectations in English teaching.

1.3 Research Question

To what extent did lower primary teachers' classroom practices reflect Competence-Based Curriculum expectations in English teaching?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Curriculum Implementation Theory and Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory. Curriculum Implementation Theory, associated with Fullan (2016), explains that curriculum reform is not implemented automatically because teachers must interpret official expectations and translate them into classroom practice under conditions shaped by training, leadership, resources, class size, workload, time, and professional support. Its distinction between the intended curriculum and the enacted curriculum was therefore central to examining whether lower primary English lessons reflected CBC expectations in learner participation, formative assessment, differentiation, language-skill integration, English use, and instructional-material use. The theory also provided an analytical basis for explaining why formal compliance with curriculum requirements, such as lesson planning and objective setting, might coexist with limited learner-centred practice.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory, introduced by Shulman (1986, 1987), complemented this explanation by showing that subject knowledge alone is insufficient for effective teaching. Teachers must know how to represent English content, anticipate learners' difficulties, select suitable activities, assess understanding, and adapt instruction to different needs. Cochran et al. (1993) further located this knowledge at the intersection of subject matter, pedagogy, learners, and context, while Porter et al. (2024) linked it to early language and literacy development. Together, the two theories enabled the study to interpret weak classroom enactment not simply as teacher resistance, but as the combined effect of limited specialised pedagogical knowledge and restrictive implementation conditions.

2.2 Classroom Enactment of the Competence-Based Curriculum

Curriculum enactment concerns how teachers interpret official expectations and convert them into the learning experiences provided during lessons. Fullan (2016) distinguishes the intended curriculum in policy documents from the enacted curriculum experienced by learners, showing that reform is shaped by teachers' knowledge, beliefs, experience, and understanding of learners, as well as by leadership, resources, workload, and professional support (UNESCO, 2021). In lower primary English,

enactment is therefore demonstrated not by the mere presence of group work, questioning, songs, or learner-centred objectives, but by whether learners meaningfully listen, speak, read, write, receive feedback, and apply language. Lightbown and Spada (2021) emphasise understandable input and purposeful language use, while Ellis (2015) highlights interaction and corrective feedback. Ondo and Waweru (2022) similarly showed that activities may appear learner-centred while providing limited participation or formative assessment, indicating that visible compliance with curriculum procedures does not necessarily constitute genuine competence development.

Evidence from Rwanda confirms that the transition from intended to enacted curriculum remains uneven. Ndiwokubwayo et al. (2020) reported continued reliance on teacher explanation and whole-class responses, while Uwanyirigira et al. (2023) identified limited integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Van de Kuilen et al. (2022) further showed that learner-centred approaches are often adapted to familiar routines and institutional conditions. Collectively, these studies demonstrate a policy-practice gap but provide limited evidence on how participation, language-skill integration, assessment, differentiation, English use, and instructional materials operate together within lower primary lessons. This gap justified examining these dimensions simultaneously in Kamonyi District to determine whether classroom activities merely reflected the language of CBC or enabled learners to develop the intended English competences.

2.3 Formative Assessment and Differentiation

Formative assessment should generate evidence about what learners understand, where difficulties occur, and how instruction should be adjusted. UNESCO (2023) associates effective foundational literacy with regular monitoring, meaningful feedback, and timely support for learners progressing at different rates. Under CBC, assessment should therefore move beyond choral responses, recall questions, and delayed marking of written work to reveal individual progress in oral language, word recognition, fluency, comprehension, and writing. Differentiation gives this evidence instructional value by varying questions, pace, grouping, materials, scaffolding, or assistance according to learner needs. Schweisfurth (2019) argues that learner-centred pedagogy must be responsive to learners and classroom realities, while Piper et al. (2018) show that structured guidance, practical materials, and sustained support can strengthen

early literacy. Repetition or additional explanation may provide immediate help, but it does not constitute full differentiation when every learner continues to receive the same task, material, and expected response.

Assessment and differentiation are therefore among the most demanding dimensions of CBC enactment. Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) found that teachers may understand the general purpose of CBC while remaining uncertain about translating it into assessment and classroom activities, whereas Ndayambaje and Ndiwokubwayo (2025) linked implementation difficulties in Rwanda to large classes, limited practical training, inadequate resources, and reliance on conventional approaches. These findings suggest that weak differentiation may result not simply from unwillingness but from limited diagnostic knowledge and classroom conditions that make individual monitoring difficult. However, previous studies have rarely examined formative assessment, feedback, support for struggling learners, and differentiated activities together through direct observation of lower primary English lessons. Examining these practices in Kamonyi District therefore helped determine whether teachers used assessment evidence responsively or mainly checked whether learners produced correct answers.

2.4 Instructional Resources and Classroom Conditions

Instructional resources can make English concrete and accessible to young learners. Textbooks and teacher guides provide structure, while pictures, charts, flashcards, word cards, storybooks, real objects, and locally produced materials can support vocabulary, interaction, reading, and writing. The World Bank (2022) identifies suitable materials and structured teacher support as essential to early-grade literacy, but availability alone does not ensure effective use. Materials contribute to competence development only when teachers connect them to intended outcomes and engage learners in observing, discussing, manipulating, reading, or responding. Thus, even a well-resourced classroom may remain teacher-centred when textbooks are used mainly for copying and repetition. Rwanda Basic Education Board (2022) similarly links resource provision with pedagogical supervision and professional development, indicating that instructional value depends on teachers' ability to transform materials into purposeful learning activities.

Class size, lesson time, teachers' English proficiency, and professional support further determine how such resources are used. Large classes restrict individual assessment, feedback, movement, group monitoring, and differentiation, while limited confidence in spoken English may encourage translation, repetition, and brief teacher-controlled exchanges (Richards, 2017). These difficulties are more likely to be addressed through model lessons, guided practice, coaching, and feedback than through short curriculum orientations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Existing studies discuss these conditions broadly but provide limited evidence on how they interact during lower primary English lessons in Kamonyi District. The study therefore examined resources and classroom conditions as interconnected influences on learner-centred teaching, formative assessment, differentiation, and meaningful English use.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm and Design

The study was guided by the pragmatic paradigm and employed a convergent mixed-methods design with a descriptive orientation. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same study period, analysed separately, and integrated during interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The design enabled classroom practices to be examined through measurable observation evidence and contextual explanations from teachers, head teachers, and curriculum documents without manipulating teaching conditions.

3.2 Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Kamonyi District in Rwanda's Southern Province, which comprises rural, semi-urban, and peri-urban communities and public and government-aided primary schools operating under varied educational conditions (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2023). The setting was relevant because schools differed in class size, instructional resources, professional-development opportunities, supervision, and support for CBC implementation.

3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The accessible population comprised 579 lower primary English teachers. The broader study involved 212 teachers from 29 schools selected through proportionate school

selection followed by census sampling of eligible teachers. For the classroom-based strand reported in this paper, 12 schools were purposively selected, yielding 12 English lesson observations, 12 teacher focus group discussions, and 12 head teacher interviews. The national CBC framework, P1–P3 English syllabi, teacher guides, and assessment guidance were purposively selected for document analysis. The questionnaire sample remained part of the broader study, while this paper primarily used evidence relevant to classroom enactment.

3.4 Research Instruments

Data were collected using a teacher questionnaire, classroom observation checklist, focus group discussion guide, head teacher interview guide, and curriculum document analysis matrix. The questionnaire provided contextual information on training, class size, curriculum access, and professional support; the observation checklist assessed lesson preparation, learner-centred teaching, participation, integration of language skills, formative assessment, differentiation, English use, and instructional materials. Interviews and focus groups explored implementation experiences and constraints, while the document matrix established official CBC expectations used as the benchmark for classroom practice. The instruments were expert-reviewed and piloted in two schools excluded from the study. Cronbach's alpha for the preparedness scale was .84, with subscales ranging from .78 to .86, while the knowledge items obtained a KR-20 coefficient of .79 (Taber, 2018). Qualitative trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation and consistent coding procedures.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Following institutional and administrative approval, questionnaires were administered to the 212 teachers in the 29 sampled schools. During the same general data-collection period, one lower primary English lesson was observed, one teacher focus group discussion was conducted, and the head teacher was interviewed in each of the 12 purposively selected schools. Relevant curriculum documents were reviewed using the analysis matrix. Completed instruments, observation notes, recordings, and transcripts were checked, coded, and securely organised for analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Classroom observation data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, item

means, and domain mean scores. Focus group discussions, head teacher interviews, and field notes were transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2021), while curriculum documents were analysed through qualitative content analysis. Evidence from the different sources was integrated during interpretation to identify convergence, complementarity, and divergence between intended curriculum expectations and enacted classroom practices. Inferential statistics were not used because the study was descriptive and did not test hypotheses or compare groups statistically.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Rwanda, followed by permission from Kamonyi District and participating schools. Participants gave informed consent and were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected through participant and school codes, and research records were securely stored and used only for the purposes of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The results are presented according to the study objective and research question. They begin with classroom observation findings, followed by teachers' explanations, head teachers' perspectives, and a comparison of classroom practices with official curriculum expectations.

4.1.1 Classroom Observation Findings

12 lower primary English lessons were observed to determine the extent to which classroom practices reflected CBC expectations. The observation checklist assessed lesson preparation, learner-centred teaching, integration of language skills, formative assessment, differentiation, use of English, instructional materials, and overall lesson alignment. Each practice was rated from 1, not observed, to 4, observed to a great extent. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: Summary of Classroom Practices Observed in Lower Primary English Lessons

Observation domain	Not observed, <i>n</i> (%)	Small extent, <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate extent, <i>n</i> (%)	Great extent, <i>n</i> (%)	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Lesson preparation and organisation	6 (10.0)	37 (61.7)	14 (23.3)	3 (5.0)	2.23	0.60	Low
Learner-centred teaching and participation	24 (25.0)	49 (51.0)	22 (22.9)	1 (1.0)	2.00	0.58	Low
Integration of English language skills	20 (20.8)	54 (56.2)	21 (21.9)	1 (1.0)	2.03	0.54	Low
Formative assessment and feedback	38 (35.2)	50 (46.3)	19 (17.6)	1 (0.9)	1.84	0.60	Low
Differentiation and inclusive teaching	34 (40.5)	41 (48.8)	9 (10.7)	0 (0.0)	1.70	0.51	Very low
Teacher's use of English	15 (20.8)	38 (52.8)	18 (25.0)	1 (1.4)	2.07	0.59	Low
Use of teaching and learning materials	27 (32.1)	39 (46.4)	18 (21.4)	0 (0.0)	1.89	0.56	Low
Overall lesson assessment	30 (31.2)	41 (42.7)	25 (26.0)	0 (0.0)	1.95	0.64	Low
Overall classroom practice	194 (27.9)	349 (50.1)	146 (21.0)	7 (1.0)	1.95	0.56	Low

Source: Field data (2026)

Table 1 shows that classroom practices reflected CBC expectations only to a low extent, as indicated by the overall mean of 1.95 (SD = 0.56). Half of all indicator ratings fell within the small-extent category, while 27.9% represented practices that were not observed, and only 22.0% showed practices demonstrated to a moderate or great extent. Lesson preparation and organisation recorded the highest mean of 2.23, indicating that teachers were comparatively more successful in organising lessons, communicating objectives, and sequencing activities than in applying interactive and responsive instructional practices. However, learner-centred teaching and language-skill integration remained limited, with 76.0% and 77.0% of the respective ratings falling within the absent or small-extent categories. These results imply that classroom participation was largely teacher-controlled and that listening, speaking, reading, and writing were not consistently integrated through meaningful learning activities, showing that lesson preparation did not always translate into effective classroom enactment of CBC.

4.1.2 Teachers' Explanations of Their Classroom Practices

Focus group discussions with teachers from the 12 schools were used to explain the limited classroom enactment observed in English lessons. The findings centred on learner participation and language integration, assessment and support for different learners, and contextual conditions affecting implementation.

Teachers reported using questioning, repetition, songs, reading aloud, and occasional pair or group activities. However, sustaining meaningful interaction in English was difficult. One participant stated:

"If learners start discussing in groups, they immediately change to Kinyarwanda. We therefore end up explaining everything ourselves." (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 12)

This extract indicates that organising learners into groups did not necessarily produce learner-centred English interaction. When learners shifted to Kinyarwanda, teachers resumed control through explanation, showing that the central difficulty involved designing and scaffolding activities that learners could complete through understandable English.

Another participant explained:

"Sometimes teacher-centred teaching is not because we prefer it. It is because we are afraid that learners will not achieve the lesson

objectives if we leave them to work independently." (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 3)

This response shows that teacher-centred instruction was partly a practical reaction to uncertainty rather than a deliberate rejection of CBC. Teachers regarded explanation and whole-class control as safer ways of completing planned content, particularly when they lacked confidence that learners could work independently within the available lesson time.

Teachers also described difficulties maintaining English as the language of classroom interaction. One participant remarked:

"Sometimes we begin the lesson in English, but when learners fail to understand, we immediately translate into Kinyarwanda to help them at least understand the concept." (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 8)

The extract reveals a tension between supporting immediate comprehension and sustaining exposure to English. Translation enabled learners to understand lesson content, but its immediate use reduced opportunities for them to interpret English through gestures, pictures, examples, peer support, and contextual clues. It therefore supported content access while limiting the development of listening and communicative competence.

Participants recognised the importance of continuous assessment but expressed uncertainty about assessing competence beyond correct answers. One teacher stated:

"We know formative assessment is important, but sometimes we are not sure how to assess competences instead of simply checking correct answers." (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 4)

This response indicates that teachers understood the general purpose of formative assessment but experienced difficulty translating it into classroom procedures. Assessment often established whether answers were correct without examining how learners communicated, participated, applied language, or progressed towards the intended competence.

Another teacher added:

"Most of us were trained to mark written work. Assessing speaking, participation and competences is still

difficult.” (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 9)

Teachers’ previous training favoured written exercises, making oral communication and participation difficult to assess systematically. Support for struggling learners was mainly reactive, involving repetition, additional explanation, or peer assistance rather than planned differentiation. Large classes, limited time, inadequate materials, and varied abilities further encouraged reliance on whole-class questioning and written work, thereby reducing individual assessment, feedback, and instructional adjustment. One participant explained:

“We mainly depend on the textbook because it is available for everyone. Preparing additional teaching aids requires time, and sometimes we do not have the necessary materials.” (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 5)

The extract explains why textbooks and chalkboards dominated instruction. Teachers preferred resources that were readily available and required limited preparation, especially under time and workload constraints. However, dependence on textbooks encouraged reading, copying, and teacher explanation rather than learner interaction with pictures, objects, word cards, and other materials supporting meaningful language use.

Another participant stated:

“We know that children enjoy learning through pictures and objects, but many of us have never received practical training on preparing such materials.” (Teacher, Focus Group Discussion, School 11)

This response shows that limited use of varied resources resulted not only from shortages but also from insufficient practical knowledge of designing and applying locally available materials. The challenge therefore concerned both resource availability and teachers’ ability to convert pictures, objects, and locally produced aids into activities linked to specific English competences.

The focus group findings explained the low observation results in learner-centred teaching, language-skill integration, formative assessment, differentiation, and instructional-material use. Teachers attributed these weaknesses to limited confidence in facilitating English interaction, uncertainty about competence-based assessment, insufficient practical pedagogical preparation, large classes, restricted lesson time, varied learner

abilities, and inadequate resources. The findings imply that awareness of CBC principles alone was insufficient to ensure their consistent enactment in lower primary English classrooms.

4.1.3 Head Teachers’ Perspectives on Classroom Practices

Interviews with the 12 head teachers examined expected and observed CBC practices, instructional monitoring, professional support, and conditions affecting lower primary English teaching. Their accounts indicated that schools expected active participation, regular English use, competence-based activities, and continuous assessment, although actual classroom practices remained largely teacher-directed.

Head teachers observed that oral questioning, repetition, and textbook exercises occurred more frequently than collaborative and independent language activities. One participant explained:

“During lesson observations, teachers commonly use oral questions and repetition. Pair work, group discussion and learner-generated language are less frequently observed.” (Head Teacher 2)

The extract indicates that learners participated mainly by responding to teacher-directed prompts rather than initiating communication or using English independently. A similar pattern was reported by another participant:

“Teachers commonly use choral repetition, oral questioning and exercises from the textbook. Learners receive limited opportunities to communicate independently in English.” (Head Teacher 4)

These practices supported pronunciation, vocabulary recall, and written exercises but provided limited opportunities for sustained interaction and independent language production. Nevertheless, some CBC-aligned practices were evident:

“Some teachers use songs, pictures, repetition and locally available materials effectively when introducing vocabulary.” (Head Teacher 5)

This shows that teachers sometimes used age-appropriate materials effectively, particularly when introducing vocabulary. However, these resources were not consistently extended to activities integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Schools monitored implementation through lesson-plan reviews, classroom visits, post-observation feedback, professional-development meetings, and peer support. Although these structures enabled head teachers to identify general weaknesses, the support offered was not always sufficiently specialised. One head teacher stated:

“Teachers receive feedback after classroom visits, but even school leaders may lack the specialised knowledge needed to support phonics, early literacy and communicative English teaching effectively.” (Head Teacher 6)

The extract indicates that school leaders could provide general feedback on lesson organisation, participation, and classroom management but had limited capacity to demonstrate specialised practices such as phonics, guided reading, language-skill integration, and communicative teaching. Peer discussions and support from experienced teachers were used to address this limitation, although schools lacked English specialists who could provide practical modelling.

Classroom implementation was also affected by limited confidence in spoken English, large classes, inadequate reading materials, insufficient textbooks, and limited subject-specific training. One participant explained:

“Teachers face large classes, inadequate readers, insufficient textbooks and limited opportunities to provide individual support.” (Head Teacher 7)

These conditions restricted teachers’ ability to monitor individual progress, provide timely feedback, differentiate activities, and organise independent or small-group literacy work. Head teachers further noted that supplying textbooks and curriculum documents was insufficient when teachers lacked practical guidance on adapting materials, integrating language skills, and supporting learners with different abilities. Overall, their accounts showed that lesson preparation, oral questioning, repetition, and textbook use were more evident than independent English communication, formative assessment, differentiation, and integrated language teaching.

4.4 Curriculum Expectations as the Benchmark for Classroom Practice

The Curriculum Document Analysis Matrix established the official practices expected in lower primary English classrooms using the Rwanda Competence-Based Curriculum Framework, the P1-P3 English syllabi, teacher guides, and assessment guidance. These documents require teachers to facilitate purposeful learning, promote active participation, integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing, assess learning continuously, respond to learner differences, and use varied instructional resources. The 2025 syllabus further emphasises learner-centred pedagogy, active learning, inclusion, and practical application of knowledge. Table 2 compares these expectations with evidence from classroom observations, focus group discussions, and head teacher interviews.

Table 2: Comparison of Curriculum Expectations with Classroom Practices

Classroom dimension	Official curriculum expectation	Observation evidence	Teachers’ explanations	Head teachers’ evidence	Interpretation
Teacher facilitation	The teacher should organise purposeful tasks, guide learners, monitor progress, and provide feedback rather than dominate instruction.	Lessons were largely controlled through explanation, repetition, and teacher-directed questioning.	Teachers explained that they often took control when learners struggled to work independently or communicate in English.	Head teachers reported that explanation, oral questioning, and choral repetition were more common than learner-led activities.	Low alignment
Active learner participation and collaboration	Learners should ask and answer questions, collaborate, practise English, and apply learning through pair work, group work, role-play, games, songs, and discussion.	Pair work, group work, and independent learner communication were observed only to a limited extent.	Teachers stated that group activities were difficult to manage because learners often shifted to Kinyarwanda or became difficult to monitor.	Head teachers observed that learner participation was mainly limited to responding to teacher questions and repeating answers.	Low alignment

Integration of language skills	Listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be developed together through meaningful topics and activities.	Some lessons combined reading, writing, and oral responses, but sustained speaking and listening activities were limited.	Teachers acknowledged that they often gave greater attention to vocabulary, reading, copying, and written exercises than to communicative speaking.	Head teachers reported frequent use of textbook exercises and repetition, with limited opportunities for independent communication.	Partial alignment
Formative and diagnostic assessment	Teachers should establish prior knowledge, monitor individual progress, identify difficulties, provide feedback, and adjust instruction.	Assessment mainly involved oral questioning, choral responses, and written exercises; adjustment of instruction was rarely evident.	Teachers reported uncertainty about assessing competences, speaking, participation, and individual progress.	Head teachers noted that large classes limited individual assessment and follow-up support.	Low alignment
Differentiation and inclusion	Activities, questions, materials, pace, and support should be adapted to learners' different abilities and needs.	Differentiation was the least evident observation domain, with most learners receiving the same tasks and explanations.	Teachers mainly described repetition, additional explanation, peer support, or extra time for learners experiencing difficulty.	Head teachers associated weak differentiation with large classes, varied learner abilities, and limited specialised training.	Low alignment
Use of English and Kinyarwanda	English should provide meaningful exposure and communication, while Kinyarwanda may be used strategically to support understanding without replacing English practice.	Teachers frequently shifted to Kinyarwanda when learners appeared not to understand English.	Teachers explained that translation helped them complete lessons and ensure immediate comprehension.	Head teachers identified limited confidence in spoken English as a major constraint on classroom communication.	Partial to low alignment
Teaching and learning materials	Textbooks, teacher guides, pictures, charts, flashcards, real objects, word cards, and locally made materials should support participation and language development.	Textbooks and chalkboards were used more frequently than visual, concrete, or locally made materials.	Teachers linked limited material use to lack of time, insufficient resources, and inadequate practical preparation.	Head teachers reported that materials were sometimes available, but teachers required guidance on using a wider range effectively.	Partial alignment
Lesson planning and organisation	Lessons should be organised around clear competences, objectives, sequenced activities, assessment, and appropriate resources.	Planning and lesson organisation were more evident than other domains, although learner practice and assessment were not always adequately incorporated.	Teachers generally expressed confidence in lesson preparation and objective setting.	Head teachers reported reviewing lesson plans and monitoring whether curriculum requirements were included.	Partial alignment

Source: Field data (2026)

Table 2 shows that alignment with CBC was strongest in lesson planning but weakest in actual competence development. Although teachers prepared objectives and

followed lesson sequences, instruction remained dominated by explanation, repetition, whole-class questioning, and textbook exercises. Observations, focus

groups, and head teacher interviews consistently revealed limited independent English use, collaboration, integrated language practice, formative feedback, and differentiation. This indicates stronger procedural compliance than pedagogical enactment, since planned learner-centred activities were not consistently experienced by learners. Assessment mainly checked correct answers, while support for struggling learners relied on repeated explanations rather than varied tasks or assistance. The findings therefore reveal a clear gap between the intended and enacted curriculum, requiring practical English-specific training, coaching, improved materials, differentiated assessment, and supervision focused on learner activity.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Guided by the research question, the findings showed that lower primary teachers' classroom practices reflected CBC expectations only to a low extent overall ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.56$). Lesson preparation and organisation recorded the highest mean ($M = 2.23$), indicating that teachers were more successful in preparing objectives and sequencing lessons than in translating plans into active learning. Curriculum Implementation Theory helps explain this gap by distinguishing the intended curriculum from the enacted curriculum and recognising that implementation is shaped by teachers' routines, knowledge, and working conditions (Fullan, 2016). In Kamonyi District, the presence of CBC language in lesson plans therefore did not necessarily mean that learners experienced meaningful interaction, feedback, adaptation, and independent English use.

Learner-centred teaching and integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were also limited. Observations, teachers, and head teachers consistently indicated that explanation, choral repetition, oral questioning, textbook exercises, and translation were more common than collaboration and independent communication. This finding supports Ndiokubwayo et al. (2020), Ondo and Waweru (2022), and Uwanyirigira et al. (2023), who similarly reported continued teacher control and weak integration of language skills. Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory suggests that the challenge was not simply awareness of learner-centred methods, but teachers' ability to design, scaffold, and manage activities through which young learners could use English meaningfully. In Kamonyi, the frequent shift to Kinyarwanda and concern about lesson time encouraged teacher control, but this also reduced opportunities for communicative competence development.

The weakest areas were differentiation ($M = 1.70$), formative assessment ($M = 1.84$), and instructional-material use ($M = 1.89$). Assessment mainly checked correct answers, while support for struggling learners relied on repetition, further explanation, or peer assistance rather than varied tasks, pace, materials, or targeted feedback. UNESCO (2023) and Porter et al. (2024) emphasise that foundational literacy requires regular feedback, diagnostic assessment, suitable resources, and support matched to learner needs. These weaknesses were intensified by large classes, limited lesson time, inadequate materials, low confidence in spoken English, and insufficient subject-specific support. Fullan (2016) and Van de Kuilen et al. (2022) show that reforms are often adapted to familiar routines when implementation demands exceed available support. The findings therefore imply that Kamonyi schools need classroom-based, English-specific professional development, model lessons, coaching, practical assessment tools, differentiated literacy activities, and stronger instructional supervision.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In relation to the research question, lower primary teachers' classroom practices reflected CBC expectations only partially. Lesson preparation and organisation were more evident than learner-centred facilitation, meaningful participation, integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing, formative feedback, differentiation, and varied use of instructional materials. Teachers frequently relied on explanation, repetition, whole-class questioning, textbook exercises, and translation rather than sustained learner interaction and independent English use. These practices were influenced by large classes, limited lesson time, shortages of materials, varied learner abilities, limited confidence in spoken English, and insufficient practice-oriented training. The study therefore concludes that teachers' awareness of CBC principles had not yet been translated into consistent competence-based English instruction in lower primary classrooms in Kamonyi District.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- 1) Practical and subject-specific professional development should be strengthened through demonstration lessons, classroom coaching, peer observation, and guided practice in learner-centred English teaching.

- 2) Teachers should receive focused instructional support in formative and diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing, stronger classroom use of English, and management of learner participation in large classes.
- 3) Schools and education authorities should improve the provision and effective use of instructional materials, including adequate textbooks, graded readers, visual aids, and locally produced materials.
- 4) Instructional supervision should focus on actual classroom enactment, particularly learner participation, feedback, differentiation, and language use, followed by precise and constructive professional support.

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