

## **An Exploration of The Challenges that Teachers Encounter in Enhancing Learners' Communicative Competence in English Language through Communicative Activities in Three Selected High Schools.**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the challenges that teachers encounter in enhancing learners' communicative competence in English Language. The study was conducted in three high schools in the Maseru District, and the design of the study necessitated the adoption of qualitative approach in order to probe the multifaceted phenomenon of English language teaching in its natural setting (the classroom situation). Data in this study were collected through face-to-face interviews with (n=9) teachers from three selected high schools. The findings of the study reveal that English Language teachers employ traditional teaching approaches in their classrooms due to a number of reasons. One of the reasons is that teachers do not teach according to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy standards because the LGCSE English Language Syllabus only accommodates writing and reading, and thus leaves out the other skills; speaking and listening which is why many students are communicatively incompetent. It is hoped that the study will encourage critical reflection from the LGCSE English Language Syllabus developers to equally assess all the four language skills, so that teachers cannot focus on teaching learners for examinations but towards enhancement of learners' communicative competence in English language.

**Key words:** Communicative competence, English language teaching, Communicative activities, English as a second language, Language skills

### **1. Introduction**

The importance of English language in the modern world and in many countries' educational systems cannot be understated (Fang, 2010). This means that of all the different languages of the world English is too widely used to be ignored in sectors which include among others, the education sector. Michaud (2002) points to the importance of English by stating that it is the major foreign or second language that is taught and pursued in many countries in the world where it has a high standing as the global language of education, communication as well as commerce. This assertion holds also for Khati and Khati (2009) that English is spoken almost everywhere even in powerful institutions like the European Parliament and United nations to mention but a few. The need therefore, to be communicatively competent in English is indispensable. It is perhaps in pursuance of this that some European countries have prioritised English such that not only a certain level of competence in English is a condition for admission in their institutions, but also for award of scholarships. This narrative therefore calls for a research-appraised change in the teaching of English language especially in activities which enhance linguistic and communicative competence.

English language is widely used in scholarly research. According to Johansson and Jonsson (2006, cited in Ekanjume 2015, p. 1157), "85 percent of all scientific publications in the world are written in English or have a summary in English". Even publications which are written in other languages are summarised in English. However, Ekanjume (2015) claims that "in spite of the high interest in English Language, teaching it as a second language has a lot of challenges and difficulties" (p.1157). This is an implication that teaching students who are communicatively incompetent in the language makes it pedagogically challenging for a teacher to teach towards linguistic and communicative proficiency and competence. This assertion holds also for Clegg and Afitska (2011) in their position that most countries which use English as a second language are confronted with a daunting task of curbing high numbers of students who underperform in English Language.

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This underperformance is caused by various factors, which include among others appeal to mother tongue whenever challenged in English Language and lack of classroom activities that can enhance learner's communicative competence (Clegg & Aftiska, 2011).

Many former British colonies have awarded English a special status in their education systems. As one of the former British protectorates, Lesotho recognises English as a medium of communication and adopts it as a medium of instruction from grade four through to tertiary level of education. Because of this perception of the status of English in the country, it is therefore imperative that teachers enhance students' communicative capabilities in order for them to be independent users of English as a second language (L2). It is stipulated in the Ministry of Education and Training (2009) that,

“In order to meet the life challenges and cope with different challenges, communication is important as a means to express ideas and feelings. Thus the learners should have the ability to communicate effectively in words, symbols, colours, signs, sound, media (print, electronic), and actions. Therefore learners should be helped to develop the following skills; listening, speaking writing and reading” (p.16).

What the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) implies is that learners must be equipped with necessary skills, which will enable them to be communicatively proficient in English as a widely used medium of communication in life. This also means that learners should know when to speak, when not to speak, what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner as these elements are an integral components of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972).

The teaching and acquisition of English as a second language in developing countries' has posed a serious challenge over the past years. According to Ekanjume (2015) the problem of learners' communicative incompetence is mainly caused by improper teaching methods and the LGCSE English syllabus which does not make provision for other skills but mainly emphasises on reading and writing. The assertion holds also for Nikian, Nor, Rejab, Hassan and Zainal (2016) who maintain that many teachers focus on teaching learners grammatical competence in isolation from other communicative competence aspects. This means that other aspects of communicative competence like the knowledge of how to address different people properly, the ability to solve communicative problems as they arise and the capacity of producing coherent and cohesive utterances are compromised. How do the above assertions therefore apply to my inquiry? They propose the need for an inquiry that will explore an extent to which the communicative activities should enhance all the aspects of communicative competence.

## 2. Statement of the problem

The problem of this study emanates from both documented scholarship on ESL learners' communicative competence and the researcher's experience as an ESL teacher. Literature reveals that ESL learners are communicatively incompetent. For instance, Alami (2014) and Nikian et al. (2016) note that learners have a problem producing coherent and cohesive utterances, solving communication problems, creating grammatically correct utterances and uttering socio-cultural rules such as when to speak, when not to speak, what to talk about with whom and in what manner. The authors assert that the above mentioned problem is caused by traditional teaching methods and lack of activities given to learners for enhancement of communicative competence. This suggests that learners' inability to demonstrate knowledge of linguistic rules coupled with inability to use those rules for effective communication compromise the intended meaning, since a learner's proficiency in language use is reflected in their ability to master all aspects of communicative competence.

Learners' communicative incompetence has been found to be a major communicative problem in many countries. Juhász's (2015) study on the conceptualisation of communicative competence in secondary EFL classrooms in Hungary found that learners are unable to speak the target language properly because teachers only focus on reading and writing for examination purposes. Another ESL researcher Michaud (2015) in a study conducted in selected Japanese senior secondary school found that ESL teachers are not fluent in English language, for this reason they adopt teaching strategies that are not suited to L2 classroom. Poor strategies include traditional teaching methods and lack of activities that improve learners' communicative skills (Michaud, 2015).

Regarding the challenges of ESL learners in Lesotho, Ekanjume-Ilongo (2015) and Nkhi and Moqasa (2023) note that the LGCSE English syllabus does not make provisions for other skills such as listening and speaking, but it mainly emphasises on reading and writing. The authors further assert that teachers only focus on helping students pass examinations without substantially enhancing their communicative proficiency. In addition, Khati and Khati (2009) state that learners are communicatively incompetent because teachers seldom involve them in their teaching through interactive activities such as debates, role-plays and presentations. Other researchers such as Adegbile and Alabi (2005), Hanadi and Majid (2003) claim that ESL learners are limited users of language because their motivation is mainly intrinsic.

This means that learners will only learn the language to pass the examinations and not to know how to be communicatively competent. It is readily perceived from the cited authors that learners are unable to express themselves properly in the target language. This lack of expression can be attributed to teachers mainly focusing on helping students pass examinations without necessarily employing communicative activities that can enhance learners' speaking skills.

### **3. Objective of the Study**

The study sought to find out the kind of challenges that learners encounter in learning English language in the three selected high schools in the Maseru district. This was done through face-to-face interviews with English language teachers.

### **4. Research Questions**

The study intended to address the following questions:

RQ1. What challenges do ESL learners encounter in learning English language?

RQ2. What challenges do ESL teachers encounter in teaching English language?

RQ3. What communicative strategies do teachers employ in the classroom?

### **5. Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted Celce-Murcia's (2007) model of the role of communicative competence in language teaching. The framework has five guiding principles for language acquisition and learning. The first principle is the need to balance language as system and language as formula. It is stated in the introduction that learners are mostly taught grammar in order to pass examinations. The model however, suggests that a communicative emphasis that includes the perfecting of structures such as conversational turn-taking and speech-act sets suggests that several set expressions and other formulaic components of language require attention as well (Celce-Murcia, 2007). This means that systematic and formulaic and interactional features of language ought to be addressed in real language instruction. This principle will best help teachers in balancing communicative activities that will help learners to fully acquire communicative competence.

The second principle is the need to focus on dynamic aspects of interaction. This can be achieved through accessing videotapes or film clips that genuinely show speakers' overall behaviour during communication (Celce-Murcia, 2007). It also suggests that teachers should videotape learner performance in classroom activities, so that learners can watch themselves and see where they have to develop. The third principle is the need to focus on strategies from time to time (Celce-Murcia, 2007). One of the objectives of the study is to establish strategies that can enhance learners' communicative competence and this can be achieved through teachers' integration of various approaches and implementation of new strategies into their language classes (Kolaj, 2022). The fourth principle is the importance of culture. This stipulates that language instruction should be integrated with cultural and cross-cultural instruction (Celce-Murcia, 2007). By cultural and cross-cultural instruction, the author means teaching learners stylistic appropriateness and the cultural factors of the target language community.

The fifth and last principle is the discourse in context. This means that ESL teachers should use resources that are well contextualised and expressive to learners. This can be achieved through giving learners a story or a speech to interpret. In order for learners to construe and utter telling discourse, Celce-Murcia (2007) urges that ESL teachers have to make use of the materials that are well contextualised and making sense to learners. The author further substantiates that learning objectives should be grounded in a real world discourse, for example, a radio broadcast, video clips and dialogues. These communicative activities will help learners to produce meaningful utterances and to rehearse the phonological structures as well as the grammatical features of a language that are significant especially in the discussion providing content (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Ahmed & Pawar, 2018; Ansah & Debrah, 2022). The need to balance language as system and language as formula, the need to focus on dynamic aspects of interaction, the need to focus on strategies from time to time, the importance of culture and the discourse in context are the key principles that will form the basis for this enquiry. These principles will form the basis for this study because they provide different ways through which communicative competence can be enhanced in learners.

The model's constructs highlighted above have implications for this inquiry. The constructs offer an interventive measure for ESL teachers through context related activities that serve to enhance learners' communicative competence. This means that communicative activities and teaching materials must be learner-centred in order to allow for communication and learning tasks must also allow interaction among learners (Celce-Murcia, 2007). This interaction can be in the form of pair work, group work and role-plays. These principles will also help the researchers to explore communicative activities that can help to balance all aspects of communicative competence in the ESL classroom. The model also calls for integration of strategies in the classrooms in order to cover each aspect accordingly.

The role of communicative competence in language teaching model also has implications for language instruction. It suggests several principles for the design and application of language aspects aimed at furnishing learners with the knowledge and skills they will need in order for them to be linguistically and culturally competent in ESL (Celce-Murcia, 2007). For students to be culturally competent, the model suggests that learners be taught the social structure of the culture of target language, for example, family, kinship relations, courtship and marriage (Celce-Murcia, 2007). In order for learners to be linguistically competent, Celce-Murcia (2007) proposes that teachers should teach students phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactical elements. In the context of this study, the above assertion implies that learners need to be equipped with the knowledge of social conventions and awareness of values, beliefs and living conditions of the target language community. This is important because mastering only grammar and phonology will result in learners being linguistically competent, but socially dysfunctional in oral communication (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

## 6. Literature Review

### 6.1 *Communicative competence*

Many theorists define communicative competence in various ways. Canale and Swain (1980) define communicative competence as a linguistic term which refers to the speaker's grammatical understanding of syntax, morphology as well as social knowledge about how and to use utterances appropriately in context. In the context of this study, this term can be understood as the learners' balanced knowledge of linguistic rules and sociocultural behaviours of the use of the target language. Communicative competence is the term originated by Hymes (1972) in reaction to Chomsky's (1965) distinction between competence and performance. By competence Chomsky (1965) meant the shared knowledge of an ideal speaker-hearer's set in a completely homogeneous speech-community and such knowledge is referred to as grammatical. It enables a user of a language to produce and comprehend an infinite set of sentences out of a finite set of rules (Kamiya, 2006). Chomsky only focused on linguistic competence without necessarily considering social factors of a language. Hymes therefore criticised Chomsky's notion of competence as abstract. As a way of addressing it, Hymes embarked on an ethnographic investigation of communicative competence which encompassed communicative form and purpose in an ultimate relation to each other (Kamiya, 2006).

Chomsky's notion of competence mainly focuses on the grammatical aspect of a language without considering its social factors. Chomsky views competence as the speaker-hearer's knowledge of their language in the same speech community, but Hymes looks at circumstantial applicability as one of the fundamental characteristics of one's understanding of language and he asserts that meaning making in communication is established by its discourse community and the real communicative context. Hymes also adds that competence ought to be taken more expansively to embrace the knowledge of when to speak, when not to speak, what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner? The implication of language teaching is therefore that learners need to be taught not only the grammatical aspect of the language, but also its social aspects like politeness strategies and the contextual knowledge of the target language community. The study therefore intended to find out communicative activities that enhance both grammatical and sociolinguistic competencies simultaneously as suggested by Dell Hymes.

Dell Hymes explored many gaps in Chomsky's conception of competence. In his exploration of communicative competence, Hymes (1972) found Chomsky's distinction of competence and performance too narrow to describe the language behaviour as a whole. Hymes (1972) explains that a linguistic pattern should be able to deal with a diverse speech community. Hymes (ibid) therefore developed a model of communicative competence wherein he differentiates between linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies. Linguistic competence is the ability of a speaker to produce accurately structured understandable utterances. Sociolinguistic competence means what is fitting or suitable to say in a given setting. Hymes (1972) further included the two concepts of knowledge and capability in his description of communicative competence. He defines the two concepts as the knowledge of when to speak, when not to speak, what to talk about with whom, what and where in what manner (Hymes, 1972). Unlike Chomsky, Hymes (1972) believes that knowledge of language must embrace varied speech community. Hyme's position on communicative competence implies that learners should be taught what to say and how to appropriately produce such an utterance in a given setting without any difficulty. The study thus sought to find out the instruction approaches that teachers employ in their classrooms and the kind of communicative activities they design in order to help learners to be communicatively competent in English language.

One of the major hindrances to learners' acquisition of communicative competence is what Celce-Murcia (2007) calls traditional teaching methods. Savignon (2002) argues that traditional methods of teaching ESL make it hard for learners to acquire L2 easily because more emphasis is put on correctness of language use and an intention to correct students' every error.

Xu (2000) is of the view that learners should be allowed to make mistakes without correcting every one they make. Savignon (2002) holds the same assertion in that learners will be afraid to make mistakes and to express themselves bravely if they keep being corrected. The study seeks to find out how traditional teaching methods pose communicative competence related challenges. The researcher also intends to find out if learners in the selected schools encounter similar challenges as those highlighted in literature.

Another problem is what the researchers of second language acquisition SLA call native speaker fallacy. Adegbile and Alabi (2005) argue that many models of communicative competence are based on what is called native speaker fallacy. This means that learners are expected to acquire not only the target language but the target culture as well. Xu (2000) asserts that if a learner commits a grammatical mistake, they will be deemed less proficient, but if they commit a mistake because of limited knowledge of target culture, their knowledge of target language will be questioned. Brown (1994) believes that native-speaker communicative competence is an impossible target for L2 learner and the learner will without a doubt be left frustrated. Acquisition of native-speaker competence is what the author calls unattainable goal. Xu (2000) suggests that learners should be taught to be communicatively competent, but not be burdened with native speaker communicative competence. Many ESL learners find it challenging to acquire native speaker competence because they are still in the process of attaining linguistic input in the target language. They are not confident with the structure and rules of the target language and therefore learners should be taught according to their levels of communicative competence. One of the interests in the study is to find out the strategies that teachers employ in order to surmount the different challenges such as native speaker fallacy to enhance communicative competence.

Literature shows that ESL teachers encounter various challenges in the teaching and learning of English language for communicative competence. For instance, According Nikian et al. (2016) in their study of the challenges of instilling communicative competence in second language learners found that one of the major challenges that teachers encounter in learners' acquisition of communicative competence in Malaysia emanates from the country's structured English Language syllabus. The authors claim that teaching reading and writing in the structured syllabus leads to teacher-centred classrooms where the main objective is to perform well in examinations. This claim implies that teachers will not be able to enhance learners' communicative competence because listening and speaking will be left unexposed. This further implies that learners' language needs will not be met if other skills are ignored (Sebolai, 2022). Another problem encountered by teachers in teaching for the acquisition of communicative competence has to do with the gaps in learners' lexicon as they regularly encounter difficulties in articulating their communicative intentions (Richards, 2006). As a result of these gaps, learners espouse some communication tactics in an effort to pass their meaning across (Juhász, 2015). So "this apparent structural and grammatical inadequacy in learners' repertoire presents great challenges not only to the learners but also to teachers and researchers" (Adegbile & Alabi, 2005, p.31). As a result of structural and grammatical inadequacy, learners only know the set of language technicalities with rigid ways of using the language isolated from its communicative use. Because of the aforementioned stipulations, the study seeks to investigate how teachers overcome the challenges they encounter in their classrooms.

Challenges that ESL teachers encounter towards learners' acquisition of communicative competence vary. For ESL learners in Lesotho secondary education, the LGCSE English Language Syllabus also stipulates that learners should be taught mainly reading and writing since they are to be assessed externally and listening and speaking will only be assessed internally. It is therefore reasonable to conclude based on the documented assertions above that teachers only focus on those two skills in order for learners to pass an examination and not to acquire communicative competence. Strengthening the assumption is Ekanjume-Ilongo (2015) that "the education system of Lesotho seems to concentrate more on the writing skills and probably some little reading while neglecting and ignoring the listening and the speaking skills which play a greater role in communication" (p. 1160). This therefore suggests that teachers are likely to ignore speaking and listening in the classroom because their focus will be on helping students to pass examinations.

The problem of examination-based system is not only in Lesotho. In their study of the challenges around instilling communicative competence in second language learners in China and Japan, Michaud (2015) and Fang (2010) observe that only grammatical skills are tested externally and learners have to learn them every day in class in order to pass an examination. This according to the authors becomes a challenge for teachers to foster communicative competence in learners if they mainly teach learners to pass examinations. The researchers also wanted to establish an extent to which the LGCSE English Language Syllabus provides for use of communicative competence activities and strategies in teaching reading, listening, writing and speaking.

Research has been undertaken on ESL teaching and learning methods. Celce-Murcia (2007), states that traditional methods of teaching ESL only concentrated on language as a system and learners were made to perfect syntax and phonation of the target language. Canale and Swain (1980) and Mashiane and Ngoepe (2021) are of the

view that communicative approach to language teaching is the best option since it has proven to be more effective than grammar-based approach. Canale and Swain (ibid) assert that communicative approach to language teaching offers a mode of in class-training that makes learners to feel more at ease, confident, encouraged and with a distinctive purpose for L2 learning and effective communication.

Communicative language teaching is seen by Brown (1994) as a method that has a conjectural position regarding the nature of language and instruction. Brown (1984) gives four suggestions to teaching strategies in a second language. The suggestions are:

- Emphasis should be put on all aspects of communicative competence.
- Classroom activities must be formulated in such a way that they engage learners in the meaningful, genuine and practical use of language for pragmatic means.
- Both proficiency and accuracy have to be taken into consideration since they are corresponding.
- Learners should use the target language effectively and openly in impromptu situations under suitable supervision but not under the teacher's influence.

The strategies imply that classroom activities must be selected in a way that will benefit students' communicative needs in speaking, writing, listening and reading. Celce-Murcia (2007) opines that activities and teaching materials which are highly learner-centred enhance all aspects of communicative competence. One of the important elements of the study that the researchers want to explore are the activities that work in ESL classroom. The researchers further intend to establish the kind of activities that teachers employ in their facilitation for acquisition of communicative competence and how effective they can be in enhancing learners' communicative competence. The adopted model for this enquiry has provided strategies that teachers can employ in an ESL classroom so the researcher also aims at discovering the type of strategies teachers employ when teaching for the acquisition of communicative competence. The evident gaps in the reviewed literature on teachers' lack of communicative classroom activities aimed at enhancing learners' communicative competence motivate this study to investigate an extent to which teachers provide for use of communicative competence-activities and strategies in teaching reading, listening, writing and speaking.

## 7. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study as the design. Face-to-face interviews with teachers were the tool used to collect data in this study. From the three schools' sample, three (n=3) teachers were interviewed per school thus making it nine (=9) teachers in total. We therefore believed that the selected teachers were the kind of participants who were not diffident but could speak comfortably about their experiences and challenges that they encounter together with their learners in the teaching and learning of English language (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researchers asked teachers questions in line with the research questions of the study. The researchers also wanted to know from teachers which communicative classroom activities they employ towards enhancement of communicative competence. We asked the participants to tape record the interviews for later reference because not all the information was easily recorded on paper. The researchers introduced themselves to the participants with an ethical clearance certificate number 10260307\_CRECHS\_2021. Participants were told that participation was voluntary and as a result they could withdraw any time should they feel uncomfortable. Teachers were assigned codes, teacher A, B, C, etc. in order to ensure the credibility of findings, researchers took the results back to the participants to confirm if their views were correctly interpreted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the study was taken to our peers for their constructive criticism. Finally, the study was taken to the editor to ensure that it was properly written.

## 8. Results and Discussions

Nine teachers were interviewed in relation to the communicative competence-related challenges that learners encounter in the acquisition of communicative competence. Teachers enumerated a number of factors they believe are the main sources of communicative competence-related challenges that learners encounter. These challenges were thematised into (1) learners' first language as a factor in inauspiciousness of the environment for the acquisition of communicative competence and (2) learners' deficiency in grammar as the challenge that learners encounter in acquiring communicative competence.

### ***8.1 Learners' first language as a factor in inauspiciousness of the environment for the acquisition of communicative competence.***

Findings under challenges bring to surface teachers' complains about the environment created by the Sesotho speaking culture in schools they work in. This culture makes the environment for the acquisition of communicative competence inauspicious. For instance, this is illustrated in the teacher C's claim that;

*“The habit of Sesotho speaking in schools is so ingrained that it becomes challenging for students to acquire communicative competence in English Language”.*

Asked what interventions they employ for learners to acquire communicative competence in this kind of environment, teachers reported that they resort to traditional teaching methods such as lecturing and question and answer in order to force learners to be communicatively competent. This answer gave me a further revelation as the researcher that teachers are not aware that it is not that simple to develop learners’ communicative competence through lecturing, be it sociolinguistic competence or discourse competence because they are telling them how to do things, but not engaging them in doing things. This could also imply that teachers are challenged as to what communicative competence means, particularly that it is about the ability to be functional, but if they say that they use traditional teaching methods such as lecturing, another finding that emerges is that there is a need for teachers to understand what communicative competence is all about and the teaching methods that enhance it. The use of these methods is inconsistent with Celce-Murcia’s (2007) assertion in the literature that traditional teaching methods are a major hindrance to learners’ acquisition of communicative competence.

Also surfacing from the study as the learners’ challenge is what teachers refer to as lack of functional English environment. Teachers complained that learners do not speak English Language at home, but they are only exposed to the language at school. This translates into the schools’ inauspicious environment to learning English. Asked about how this posed as the communicative competence related challenge to students, teachers reported that when learners communicate, their English seems to be heavily clouded by first language approximation. As a result of this first language approximation, teachers revealed that learners’ sociolinguistic competence suffers because they become unable to produce utterances that are understood in different social and cultural contexts of communication. This finding is not consistent with Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Kamiya (2006) and Celce-Murcia (2007) assertion that for one to be socio-linguistically competent, they need to know how to use the language properly in different social and cultural contexts. For instance, when highlighting learners’ inability to use the language appropriately in written contexts, one teacher revealed that learners fail to use the language in relevant contexts.

*“When asked to write a letter to the principal, learners will be using words they normally employ when writing to their friends instead of writing formal language” (TA).*

These communicative competence related challenges that learners encounter, which occur as the result of an uncondusive learning environment raise a serious concern on learners’ inability to use the language properly in appropriate contexts.

## **8.2 Learners’ deficiency in grammar as the challenge that learners encounter in acquiring communicative competence.**

Another communicative competence-related challenge that learners encounter in learning English Language revealed by the findings is their deficiency in the correct use grammar. Some of the communicative competence’s challenges that the study reveals are linguistic, and particularly the use of grammar. Students’ incapability to construct grammatically correct sentences is in contrast to Canale and Swain (1980) postulation that for learners to be communicatively competent, they should be able to create grammatically correct utterances. Teachers are further concerned that, because of the electronic social media to which learners are amply exposed, their linguistic competence suffers because the kind of English used therein is ungrammatical. This revelation is commensurate with Nkhi’s (2023) finding that digital social media negatively impacts students’ grammatical competence. For instance, when stressing the difficulties that learners face in using grammar accurately, teacher C showed that;

*“...they are so ignorant of the rule restrictions that they write words such as, fishes, sheeps and mouses...they also overgeneralise the rule in the past tense by producing words like, goed, speaked and weared”.*

Asked what intervention strategies they employ to address these grammar deficiencies, teachers reported that they tell students to read one of the textbooks they use and then give them fill in exercises on the board. This is also surprising because teachers still use traditional teaching methods as interventive strategies to remedy a challenge that learners encounter grammatically. This implies that teachers are challenged when it comes to the employment of communicative teaching strategies towards enhancement of learners’ communicative competence.

## **9. Communicative competence-related challenges that teachers encounter in teaching English language.**

Findings from interviews reveal that teachers encounter a number of challenges. Teachers were asked about the kind of challenges they encounter when teaching towards learners acquisition of communicative competence. Teachers stated that it is hard to teach learners to be communicatively competent because they do not have functional English environment at home. Teachers further pointed out that because of not having

functional English environment at home; learners do not want to speak even when they try to employ communicative competence-related activities. Findings reiterated that when they write, learners do not communicate efficiently with lucidity, relevance and precision using Standard English. Teachers also highlighted that learners become communicatively incompetent as result of not wanting to communicate in the target language and the improper use of lexico-grammatical structures. This finding is consistent with Adegbile and Alabi's (2005) observation in that avoiding communication and misuse of language structures make learners to be communicatively incompetent.

Another communicative competence-related challenge that teachers encounter is that they teach many students per class. They stated that it becomes a challenge when trying to use communicative competence-related activities. Teachers claim that they teach a lot of content in the syllabus and therefore it is not easy for them to teach learners towards the acquisition of communicative competence. One teacher mentioned that she teaches 70 learners per class, so she does not have time to give learners communicative competence-related activities; after all, the focus is on helping learners to pass examinations at the end of the year. The teacher expressed the following;

*"I teach too many students and it is even difficult to move in between chairs, so I cannot in any case be able to employ activities other than lecturing besides, we just teach for exams because of the syllabus. I cannot waste my time on skills that are not tested"* (TC).

This finding is commensurate with Ekanjume-Ilongo's (2015) finding that teaching too many students in the classroom is a challenge for teachers. It also poses a great challenge to the teaching of English language in the country if learners are only taught to pass examination. This therefore suggests that there is no alignment between standards (content) outlined by CAP and instruction as well as what is assessed (Squires, 2005; Acquah & Owusu, 2021; Sebolai, 2022; Nkhi & Moqasa, 2023).

One more finding revealed by the study is teachers' incompetence in using communicative competence-related activities. Teachers claim that learners do not know how to use language properly in appropriate contexts. Learners are always lectured without being given a chance to communicate, so they will find it hard to use these language structures properly. The finding is consistent with the framework's second principle that it is unlikely that learners can be helped to practice a language in a teacher-centred classroom (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

## 10. Conclusions

Findings of the study with regard to the first objective point to learners' first language as a factor in inauspiciousness of the environment for the acquisition of communicative competence. This seems to make learners' communicative competencies suffer because they tend to approximate. This challenge is also evident in teachers who appear to be challenged with regard to choosing communicative teaching strategies aimed at enhancing learners' communicative competence. Teachers aggravate learners' communicative competence-related challenges in that they use traditional teaching methods that do not have communicative strategies such as lecturing and question and answer when trying to intervene. Our conclusion therefore is that some of the challenges that learners encounter are teacher induced.

Another finding is learners' deficiencies in grammar as the challenge that learners encounter in acquiring communicative competence. This challenge is associated with electronic social media that learners are amply exposed to. Even asked about the kind of intervention strategies they employ to address these grammar deficiencies, teachers still seem not to know which strategies to use. This is also surprising because teachers still use traditional teaching methods as interventive strategies to remedy a challenge that learners encounter grammatically. This implies that teachers are challenged when it comes to the employment of communicative teaching strategies towards enhancement of learners' communicative competence. The conclusion is that learners' exposure to social media coupled with teachers' inability to implement the right communicative strategies when teaching for enhancement of learners' communicative competence is a hindrance to learners' acquisition of communicative competence in English language.

Findings in regard to the second and third objectives revealed that learners do not want to speak, and as a result, they tend to commit lexico-grammatical errors. Teachers also have a challenge of teaching too many learners in the classroom as well as the syllabus that makes it hard for them to teach because it is examination oriented and ignores other skills. So, this makes it hard for teachers to teach learners towards communicative competence, but they teach students to pass examinations. Therefore, teachers need to be pedagogically empowered with communicative teaching strategies for enhancement of learners' communicative competence. There can also be school-based workshops on teaching for learners' communicative competence. This recommendation has teacher training implications. Communicative competence in all its aspects seem to be a challenge, therefore teacher training for communicative language teaching appears to be a need. There is still however, a need for further research on teachers training needs in relation to communicative competence.



There is also a need for syllabus developers to critically reflect on the challenges that English language teachers encounter when teaching because of the two skills that are not assessed externally.

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