

Evaluating the impact of competency-based teaching on students' English communication skills in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT), based on constructivist theories of learning, is learner-centered, focuses on practical skills development, and discourages cramming, making it one of the best teaching approaches for improving skills in the English language. Although CBT has been embraced throughout the world, there are few studies on the efficacy of this pedagogic approach in enhancing English communication skills within the rural secondary schooling context in Tanzania. Thus, this study assessed the effectiveness of CBT in improving English communication skills among Form Three students in rural public secondary schools within Mbinga District in Tanzania. The population of this study included both Form Three students and English language teachers, from which a sample of 480 students was selected using purposive and random sampling approaches. The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, where the experiment was conducted using two schools with 353 students using CBT, while two other schools with 129 students used a traditional teaching approach. Information was gathered by administering pretests and posttests on students' abilities in speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Analysis of quantitative data was done using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. The results showed that there was a significant improvement for students exposed to CBT in all four language skills, with the highest improvement in speaking and reading, the second highest in listening skills, and the least in writing. The control group, however, showed very little improvement. The study concludes that CBT can be effective in improving the practical English communication skills and meeting the various learning needs of students. Teacher training should be strengthened, teaching resources should be made available, and interactive teaching tools should be used regularly to ensure the benefits of CBT are maximized in the rural secondary schools.

Keywords: Competency-Based Teaching, English Communication Skills, Learning Gains, Student Learning Outcomes

I. INTRODUCTION

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) has been identified as a powerful alternative model for facilitating learning from the memorisation of content to the recall of learning to the demonstration of learning (Msamba et al., 2023; Serge et al., 2021). CBT is different to the prevailing teacher-led approach to learning, which focuses on what the learner can remember, and is based on what the learner can do. Language learning, for example, learning the English language for communication, is one of the areas where CBT aims to provide an interactive learning space where learners can engage with the language, listening, speaking, writing and reading (Chappell et al., 2020; Knapp & Ali, 2020). The domain of secondary learning is a field where the importance of CBT learning cannot be overemphasised, as it is important to provide the necessary skills to the learners in this field to make them competent in academic learning, employment and social interaction.

The problem of the gap in communication skills between the educated and the uneducated population in the world has been taken up by many learning institutions, which are implementing the idea of competency education. The principles of CBT have been used in several countries in Europe, North America and Asian countries in improving the ability to apply learned concepts in the natural environment (Oroszi, 2020; Syomwene, 2023; Thummaphan et al., 2022). Many developing nations have adopted the move towards CBT in enhancing the quality and relevance aspect in the learning institutions. Medium of communication: These are the countries that have English as their medium of communication. There have been several different studies that have shown different inconsistencies in the application of the principles of CBT in developing countries, with a lack of preparedness among the learning fraternity (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021; Catacutan et al., 2023; Rhoney et al., 2024).

The competency-based education reforms have been implemented in a few countries in Africa, such as Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania, to improve the pedagogy of learning and hands-on skills (Akinrinola, 2021;

Atuhura & Nambi, 2024; Kubai, 2023). The reforms have not, however, ensured that the principles of CBT are being translated into good classroom practice at rural public schools that lack the infrastructure, teacher training, and instructional materials. The concern of English communication skills is paramount due to many students reaching secondary school during late adolescence with poor levels of communication skills, including poor speaking and writing skills, which consequently affect their academic performance and employment opportunities (Muchira et al., 2023; Nsengimana et al., 2021, 2024). Indeed, in such a case, questions must be raised about the implementation of CBT in English language classrooms and how beneficial it actually is to the development of communication skills.

For Tanzania, the adoption of CBC in secondary education was done as a solution to the long-standing concerns regarding the performance of education relative to the needs of the society (Issa et al., 2024; Kiswaga, 2022; Mokoro, 2020; Msamba et al., 2023). English is a subject of communication, and is an important subject in secondary education. An anomaly is emerging that candidates from rural public secondary schools are failing in communication, allegedly in the CBT method of curriculum implementation, despite their large population. It highlights a possibility of a disconnect in curriculum implementation from curriculum theory in connection to improvement in communication standards among candidates in English Language (Kiswaga, 2022; Majiwa et al., 2025; Mathias et al., 2023; Nkya et al., 2021; Venance, 2022). Thus, it becomes essential to go into CBT theory in relation to its application in the field of communication standards of the candidates in the English Language.

However, even though the Competency Based Teaching approach has been integrated into the curriculum of secondary education in Tanzania, little information is available about the actual implementation of the teaching method in English communication in rural public secondary schools, and particularly the impact of the method on the actual communication of the learners (Kimario & Otieno, 2022; Juma et al., 2025; Ndimbo, 2023; Venance, 2022). Most of the findings focused on policies and on the actual implementation of the curriculum, and more about the general academic performance of the students. There was not much information from a rural area, which highlighted the actual effect of this approach by teachers in improving English communication skills by applying the CBT approach. Therefore, this was an emerging problem to fill this gap of knowledge on the actual impact of the use of the Competency-Based Teaching method on improved actual communication by Mbinga students in a rural area in Tanzania.

Theoretical foundations, policy intentions and general implementation challenges in various settings of Competency Based Education (CBE) and Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) have been studied so far (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021; Chappell et al., 2020; Oroszi, 2020; Rhoney et al., 2024). Research in Africa has so far focused mainly on teachers' perceptions, readiness and challenges in the implementation of CBC (Akinrinola, 2021; Nkya et al., 2021; Muchira et al., 2023; Ogembo, 2025). Likewise, research has been done in Tanzania in districts like Arusha, Mbeya, Magu, Njombe, Mtama, and others, that have investigated issues of competence-based English curriculum and teacher preparedness (Issa et al., 2024; Kimario & Otieno, 2022; Kiswaga, 2022; Mathias et al., 2023; Juma et al., 2025; Venance, 2022). These studies help to recognise the implementation of curriculum and institutional barriers, but do not focus on measurable student learning outcomes as a result of Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) in English classes.

More specifically, there are no empirical research studies on the direct impact of CBT on students' English communication skills, specifically in rural public secondary schools, where they may experience several challenges that influence the teaching of the English language. Difficulties, challenges and problems surrounding the implementation, assessment and training of CBT have been discussed in most studies, but the impact of CBT on the ability of the students to communicate, speak and write effectively in English has not been ascertained. Furthermore, pretest–posttest research designs have not been extensively used to assess the impact of CBT on students' communication skills. This is particularly the case in rural public secondary schools like Mbinga District, where some challenges may impact the effectiveness of teaching, particularly in the case of English communication competencies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap in knowledge by evaluating the effect of competency-based teaching on the English communication competencies of secondary school students in Mbinga District, rural public secondary schools, Tanzania.

The study is significant since it brings empirical research findings on the effect of CBT on English communication skills of students in rural public secondary schools, which has received little research attention in Tanzania. The emphasis on the real effects of CBT is essential to the comprehension of the correlation between competency-based teaching and the students' English communication competency. This research is important for teachers because it will provide them with useful information on how to apply CBT to improve their students' English communication skills. The research provides the policy makers and curriculum planners with valuable knowledge on the actual effect of a competency-based approach on students' English communication skills in rural public secondary schools. The research is also important to the academic community because it bridges the gap on the impact of CBT on the English communication skills of students in rural public secondary schools.

This is the reason why the introduction of CBT in secondary education in Tanzania has been condemned due to the poor communicative ability in the English language of the learners. The introduction of CBT was expected to move away from the conventional content-based teaching methods to competence-based learning in which the learners are involved in practical exercises like speaking, reading, listening, and writing. However, research has indicated that despite

the introduction of CBT into a country's educational system, students continue to demonstrate poor English language communicative skills, which in turn continues to impact their educational performances and prospects of securing a successful life (Kiswaga, 2022; Majiwa et al., 2025; Nkya et al., 2021; Venance, 2022). The above findings suggest that some problems may be occurring in the implementation of CBT, affecting the expected outcomes of CBT. The use of CBT appears to be constrained by context (Issa et al., 2024; Mathias et al., 2023; Juma et al., 2025), yet a focus on active involvement of learners in the learning process and skill acquisition is a key principle of CBT.

Furthermore, the literature has demonstrated that most of the research conducted on competency-based education in Tanzania and other parts of Africa has addressed the policy issues, teachers' views and implementation challenges, little of which has been dedicated to learner-focused outcomes/achievements (Akinrinola, 2021; Muchira et al., 2023; Ogembo, 2025). Few studies have tried to explore the effect of CBT on learners' English communication skills using pretest – posttest studies or similar research designs. That is, it remains unclear whether or not CBT could enhance language learning in the classroom. This is particularly problematic in districts like Mbinga, where learners may have additional challenges in learning. This is the reason for this research to be undertaken to find out the effects of CBT on students' English communication skills in Mbinga District.

1.1 Research Objectives

Specifically, this study was pursued to: -

- i. Assess the impact of Competency-Based Teaching on students' speaking skills in English.
- ii. Examine the impact of Competency-Based Teaching on students' reading skills in English.
- iii. Determine the impact of Competency-Based Teaching on students' listening skills in English.
- iv. Evaluate the impact of Competency-Based Teaching on students' writing skills in English.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Competency-Based Teaching (CBT)

Competency-Based Teaching, a method of teaching in which learning is directed around clearly defined competencies that inform learning activities, teaching strategies and assessment. For this reason, CBT is heavily dependent on situations where the knowledge and skills gained can be applied in the real world, rather than on the content itself. CBT frames learning around clearly defined competencies, shapes teaching approaches, learning activities and assessment approaches (Chappell et al., 2020). Students will be able to complete tasks independently and effectively, as this approach is based on observable and measurable results and is essential in language education, as the ability to communicate forms the basis for academic and social success.

CBT, therefore, encourages learner participation in English language classes through task-based and interactive activities like group discussions, debates, role plays, presentations, and solving problems in teams. These activities provide opportunities for students to practise their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in meaningful contexts to improve fluency, accuracy and confidence. CBT emphasize language learning in a more practical sense, moving away from memorisation and towards the actual use of language, thereby bridging the gap between theory and application.

Continuous assessment and feedback indeed are other indispensable elements of the learning process as underscored in CBT. Assessment for teachers is based on performance tasks, demonstration and continuous observation rather than on final exams. The teacher would thus track student progress, pinpoint areas of need, and provide interventions as needed to ensure that children develop these skills. But implementation depends on well-trained teachers, teaching aids and conducive learning atmosphere—all of which are problems in rural secondary schools. Despite their limitations, however, CBT provides a sound base for developing students' proficiency in English communication skills by making teaching, practice and evaluation closely reflect real-life skills.

2.1.2 Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist Learning Theory, proposed by Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and others, emphasises the importance of learning through prior experiences, interaction with one's environment, and in a social context (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Students actively participate in the discovery process and make connections between what they learn and their personal lives through problem-solving and reflection instead of being told. The CBT approach is very learner-centred, with learning noted as meaningful and skills development, which is equally applicable to the learning of practical English communication skills. Constructivism is one of the explanations for how students acquire knowledge by engaging in the process instead of memorising.

A key concept found within Vygotsky's constructivist theory is the Zone of Proximal Development, or the gap between independent performance and guided or collaborative performance of a learner. The ZPD has a focus on how the teacher facilitates the development of skills and how peers help in an English language classroom. The teacher

assumes leadership in structuring activities that allow the students to practice skills together with group discussions, role plays and/or problem solving. These provide opportunities for students to become competent in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Thus, social interaction is a significant component of learning through constructivist.

In the view of this theory, Constructivist Learning Theory emphasises the importance of critical thinking and reflection as student learning constructs. Students, in particular, are encouraged to make meaning of learning, to reflect on and make sense of their learning (Waite-Stupiansky, 2022). For CBT learning, reflection is used to help students assess their own communication skill level and to identify methods of strengthening their communication skills. Furthermore, the constructivist learning approach emphasises that it is essential that teachers have high knowledge and competence in constructing plans and developing learning experiences that are learner-centred and interactive. Even when learning is done with limited resources and facilities, as is mostly evident and applicable to most rural secondary schools, learning through constructivist principles can improve English proficiency and develop interaction.

2.1.3 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Theory

The theory behind Communicative Language Teaching is the communicative competence theory of Dell Hymes, which emphasises the communicative competence of the learners, which is the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in all situations. The traditional grammar-based approaches differ from CLT in that meaningful communication is given greater consideration, and where grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies are interwoven. For Canale and Swain (1980), grammatical competence is defined as the knowledge of vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation; sociolinguistic competence is defined as the knowledge of using language in various social situations, discourse competence is defined as the degree of coherence in oral or written communication, and strategic competence is defined as the capacity to circumvent communication failures by employing strategies such as paraphrasing and clarification. All of these skills are important for assessing the effectiveness of Competency-Based Teaching in the English classroom.

CLT supports interactive and learner-centred teaching techniques that are similar to those embodied by the principles of CBT. Interactive techniques like debate, role play, storytelling, presentations and group discussion provide opportunities for students to engage in communicative activities to assist with fluency and accuracy of language. CLT is engaged in making students connected with the language communication activities, which not only helps them develop language skills but also their learning skills in how to communicate in conversations. The CLT activities offer rural high school students an opportunity to build communication skills.

In addition, the CLT approach emphasises performance and interactivity, as opposed to written test performances. In this place, the teacher will be able to make observations of the different performances and test the communicative skills of students. These performances may include dialogues, presentations, and others. These performances will directly relate to the application of learning in the CBT approach. More specifically, it refers to the demonstration concept. In this sense, the inclusion of the CLT approach in the CBT approach has a good theoretical background in terms of enhancing students' English communication skills in the context of the constraints found in the question.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Speaking Skills

Empirical studies prove that CBT has great potential in enhancing students' speaking skills by engaging in activities and communication processes in a realistic way. For example, Açıkgöz and Babadogan (2021) argue that CBT emphasises the involvement of the learners through activities such as group discussions, role play and presentations and offers students an opportunity to speak in the real world. Similarly, Catacutan et al. (2023) show that collaborative learning with the CBT approach is effective on the development of students' oral proficiency, as students are encouraged to share their ideas with other learners in the group.

As for the use of CBT in Africa, there is a lack of uniformity concerning its impact on the students' use of speaking skills. Specifically, Akinrinola (2021) shows that although interactive teaching techniques have several advantages, some classroom factors seem to militate against their implementation in the learning process, including overcrowding and a lack of materials. For instance, Muchira et al. (2023) found that students who were taught with CBT performed significantly better in their oral tasks, but their fluency was affected by the lack of enough time to perform oral tasks. Likewise, Issa et al. (2024) reveal students' responsiveness in their involvement in the discussions and role-playing activity, but it could be seen that the students still face problems related to their confidence and spontaneity in speaking.

2.2.2 Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Reading Skills

CBT has been closely associated with better reading skills by using a learner-centred approach like guided reading, reading comprehension and vocabulary development. CBT focuses on the involvement of the learner and means

that the person makes their meaning rather than taking it as passively given (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021). According to Catacutan et al. (2023), regular testing and interactive reading activities enhance learners' comprehension and analytical thinking skills.

Despite this, studies done in Africa indicate that contextual issues impact the effectiveness of CBT in enhancing reading skills. For example, Ogembo (2025) found that the students' ability to do self-study reading exercises is strongly influenced by the absence of reading materials. In addition, Nkya et al. (2021) reported that teachers encounter many challenges in the effective implementation of reading methods in Tanzania due to the lack of teaching materials and limited training opportunities. While CBT works well for comprehension-based learning, many learners in rural areas struggle to read fluently and to understand lengthy texts (Kiswaga, 2022).

2.2.3 Impact of the Competency-Based Model on Students' Listening Skills

Listening skills are one of the important components of language learning and can be improved through CBT with a range of task-based activities. CBT allows the development of listening skills in real-life dialogue, story narration, and other listening exercises (Chappell et al., 2020). Knapp and Ali (2020) also assert that the combination of listening activities with continuous feedback is useful to enhance learners' listening ability.

At the same time, research conducted in African countries shows that it can be quite difficult to implement effective listening exercises into the learning process. Therefore, Muchira et al. (2023) concluded that schools in Kenya are deficient in audio-visual material, which would enable children to have interesting listening exercises. Similarly, in another study from Tanzania, Juma et al. (2025) reported that teachers do not have much interest in listening tasks in their class. Issa et al. (2024) state that even when listening competence is enhanced in the CBT context, learners still are not able to fully understand and respond to the oral language because of the lack of practice.

2.2.4 Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Writing Abilities

CBT aids in the development of writing skills as learners are motivated to undertake purposeful writing activities. Açikgöz and Babadogan (2021) believe that writing within the context of CBT is an activity which requires the writer to organise the ideas and apply the proper rules of language. Collaboration in writing and provision of feedback in the development of learners' writing skills is also highlighted by Catacutan et al. (2023).

On the other hand, studies conducted indicate that the development of writing skills takes more time than other language skills in the context of CBT. For example, Nkya et al. (2021) show that teachers are facing issues in facilitating learners to engage in writing tasks in Tanzania due to the large number of learners in a class and the limited time they have to give individual feedback. Furthermore, both Kiswaga (2022) and Venance (2022) discovered that, despite being engaged in CBT, grammatical errors, cohesiveness problems and difficulties in developing ideas in written texts are encountered by the learners. Furthermore, the teachers' limited competency in assessment of the competencies has caused teachers to focus on examination-based writing activities.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy

The philosophy of this study was post-positivism, because the study was focused on cause-and-effect relationships and was sensitive to reliability and external factors (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It was through this philosophical approach that quantitative approaches were harnessed in evaluating the effect of CBT on the English communication skills of learners while being mindful of issues like teacher preparedness and learners' involvement, which might affect the outcomes in a rural setting like secondary schools located in Mbinga District in Tanzania.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

This study used a quantitative research method, which was helpful in getting objective, quantitative data related to the implementation of CBT and the communication skills of students. The tools that aided this study were quantitative in nature, and pretests, posttests, questionnaires, and document analysis aided in assessing different methods, techniques, and processes in the classroom scenario (Fischer et al., 2023). A statistical approach was also used to evaluate the impact of CBT, and this has proved that CBT is effective in a rural environment in Tanzania.

Quasi-experimental research with a pretest and posttest control group design was used to assess CBT effectiveness in promoting English communication skill development among students. Where one group was given CBT as a teaching aid, traditional methods were used to teach the control group, facilitating comparison of student learning outcomes (Maciejewski, 2020). This approach factored in situational variations like teachers' preparedness and willingness to implement CBT, presence of learning resources, and student involvement and generated statistical significance on pre- and post-treatment variations among learners

3.3 Study Area

The research context was carried out in the Mbinga District in Tanzania, characterised by the physical landscape of lowland/mountainous terrain, 28 geographical wards, and largely rural public schools in the form of public secondary schools, little researched in the context of CBT in the context of the geographical terrain in Tanzania, characterised by poor student outcomes in English, linguistic diversification, and limited infrastructure within schools. The purpose of selecting this particular geographical context was significant, since historically, this geographical context in Tanzania has lacked research in the context of CBT, poor outcomes in student English, linguistic diversification, and poor school infrastructure.

3.4 Target Population

The study was conducted with the Form Three students, teachers of English, school heads, and the Quality Assurance Officers in the public secondary schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania. The population included 2669 Form Three students from 33 schools in the rural areas, approximately 66 English teachers (two per school), 33 school heads and five district Quality Assurance Officers. The students selected are at an important stage in their ELD journey, and the teachers, heads, and officers who were selected have a direct impact or responsibility for the implementation of Competency-Based Teaching (CBT).

3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

Four schools were identified through purposive sampling for their location in rural areas, CBT training of teachers and willingness to participate. Two schools (K1S, K2S) formed the experimental group and two (K3S, K4S) the control group. Pre-test and post-test were conducted on the Form Three students who were selected through a simple random sampling method. A total of 494 participants were seen in the last sample, which comprises 480 students (320 experimental students and 160 control students), 8 teachers, 4 school heads and 2 Quality Assurance Officers.

Table 1

Population and Sampling

Category	Total Population	Target Sample	Notes / Selection Basis
Form Three Students	2,669 (from 33 rural secondary schools)	480 (320 experimental + 160 control)	Purposeful and random sampling to assess CBT implementation
English Language Teachers	66 (estimated 2 per school × 33 schools)	8	Selected based on adequate CBT experience
School Heads	33 (1 per school)	4	Selected for leadership perspective
Quality Assurance Officers	5 (district-level)	2	Selected for expertise in CBT monitoring
Total	2,773	494	

3.6 Data Collection Methods

The data for this study were gathered through English communication tests, questionnaires, and classroom observations to determine the effect of Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) on the communicative competencies of students. Pretest and posttest English communication tests were conducted on the students to determine the effect of CBT on their speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. Questionnaires were administered to the students to gather quantitative data on their experiences with CBT in English classes. Classroom observations were also carried out to determine the extent to which the teachers used CBT strategies in English classes and how these strategies affected communicative learning. The use of all these approaches helped in gathering accurate data on both the teaching approaches and the communicative outcomes among students in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using quantitative methods to ascertain the impact of CBT on students' English communication skills. Scores from students' pretest and posttest results on English communication skills were coded and analysed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to describe students' performance before and after being exposed to CBT. Inferential statistics, such as the paired sample t-test, were also used to ascertain whether a significant difference existed between students' pretest and posttest results. In addition, questionnaire results were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to describe students' perceptions of CBT practices. The results were presented using tables to clearly illustrate students' changes in communication skills.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical procedures during this study included giving informed consent to participants, seeking permission from relevant third parties, which in this study covered every region and district, along with school heads, participants' confidentiality, anonymity, and right of withdrawal, thus guaranteeing ethical principles of protecting human rights.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' English Communication Competencies in Rural Public Secondary Schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania. This section presents findings on the impact of the application of Competency-Based Teaching on English communication competencies of Form Three students of public secondary schools situated within Mbinga District. The study targeted Form Three students of four selected schools across two experimental schools, namely K1S and K2S, where CBT was used and two control schools, namely K3S and K4S, where conventional teaching methods were used. The four domains of English communication competencies that this study analysed include Speaking, Reading, Listening, and Writing, with a composite score measured against 20 marks. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to evaluate and establish statistical significance in measuring and interpreting means and deviations.

4.1.1 The Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Speaking Skills in English

This subsection will discuss the findings on how CBT impacted the speaking skills of the students in English among the Form Three students in the chosen rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District. Being able to speak was a part of English communication competence. This assessment took place using structured oral activities, which allowed students to express themselves, discuss and respond to structured prompts in English. The study design involved comparing two experimental schools (K1S and K2S) where CBT strategies were fully implemented with two other schools (K3S and K4S) where a conventional teacher-centred approach continued. The main aim was to assess whether CBT had a significant impact on students' ability to communicate fluently and confidently in English.

Pre-test analysis indicated that both groups were at a fairly comparable speaking skill proficiency before the intervention. This was calculated from the mean score of the experimental group in their pre-test, 5.1 and the mean score of the control group in their pre-test, which was slightly lower, 4.8. This means that before the intervention, both groups of students had a similar level of English-speaking skill proficiency. Both groups had similar pretest mean scores, resulting in a fair basis for the measurement of the effect of the teaching approach employed over the course of the study, as any improvement in the post-test would be attributed to the teaching approach employed and not to the level of achievement in the pretest.

After the implementation of CBT strategies like group discussions, role plays, oral presentations, peer interactions, and speaking exercises in the experimental schools, there was a marked improvement in the speaking skills of the students. The post-test results showed that the experimental group had a significant learning gain of +2.2 points, from the mean of 5.1 to 7.3. The control group (traditional teaching method) did, however, attain a marginal gain of +0.2 points (+0.8 to +0.5) and an improvement from 4.8 to 5.0. The difference between the learning gains of the two groups can be seen, that is, the students who were taught with CBT could improve their speaking skills more than the traditional method.

Furthermore, results of inferential statistical analysis with an independent samples t-test revealed that the difference in the posttest speaking scores of experimental and control groups was statistically significant, with $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the experimental group had changes that were not a random probability but were connected to the teaching strategies used. The results of the study revealed that the regular application of a learner-centred and activity-based approach of CBT gave more opportunities for students to practice speaking English in a classroom environment that enabled students to become more fluent, confident and clear in speaking English.

Table 2

Pretest, Posttest, Learning Gains, and t-Test Results for Speaking Skills

Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Learning Gain	t-value	p-value
Experimental (K1S, K2S)	5.1	7.3	+2.2		
Control (K3S, K4S)	4.8	5.0	+0.2	—	<0.001

4.1.2 The Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Reading Skills in English

Reading competence was evaluated through structured comprehension exercises, which involved reading, identifying main ideas, interpreting meanings, answering reading comprehension questions, and understanding the meanings of the vocabulary used in the context of the reading material. This evaluation was meant to measure the

students' competence in reading, interpreting, analysing, and responding appropriately to the reading material. Before the intervention, the students in the two groups were given a pretest aimed at establishing the baseline reading competence of the students in the two groups. From the results of the pretest, it was found that the experimental group had a mean of 2.7, while the control group had a mean of 2.5 in the possible marks for the reading skills. This difference in the mean scores was small, indicating that the two groups had nearly similar reading competence before the intervention of the CBT. This was important in the validity of the research since it showed that the two groups had similar reading competence, which made the study valid since any improvement in the posttest could be attributed to the teaching strategies applied in the research rather than the students' initial competence.

After the implementation of CBT in the experimental schools, a posttest was conducted to identify the changes in the reading abilities of the students. The findings revealed a marked and observable improvement in the students who were taught using CBT strategies. The mean score of the experimental group rose from 2.7 in the pretest to 3.8 in the posttest, reflecting a learning gain of +1.1 points. This is an indication that the students were able to comprehend the text, identify the main idea, interpret the vocabulary, and respond to comprehension questions correctly. On the other hand, the control group, which was taught using conventional teaching methods, recorded a slight improvement from a mean score of 2.5 to 2.6, reflecting a minimal learning gain of +0.1 points. The difference in the degree of improvement between the two groups clearly indicates the impact of CBT on improving reading comprehension.

The significant difference in the performance of the experimental group could be attributed to the CBT strategies used to deliver the instruction. In the experimental schools, teachers often used guided reading, class discussions of texts, vocabulary development, peer learning, and interpretation, among other activities. The students were encouraged to participate by reading aloud, asking questions, sharing their interpretations, and relating the texts to real-life situations, among other activities. The activities gave students opportunities to interact with the reading materials in a meaningful way rather than simply listening to the teacher's explanation. They were able to comprehend the materials in a deeper way and became more confident in dealing with English texts. However, through the use of inferential statistics, it was established that the difference in posttest reading scores between the two groups was statistically significant. The results of the statistical analysis confirm that the difference in performance between the two groups was not by chance but was due to the CBT approach used to deliver the instruction. The students who participated in activity-based and participatory reading tasks were able to comprehend, understand vocabulary, and interpret the texts compared to those students who used the traditional approach to learn.

Table 3

Pretest, Posttest and Learning Gains in Reading Skills

Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Learning Gain
Experimental (K1S & K2S)	2.7	3.8	+1.1
Control (K3S & K4S)	2.5	2.6	+0.1

4.1.3 The Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Listening Skills in English.

Listening skills are an essential aspect of learning the English language, as they allow learners to comprehend the spoken word, interpret the meaning of the spoken word, and respond appropriately to the spoken word in both academic and non-academic situations. In this particular study, the listening skills of the learners were assessed to evaluate the impact of the implementation of Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) on the learners' ability to comprehend, interpret, and respond to the English language. A pretest was administered to the learners of the two experimental schools, namely K1S and K2S, where CBT was implemented, as well as the two control schools, namely K3S and K4S, where the conventional teacher-centred approach was used. The results of the pretest indicated that the learners of the experimental group had an average of 1.8 out of 5 marks in listening skills, while the learners of the control group had an average of 1.7 out of 5 marks. The results of the pretest indicated that at the baseline stage, the two groups of learners were comparable in listening skills, meaning that any improvements that could be seen later would be attributed to the teaching approach used.

Subsequent to this, post-tests were carried out to measure any improvements that might have taken place in their listening skills. From the results, there was a significant improvement in the students of the experimental schools. The mean score increased from 1.8 to 2.5, indicating a gain of +0.7. On the other hand, the students in the control schools did not undergo CBT, and also showed some improvement, but to a very marginal extent. The mean score increased from 1.7 to 1.8, indicating a gain of +0.1. From this, it is evident that the use of CBT techniques, including guided listening, interactive audio-visual aids, discussion among themselves, role plays, and question-and-answer sessions, was effective in improving the students' listening skills. The results also confirm that the active involvement of students through task-based listening in CBT was more effective in improving their listening skills compared to the conventional method of teaching.

Table 4*Listening Skills Pretest, Posttest, and Learning Gains*

Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain (Post – Pre)
Experimental (K1S & K2S)	1.8 (–)	2.5 (–)	+0.7
Control (K3S & K4S)	1.7 (–)	1.8 (–)	+0.1
Total Gain	–	–	Experimental: +0.7, Control: +0.1

4.1.4 The Impact of Competency-Based Teaching on Students' Writing Skills in English

The study aimed to determine how CBT would affect the students' writing performance in English because the acquisition of the language includes mastery of grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, logical organisation of ideas and coherent expression of thoughts. The most vulnerable area of English communication amongst pupils in rural public secondary schools, which includes those in Mbinga District, has been writing because this skill is less practised, there is little exposure to the language outside the classroom, and little support in terms of materials and resources, and pupils continue to be taught using the traditional teacher-centred approach that involves memorisation rather than skills acquisition. A pretest was applied before giving CBT in the experimental schools to determine students' skill levels in this skill. The results revealed that the students in the experimental school had a mean score of 0.6, which means that they also find it difficult to learn this important skill in English communication, while those in the control school had a mean score of 0.4.

The students' writing skills were measured in the experimental schools after the introduction of CBT strategies, such as structured writing, peer review, group composition, guided paragraph construction and iterative feedback with teachers, and the results show that their writing skills are measurably improved. The mean scores of the posttest indicated a gain, +0.2 points, for the experimental group in the mean score of 0.8. The control group that did not use the ICT method experienced no improvement, with a mean score of 0.4. The gains in writing were also smaller than those seen in speaking, reading and listening, but still indicate that CBT has been successful in providing systematic practice and development of writing skills for students.

The findings suggest that a learner-centred and task-based approach, like CBT, can help students' confidence and competence in writing to improve slowly over time. It also suggests that writing is an ability which has to be learned over time and that there is a significant improvement in this ability to be discerned when it is the subject of the student's own activity. The results also suggest that, if properly applied, the use of CBT in the classroom can be the means of achieving significant improvement in the writing ability of the students, an important component of the students' overall English communication skill set.

Table 5*Writing Skills Pretest, Posttest, and Learning Gains*

Group	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Gain (Post – Pre)
Experimental (K1S & K2S)	0.6 (–)	0.8 (–)	+0.2
Control (K3S & K4S)	0.4 (–)	0.4 (–)	0.0

4.2 Discussion

The study was conducted to assess the effect of the implementation of CBT on the students' English communication competencies in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District. The study findings have clearly shown that CBT has a significant positive effect on the four key domains of the students' English communication competencies: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Specifically, the study has found that the students in the experimental group showed significant improvements in their ability to express themselves orally, read a text, listen attentively to a speaker, and write coherently, unlike the students in the control group. The study has found that the students in the experimental group showed the most significant improvement in their speaking skills, gaining +2.2 points, while the students in the control group gained only +0.2 points. The study findings support the claims made by Açıkgöz and Babadoğan (2021) and Catacutan *et al.* (2023) that CBT has a positive effect on the students' communication competencies because CBT encourages active participation, critical thinking, and the practical application of knowledge rather than rote memorisation..

Reading and listening skills also demonstrated significant improvement. The experimental group of students recorded +1.1 points in reading and +0.7 points in listening, while the control group recorded minimal gains of +0.1 points in reading and listening. This indicates that CBT enables learners to comprehend, develop vocabulary, and analyse information more effectively. For instance, reading activities, guided comprehension, and group listening enabled students to not only read but also critically engage with the meaning of the text, thus improving their ability to react accordingly in English. The findings are consistent with the studies carried out by Issa *et al.* (2024) and Kimario and Otieno (2022), which emphasised that learners who are exposed to competency-based teaching methods have shown

greater sensitivity to both written and spoken English input than learners in conventional learning environments, where teaching mainly focuses on memorisation and drill-and-practice rather than meaningful engagement.

While the improvement in the students' writing skill was less than that in the other areas, with an increase of only +0.2 points in the experimental group, it is still an improvement in an area where rural students have traditionally had problems. However, the improvement in the students' writing skills also shows that competency-based learning is structured and allows for the development of the skill because the students have to go through an iterative process where they have to write and get feedback from their peers. This is also in line with the findings by Juma *et al.* (2025) and Msamba *et al.* (2023) that the improvement in the students' writing skills is gradual and results from the practice and active participation of the students and not from the passive reception of knowledge. The improvement in the students' writing skills also shows the challenges that are experienced in rural areas and how they may limit the full potential for the improvement of the students' writing skills.

The overall learning gains, as shown by the +4.2 score of the experimental group compared to the +0.4 score of the control group, are clear evidence of the effectiveness of CBT in developing English communication skills. Aside from the learning gains in the skills of the students, the study also showed how CBT can contribute to the development of uniformity and consistency in learning outcomes. The reduced range of posttest scores in the experimental group shows how CBT can accommodate students of different initial proficiency levels, as all of them can benefit from the task-oriented and collaborative approach of CBT. In contrast, the traditional approach of the control group showed minimal learning gains and a larger range of posttest scores, which only showed the limitations of the traditional approach in catering to the needs of students of different proficiency levels. These findings are in line with the conclusions of Akinrinola (2021) and Muchira *et al.* (2023) that the effective implementation of CBT is not only dependent on the design of the curriculum but also on the teacher's and school's readiness to improve the competencies of students.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This research examined the impact of CBT on students' English communication skills in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania. The research findings show that the application of Competency-Based Teaching had a significant positive impact on the students' competencies in all four areas of English communication: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Specifically, the research found that the application of Competency-Based Teaching had a significant positive impact on the students' speaking and reading skills, a moderate positive impact on their listening skills, and a slight positive impact on their writing skills. This shows that the application of learner-centred, task-based, and interactive teaching approaches helps learners develop not only the knowledge of the English language but also the skills of communicating in English.

Moreover, the study also confirmed that CBT can ensure a level of uniformity in learning outcomes and minimise the level of variation in the students' learning achievements, which in turn indicates the effectiveness of CBT in catering to the divergent learning needs of students in rural schools. On the contrary, it was observed that the teacher-centred approach had yielded minimal results and had not been effective in any way in developing the communicative competence of the students. The study also revealed the importance of teacher preparedness and the availability of instructional resources in facilitating the successful application of CBT. Thus, it can be asserted that the study has once again proven the effectiveness of CBT as a tool in developing English communication skills in students, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice, and enabling the students to communicate effectively in English in real-life situations.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is strongly recommended that rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District adopt and integrate CBT strategies in the English language learning curriculum to enhance students' communication competence. Teachers should be given in-service training and professional development on practical competency-based teaching techniques such as role plays, group discussions, listening exercises, peer writing, and interactive reading techniques. The training should not only be on theoretical knowledge but also on practical application of CBT techniques, enabling them to confidently apply CBT techniques to cater to students of different competencies. Moreover, policymakers and school administrators should ensure the availability of teaching and learning resources, such as textbooks and teaching aids, to support CBT techniques in teaching English in secondary schools in Mbinga District. Finally, policymakers and school administrators should ensure that students' progress is monitored and evaluated in the four key areas of English communication competence: Speaking, reading, listening, and writing, to provide students with additional support in areas where progress is least noted, such as writing competence.

In addition, collaborative strategies among teachers, such as peer learning, workshops, and best practices, should be promoted to enhance the quality and effectiveness of CBT. The school management should also focus on addressing structural and contextual factors that may limit the effectiveness of teaching, such as class sizes, infrastructure, and resources. The promotion of student-centred environments where learners can participate and use English to learn can further enhance their competence. Lastly, based on the effectiveness of CBT in improving students' English communication skills, it is recommended that the authorities consider expanding the method to other rural areas across Tanzania. This will not only promote equal opportunities for accessing quality teaching methods but will also align with the national objective of improving students' competence in communicating effectively.

Declaration of Interest

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