Effectiveness of Audio-Lingual Teaching Method to Enhance Students' English Speaking and Listening Proficiency: The Case of Selected Primary Schools in Nyagatare District

Evode Nshimiyimana[1] & Gabriel Bazimaziki[1]
[1]University of Rwanda- College of Education
Corresponding Author: nshimiyimanaevode2@gmail.com

Abstract
This study is qualitative research that explored the effectiveness of the audio-lingual method to improve students' English speaking and listening proficiency in primary schools. The study was conducted in three primary schools located in Nyagatare District, in Rwanda. Both interview and observation were used to collect data from 174 participants. The observation was carried out on 160 students while interview questions were administered to 14 teachers selected purposively. Qualitative analysis reveals that applying the Audio-lingual method in the English classroom boosts learners' English proficiency viz speaking and listening skills by enabling them to communicate using the target language within and outside the school context. In light of the study findings, curriculum implementers and other education stakeholders are recommended to provide needful facilities for effective use of this teaching method. Equally important, teachers should carefully use the audio-lingual method to help learners acquire communicative competencies. Lastly, further studies should explore the effectiveness of the audio-lingual method in teaching language to adult learners in the context of Rwanda.

Keywords*:* Audio-lingual, teaching method, second language, Behaviourism theory, speaking and listening skills

Introduction

English is not only taught in Rwanda as a second and official language but also used as a mandatory medium of instruction from primary to tertiary level in Rwandan education system and even beyond. REB (2015) explains that Rwanda as a member of the Commonwealth and East Africa Community uses English as medium of instruction in schools and as an official language of communication for trade, science, and technology. In Rwanda, the English language is taught to equip learners with listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills that will enable them to communicate with other people and be able to express themselves using it. While the government of Rwanda takes English and other languages on a priority basis (Mineduc, 2020), some students still finish their primary level with poor skills in that language (REB, 2022). They express themselves with difficulty and barely understand what they are told. Against this situation, this paper intends to explore the effectiveness of one of the methods used to teach English language in primary schools to help students improve their skills in it.

Problem Statement

English language is a medium of instruction and is taught as a second language at all levels except lower primary schools where Kinyarwanda is recommended as a Language of Instruction (LOI) (Unicef, 2017). The educational curriculum used in Rwandan schools' states that English language teaching was adopted to help students acquire that language and equip them with the abilities to use it in communication (REB, 2015) locally, regionally and globally. Students are expected to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes which can help them to use this language effectively and productively. It means that the end result of a second language teaching and learning is to benefit the trainee(s), and the latter's pride lies in their mastery and effective use of the acquired knowledge, competencies

and skills to thrive in their future (Bazimaziki, 2020). Generally, a student who studied English language should be able to understand the information given to him/her orally, speak English fluently, express thoughts and communicate information to others.

However, the primary six leavers demonstrate inadequate English language skills to communicate effectively (REB, 2020). They can barely communicate through speaking or understanding what they are told in the English language. Research reveals that students have difficulty to understand the message conveyed orally and they cannot make a correct sentence when expressing their thoughts; and when they try to do so, they speak incorrectly with the influence of their mother tongue Kinyarwanda(Tabaro& Twahirwa, 2018; Habyalimana and Ferreira, 2015). Therefore, this situation triggered the researchers to explore the effectiveness of the Audio-lingual teaching method in English class with a particular interest in how that method helps learners develop English language speaking and listening skills (1) to orally express themselves with confidence, (2) to make well-structured sentences with clear meaning, (3) to be able to listen and understand what they are told, and (4) to be able to react orally to the message conveyed to them.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to throw light on how the application of the Audio-Lingual method helps pupils develop English speaking and listening skills. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Explore the use of the Audio-lingual method in English language classes;
2. Assess the effectiveness of the Audio-lingual method in teaching English to students in a mother tongue-dominated environment.

In light of the above objectives, the present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers of English Language apply the Audio-lingual method when they are teaching?

2. How does the Audio-lingual method fit in teaching English language to primary students exposed to Kinyarwanda as their mother tongue?

Literature Review
Theoretical Framework

This study hinges on Behaviorism learning theory concerned with real-life applications. As Skinner (1974) puts it, language has the character of something that a person acquires and possesses. The words of which a language is composed are said to be tools used to express meanings, thoughts, and ideas. The author adds that "A much more productive view is that verbal behavior is behavior. It has a special character only because it is reinforced by its effects on people". Put another way, the theory has it that language learning is like other behaviours learnt by interacting with the environment. It is shaped by the input in the environment (Paula, 2019). Regarding language learning, the students are exposed to the drills and repetition, and positive reward is given when a student demonstrates a desired behaviour (Mart, 2013). In such context, learning takes place when the results are related with the response followed by reward and reinforcement to be kept (Paula, 2019). As described in the section

below, Behaviourist theory fits for the application of the audio-lingual method in language teaching.

Behaviourism and Audio-lingual Teaching Method

The Audio-lingual teaching method is based on Behaviourism Theory (Castagnaro, 2006). According to Griffiths et al. (2001), the Audio-lingual method focuses on drills, repetition, projects engagement, group activities and doing exercises. This idea is highly supported by behaviourism theory which explains language learning as a way of formation of habits which can be taught and learnt on [is this an accurate quotation?] a motivation, response and reinforcement (Mei, 2018). The Behaviourist theory proposes that language is studied through practice. For English, which is taught especially as a Second Language (ESL), the practices with drills, repetition and discussions in groups are inevitably a means to effective learning.

Audio-lingual and Language Teaching

The Audio-Lingual is a teaching method proposed by American linguists around 1950. Its main focus was that a language is primarily the way sounds are produced in order to achieve communication within the society (Mart, 2013). The Audio-lingual method is based on the idea that learning a foreign language takes place through habit formation, reinforcements and associations and by this it takes a short time to have learnt a language (Bagheri et al., 2019). The focal point of the Audio-lingual teaching method is to manipulate a target language and help a student to develop communicative competencies in that language through dialogues and habit formation of the students. Abduh (2016) explains that the Audio-lingual teaching method gives priority to spoken language. He continues explaining that instructions in the audio-lingual teaching method are brought in the context and are given in the target language. Teaching is intended to equip students with native like–speaking skills; errors are avoided, and learners are encouraged to respond to verbal and non-verbal stimuli as well as to do many exercises a lot of practice.

Mart (2013) claims that the Audio-Lingual teaching method focuses mainly on oral skills to develop students' speaking skills. When teaching English language, the mother tongue should be avoided as much as possible because the interaction in the mother tongue influences and hinders the effective learning of the second language (Voicu, 2012).Considering that the primary aim to teach English is to enable people stay connected, teaching English language in primary schools requires an effective teaching method that can helps students acquire communicative competences. Hence, the Audio-lingual method is a valuable tool for learners to communicate not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom.

Although there is a belief that the audio-lingual method has largely fallen out of use in modern language learning/teaching, it is still effective as a methodology, especially for ESL learners. While the latter generally grapple with pronunciation challenges, speaking and listening difficulties, the audio-lingual method serves as one of the possible remedies to address those problems. Besides, while teaching and learning in the 21st century is effectively fueled by information Communication Technology (ICT), English language teaching and learning is not left behind. The audio-lingual method uses ICT gadgets such as audio materials. Therefore, its relevance should

not be doubted mainly because, as highlighted in research (Zhou, 2023; Jurakulovich, 2020), it enhances learners' fluency in their target language.

Audio-lingual Method vs Learners' Engagement in a Lesson

The Audio-lingual method is more learner-centered than teacher-centered. It is engaging and competence-based in nature. REB (2015) states that a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC)recommends teachers to leave behind traditional methods of teaching and embrace the method that promotes participation and interaction which engages the learners in the teaching and learning process in both group and individual work. In CBC, the learners should be engaged in all teaching and learning activities. This is what happens with the Audio-lingual teaching method. With this method, students participate in classroom and out-of-classroom activities by engaging themselves in project activities, exercises, dialogues, group activities, role play, etc. (Matamoros-gonzá & Vera-quiñ, 2017). Thus, the Audio-lingual teaching method boosts students' level of confidence as they engage in practice. When a learner is motivated and brought in a conducive context, they learn a language more easily(Sibomana, 2014).

Methods

This paper was designed to evaluate the extent to which the Audio-lingual teaching method helps primary students to improve their speaking and listening skills. The targeted population for this study comprised of English teachers from three primary schools that were selected purposively. The data were collected from a sample of 174 participants using interview and observation tools. A questionnaire for interview was administered to 14 teachers to gather information on how they apply the Audio-lingual method in their English as a Second Language (ESL). Two in-classroom observation sessions and several out of classroom were conducted with 160 primary five and primary six students who are taught English language through the Audio-lingual teaching method. In the classroom, controlled observation was used while participatory observation was used outside the classroom.

The data were interpreted in light of Creswell (2009) with a very simple description of the perceptions of participants towards the audio-lingual teaching method and its effectiveness in improving pupils' speaking and listening skills. The data collected from teachers were triangulated with the theories and related existing literature and the findings from observation.

Findings and discussion

The data collection on the use of the Audio-lingual method in teaching English speaking and listening skills used an interview questionnaire comprising of 8 questions which were administered to 14 teachers. The questionnaire administration intended to gather information about teachers' views on the Audio-lingual method and the way they apply it, and its effectiveness in improving pupils' speaking and listening skills. The data collected are described below in light of questionnaire questions.

Teachers' Perception Towards Application of Audio-lingual Teaching Method

The teachers were asked whether using the audio-lingual tools such as speakers, recorders and audio dialogues help in developing the pupil's speaking and listening skills or not. 11 out of 14 teachers (79%) reported that audio tools help pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. On the other hand, 1 teacher (7%) replied that it is helpful when used with other methods, and 2 teachers (14%) believe that even other methods can work to improve students' speaking. Based on the teachers' perceptions as revealed by the above-presented results, it is worth pointing out that teachers have a positive perception towards the use of the audio-lingual method in improving learners speaking and listening skills. Concerning the use of the Audio-lingual method in their teaching English in an attempt to help students develop speaking and listening skills, the teachers revealed that they generally use this method. They added that for learners to learn and develop communicative competencies, there is a need for a learning environment which favours them to learn and acquire those competencies. One of the teachers (RSPS) put it this way:

> *"… Yes, we use audio tools while teaching English, we play audio voices, students repeat after the voice. If it is a dialogue, students listen carefully and dramatize what they have heard. In most cases, it awakens their level of confidence. As days pass, they develop the habit of speaking English. At first, they are challenged but as days pass, they get used to the environment and speak comfortably."*

In the same line, an observation conducted in one class, when primary five students were learning English in the classroom, revealed how the Audio-lingual method is applied. Indeed, the teacher introduced the students to the audio materials, played an audio of a short conversation, then learners listened to it and practiced the conversation after listening to it. For the first time, the learners pronounced the spoken sentences incorrectly. "Children should *except* gifts from strangers." The teacher played the audio again and this allowed students to correct themselves and later improve their speaking as they now said, "Children shouldn't *accept* the gifts from strangers." Interestingly, outside the classroom, pupils were observed trying to use the new vocabulary learnt in the class orally and in a correct way as they acquired it from the speech voice they had heard. Some examples from what was observed include but are not limited to "*strangers are feared*", "*strangers are welcome* to *school*", "*we cannot accept them*", etc. This corroborates what Mei (2018)referred to when he stated, "… once learners practice sentence patterns and become familiar with them, then use them fluently in communication, they acquire grammar and oral ability at the same time (p.49)". In other words, the more the pupils are placed in English listening and speaking environment, the more fluent they will become

Using Audio-lingual Method in Teaching English Language toNative Speakers of Kinyarwanda

Although Kinyarwanda and English are two distant languages, it is believed that the mother tongue plays a role in the acquisition of a second language. For example, Sun (2019) reasons that the mastery of a mother tongue is a basis for effective learning of ESL and the poor skills in a mother tongue exert a negative influence on a Second Language acquisition. Indeed, because students live in a Kinyarwanda-speaking environment, they use this language in their daily lives when they are out of the school. However, 11 out of 14 teachers (79%) revealed that

when they use the audio-lingual method in English class, they are likely to avoid any resort to Kinyarwanda. When learners are allowed to speak Kinyarwanda, they are not comfortable with English which requires them much effort. During the classroom observation, it was found that speaking Kinyarwanda while studying the English subject was strictly forbidden. From the researchers' observation, one pupil asked a question in Kinyarwanda wanting to know how to wish her friend good luck. When the student said, "Ni gute nakwifuriza mugenzi wange amahirwe?"(How can I wish my partner a 'good luck'?), immediately other pupils said together "*Kinyarwanda No.*" Before the teacher answered her question, he first of all played an audio asking the same question in English as "How can I wish my partner the best of luck."

The pupil was asked to repeat after the audio was played. After the second time of the repetition, the pupil was able to ask her question correctly in English. While Rwanda is a mother tongue [Kinyarwanda] dominated environment (Bazimaziki, 2020), English language is taught as a second language to help the country integrate regionally and globally. Though the context is not suitable yet for communicative competence in this language (Sibomana, 2014), the means to achieve English language proficiency lies in reinforcement. In this regard, the audio-lingual method fits in that context. Based on dialogues, listening and memorization activities about the social cultural situation of the target language, greetings, likes and dislikes, opinions, hobbies etc. (Alemi & Tavakoli, 2016)**,** the merits of Audio-lingual method should not be doubted when teaching a second language in a mother tongue dominated environment like Rwanda. The Audio-Lingual Method focus on speaking and listening aligns well with Rwanda's English language education that targets to improve its citizens' English proficiency for communication purposes.

The role of the teacher and how he/she engages learners also matters

According to Griffiths (2004), the Audio-lingual teaching method stands highly on the use of drills and repetition which were acceptable drawing on Behaviorist theory given that language is a system of habits which can be taught and learnt on the stimulus, response and reinforcement. Mart (2013) explains that the Audio-lingual method is an appropriate method that makes it possible to develop communicative competencies of a student. He further notes that the Audio-Lingual Method develops communicative competence of students using dialogues and drills. The use of dialogues and drills are effective in foreign language teaching as they enable the students to produce speech. Based on Kasap et al.'s (2022) view that the usage of our mother tongue in the second language learning affects a person's thought process - mainly because they think in the mother tongue and express their thoughts ina second language, it is not advised to help a pupil develop communicative competences in English by using mother language in learning environment. Consistently, Voicu (2012)posits that the pupils' native language should not be used in the learning environment because it will hinder the students' effort to master the target language. Too much exposure to Kinyarwanda language can therefore impede English language communicative competencies as they are two distant languages. One is a Bantu parcel while the other belongs to Germanic languages (Bazimaziki, 2020). Because students think in their mother tongue and express their thoughts in a target language, this inevitably slows down their pace to second language mastery.

The Relationship between Speaking and Listening skills

The majority of the teachers (96.5%) replied that there is a close connection between speaking and listening skills. When commenting on the interface between the two skills, one of the teachers reported:

"… Of course, the relationship between the two exists. The conversation and effective communication between two or more people take place when one can speak and the other understands what their colleague have said and respond to it. None can say that they are able to speak a language while they can't understand what they are told."

Inherently, as observed when students were playing outside the classroom, they were using the target language. The researchers approached them in order to have a conversation with them. When a pupil did not hear what he was told in a second language, he could not speak except to ask the speaker(s) to clarify. Bozorgian (2012) found out that there is a relationship between speaking and listening skills but which is not very close. He, however, notes that listening skills help to improve speaking skills. He suggests that the spoken language provides a means of interaction among learners to achieve understanding. Akin the above findings, Celik & Yavuz (2015) report that the relationship between speaking and listening skills exists but is significantly low:

"… Speaking requires a production which is regarded as the last phase of language learning process while listening is just reflection of the comprehension that can be accepted as easier to speaking production. Also speaking is regarded as a completely active action that needs a linguistic background as well as communicative and social abilities but listening is much passive when compared to speaking that makes the exam process easier." *(p. 2140)*

Impact of Learning Environment in Developing Pupils' Speaking and Listening Skills

The Second Language leaning environment plays a big part for a learner to master it. Teachers find it hard to teach English language in the environment where Kinyarwanda is mostly used by all people (in a monolingual context). This is similar to what Voicu (2012) observed, namely that the use of the mother tongue when teaching or leaning a second language hinders the provision of enough comprehensible input, while it is basic for acquiring any language. Based on the observation conducted, the teachers of English try to create a conducive environment for English practice at school. The students are encouraged to use the target language while asking questions or interacting among themselves. However, the teachers said that even though they try to do so, pupils' levels of speaking and listening skills differ due to other linguistic environment factors. For example, children from families where the parents, siblings and caregivers speak English language might do better than those from families were English is never spoken. Hence, exposure to a language is a critical factor for language skills development.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of Audio-Lingual method in the ESL classroom. The targeted research area was primary schools with particular interest in three schools from Nyagatare District. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research findings (Mei, 2018; Matamoros-gonzá & Vera-quiñ, 2017;

Castagnaro, 2006) that the Audio-lingual method is one of the methods that enable learners to enhance communicative competencies. The method engages learners in the lesson by using dialogues and drills which are more valuable in teaching English to learners whose mother tongue is not English. The study results highlight that the application of the audio-lingual method in English language classroom enables students to react quickly to the input and produce the desired language. The findings also confirm that there is a certain connection between speaking and listening skills because effective communication involves two persons speaking and listening to each other. The curriculum implementers and other educational stakeholders are to provide facilities needed for effective use of this teaching method. The study also recommends that the teachers should use the audio-lingual method rigorously to help learners improve their listening skills. Further research could look into how the audio-lingual method can be used in teaching English to adult learners.

References

Abduh, N. B. (2016). The Use of Audio-Lingual Method in Teaching Listening Comprehension At the Second Year Students of Smk Yapip Makassar Sungguminasa. *Exposure : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Inggris*, *5*(1), 43. https://doi.org/10.26618/ejpbi.v5i1.808

Alemi, M. & Tavakoli, E. (2016). Audio ligual Method In 3rd International Conference on Applied Research in Language Studies. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293731529.

Bagheri, M., Hadian, B., & Vaez-Dalili, M. (2019). Effects of the Vaughan method in comparison with the audiolingual method and the communicative language teaching on Iranian advanced EFL learners' speaking skill. *International Journal of Instruction*, *12*(2), 81–98. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.1226a

Bazimaziki, G. (2020). Students' perceptions of using a second language in a mother tongue dominated environment: Contrastive Analysis", *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 6(2),01-12.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., Dicenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(5), 545–547. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547

Castagnaro, P. J. (2006). *Audiolingual Method and Behaviorism : From Misunderstanding to Myth*. 519–526. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml023

Celik, O., & Yavuz, F. (2015). The relationship between speaking grades and listening grades of university level preparatory students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *197*(2015), 2137–2140. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.339

Creswell/Editorial. (2009). Mapping the Field of Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *3*(2), 95–108.

Delprato, D. J., & Midgley, B. D. (1992). Some fundamentals of B. F. Skinner's behaviorism. *American Psychologist, 47*(11), 1507–1520. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.47.11.150

Griffiths, C., & Parr, J. M. (2001). *Language-learning strategies : theory and perception. 55*(July), 247–254.

Griffiths, C. (2004). *Language Learning Strategies : Theory and Research. 1*(1).

Habyarimana, H. & Ferreira, A. (2015). *Investigation of Attitudes and Classroom Practices of Educators and Learners in Relation To English As the Medium of Instruction At Four Primary Schools in Rwanda*.

Hashim, H.U.& Yunus,M.M. (2018). English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning: Setting the Right Environment for Second Language Acquisition," Tadris J. Kegur. dan Ilmu Tarb., vol.3, no. 2, p. 207, doi:https://doi.org/10.24042/tadris.v3i2.2941.

Jurakulovich, J. S. (2020). Ways of Improving Effectiveness in Teaching Foreign Languages: Audio-lingual Approach in English Language. *International Journal of Research andDevelopment(IJRD), 5(11), 663-665.*

Kasap, S. &Emamvirdi,B. (2022). The Influence of Mother-Tongue Interference on English as a Foreign Language. *Research in Language and Education: An International Journal [RILE], 2(2), 5-13.*

Kristiawan, M. Sirande, N., Sampelolo, R., Panggua, S., &Siumarlata, V. (Eds.) (2023). Challenge in Teaching English for YoungLearners: A Pre-service Teachers Perspectives. In In book: Online Conference of Education Research International (OCERI 2023) ASSEHR 775, pp. 635–641, 2024.https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-108-1_62.

Mart, C. T. (2013). The Audio-Lingual Method: An Easy way of Achieving Speech. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *3*(12), 63–65. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v3-i12/412

Matamoros-gonzá, J. A., & Vera-quiñ, S. (2017). *English Language Teaching Approaches : A Comparison of the Grammar-translation , Audiolingual , Communicative , and Natural Approaches*.

Mei, Y. (2018). Comments on the Audiolingual Method.*International Journal of Arts and Commerce*, 7(4), 47–53.

Ministry of Education. (2020). Education sector strategic plan. 2018-2024. Rwanda. Retrieved from https://www.globalpartnership.org

Niyibizi, E. (2015). The Rwandan teachers' and learners' perceived speaking proficiency in both Kinyarwanda and English after 2008-2011 consecutive language-in-education policy shifts. *Rwandan Journal of Education*, *3*(1), 91–116.

Paula, E. (2019). *Education Quarterly Reviews. 2*(2), 408–414. https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1993.02.02.73

Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB). (2015). Competence-Based Curriculum. *15Th International Conference the Knowledge-Based Organization: Behavioral and Social Sciences, Conference Proceedings 4*, *4*, 308–312.

Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB). (2022). *Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools*. Kigali: REB.

Sibomana, E. (2014). The acquisition of English as a second language in Rwanda: challenges and promises. *Rwandan Journal of Education*, *2*(2), 19–30.

Skinner, B. F. (1974). *About Behaviourism Theory*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf.

Sun, Y. (2019). An Analysis on the Factors Affecting Second Language Acquisition and Its Implications for Teaching and Learning. Journal of Language Teaching and Research,10(5)1018-1022. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1005.14

UNESCO. (2021). World Atlas of Languages: towards a comprehensive assessment framework for linguistic diversity. Retrieved fromhttps://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380132

UNICEF. (2017). The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning in Rwanda. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org.esa/files/2018-09/UNICEF-2017-Language-and-Learning-Rwanda.pdf

Voicu, C. G. (2012). *Overusing mother tongue in English language teaching*. *2*(3), 212–218.

Zhou, M.(2023). Effectiveness of Audio-Lingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching in Enhancing the English Language Grammar Proficiency and Attitude among Intermediate Chinese EFL Learners,*World Journal of Educational Research,*10(5),58-87.