

## An assessment of prevalent competency-based teaching practices for enhancing students' English communication skills in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania

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### ABSTRACT

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) is a revolutionary teaching method that focuses on the development of students' skills rather than rote learning. The study focused on the major types of CBT which teachers used to improve the English communication skills of students in rural public secondary schools in the Mbinga District in Tanzania. In particular, the study was directed towards the strategies used by teachers in the development of their students' speaking, reading, listening and writing competence. The theory behind this study was competency-based education and constructivist learning theory, which emphasises active learning and demonstration of skills. The study employed the pragmatism philosophy. The study targeted English language teachers and Form Three students of public secondary schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania, which are mainly located in rural areas. The study was conducted in 16 rural public secondary schools, four of which were purposively selected in Form Three with 16 English language teachers. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected in a qualitative case study design using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews. The results showed that teachers used teacher-centred and a combination of both (hybrid) CBT practices, and the most common was the hybrid approach. Ongoing teacher training, supply of teaching materials and structural changes (e.g., smaller classes) are suggested to optimise CBT effectiveness, as recommended by the study.

**Keywords:** Competency-Based Teaching, English Communication Skills, Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As English has become more significant in the world, it has become one of the significant aims of education globally (Yuldashova et al., 2025). English is used in secondary schools in Tanzania not only as a subject, but also as the medium of instruction, and therefore is essential in ensuring the success of learners and their future life. However, despite this importance, there are still some problems which need to be addressed, most importantly in the rural public secondary schools, where the students have a low level of English communication skills. This situation is a concern for the teaching methods used and the extent to which competence is being built. Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) has been advocated as a paradigm shift from memorisation to demonstration and application of skills (Msamba *et al.*, 2023a; Serge *et al.*, 2021). CBT differs from traditional training by focusing on how a person can practically apply knowledge and skills, particularly in language learning.

To alleviate worries about the ability of graduates to acquire practical communication and problem-solving skills during formal education, competency-based curricula have been adopted globally in countries such as Europe, North America, and Asia (Ogembo, 2025). The changes in this reform call for the use of knowledge in real-life contexts rather than merely recalling content (Oroszi, 2020; Syomwene, 2023; Thummaphan *et al.*, 2022). However, there are still issues in the implementation of the program in developing countries, such as the lack of teachers' training, instructional support, and limited resources (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021; Catacutan *et al.*, 2023; Rhoney *et al.*, 2024). The restrictions of these constraints often constrain teachers' ability to be truly learner-centred and make it difficult for students to practice and demonstrate communication skills.

The implementation of competency-based education reforms has been adopted across Africa, including Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania, to encourage a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning as well as the development of learning competencies (Akinrinola, 2021; Atuhura & Nambi, 2024; Kubai, 2023). However, implementation in rural schools continues to be challenging because of large class sizes, a lack of materials, and professional development opportunities. Consequently, students often struggle with low proficiency in English communication skills, especially speaking and writing, negatively impacting their academic performance and

professional prospects (Muchira *et al.*, 2023; Nsengimana *et al.*, 2021, 2025). The difficulties are related to what happens in classrooms and how effective classroom practices are in improving communication skills.

The implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in secondary education was an intentional strategy in Tanzania to link the expected learning outcomes to the needs of the society (Issa *et al.*, 2024; Kiswaga, 2022; Mokoro, 2020; Msamba *et al.*, 2023). English has a bi-functional role as a subject and as a medium of instruction. But even with this reform, students in rural areas are still facing a problem with communication skills, indicating a gap between “what is designed” and “what is being taught” in the classroom. The principles of learner-centeredness have not been fully realised, and teachers tend to revert to traditional methods where the emphasis is on getting through the syllabus instead of teaching the skills through active learning (Kiswaga, 2022; Majiwa *et al.*, 2025; Mathias *et al.*, 2023; Nkya *et al.*, 2021; Venance, 2022). The discrepancy between policy and practice provides an opportunity for further exploration of classroom realities.

The few empirical studies conducted previously in Tanzania have mainly concentrated on policy guidelines, teachers’ perceptions and challenges in implementing the policy changes (Kimario & Otieno, 2022; Ndimbo, 2023; Venance, 2022). There are few studies giving empirical evidence of the dominant CBT approaches implemented in classrooms, as well as the outcomes of those in terms of improvement of communication skills, especially in rural areas. The absence of evidence highlights the need for an intense study of real teaching and learning, and how effective it is. Although the introduction of the CBC, students in remote secondary schools tend to have limited English communication skills: speaking, writing, reading and listening. The poor performance and dropout rates are indicative of the inadequacy of current methods of teaching (Kiswaga, 2022; Nkya *et al.*, 2021; Venance, 2022). The problem is worsened by overcrowding of classrooms, shortages of resources, and a lack of expertise (Mathias *et al.*, 2023; Majiwa *et al.*, 2025).

CBT was supposed to foster learner-centeredness and skill development, but results have been limited. The major challenge faced by the teachers in implementing CBT is the lack of training and instructional support (Mokoro, 2020; Msamba *et al.*, 2023). However, similar problems have been reported in Sub-Saharan Africa, where inconsistencies in CBT application are a limiting factor in competency development (Akinrinola, 2021; Muchira *et al.*, 2023; Nsengimana *et al.*, 2021). The majority of studies have focused on policy and perceptions, but not on classroom practices. Therefore, the implementation and effectiveness of CBT strategies in rural schools in Tanzania and their effect on communication skills remain unknown (Kimario & Otieno, 2022; Issa *et al.*, 2024; Ndimbo, 2023). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the dominant CBT techniques used in Mbinga District and how they influence students’ English communication skills.

The study aims to find out the common practices of CBT in public secondary schools in Mbinga district and how these practices affect pupils’ communication skills in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga district. The research closes the gap between policy and practice, and gives insights into the implementation of CBT in classrooms and its effectiveness in improving English proficiency. The results have implications for several reasons. The study indicates that there are effective CBT techniques which can enhance students’ communication skills, providing practical guidance to teachers in the classroom. Policymakers learn from problems and successes of CBT implementation, which leads to policy changes to better support rural schools. The study contributes to the academic body by filling a knowledge gap, particularly regarding CBT approaches in rural settings of Tanzania. CBT is effective for students who are active learners, as it helps to improve their speaking, reading, listening, and writing abilities, a key requirement for academic achievement and future job success.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

Specifically, this study sought to: -

- i. Identify the prevalent Competency-Based Teaching practices used by teachers to develop students’ speaking skills in English in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District.
- ii. Explore the commonly applied Competency-Based Teaching practices for enhancing students’ reading skills in English.
- iii. Examine the strategies employed by teachers to improve students’ listening skills in English through Competency-Based Teaching.
- iv. Describe the Competency-Based Teaching practices that support the development of students’ writing skills in English.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the theories of Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT), which together gave an understanding of how Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) strategies improve the English communication skills of rural secondary school learners.

#### 2.1.1 Competency-Based Education Theory

CBE focuses on the mastery of a set of skills and not on the number of hours spent in class or on readings or memorising (Chappell *et al.*, 2020; Knapp & Ali, 2020). The principles it is based upon comprise the articulation of competencies, a learner-centred approach, authentic assessment and flexible pacing (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021). In English classes, the CBE approach focuses on language use rather than learning grammar and emphasises practical language skills (speaking, reading, listening, and writing) through role-play, debate, storytelling, presentation, collaborative writing, and peer feedback (Catacutan *et al.*, 2023). The theory's relevance is that there is a drive to demonstrate skills in the classroom, which can be observed, and there is a focus on analysing classroom practice and identifying CBT strategies for each language skill.

#### 2.1.2 Constructivist Learning Theory

The constructivist theory, based on Piaget and Vygotsky, is based on the principle that learners actively build knowledge. Constructivist theory (Piaget, 1973) holds that learners construct knowledge. Piaget emphasises individual meaning-making, and Vygotsky emphasises social interaction and cultural tools. This is especially true of social constructivism, a theory of language development that emphasises meaning in language. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) demonstrates that students move up into the next level of competency when they are assisted by a teacher or other student. This will enable the CBT strategies like group discussion, peer-assisted reading and collaborative writing. The theory supports learner-centred approaches, accounting for the importance of social activities and formative assessment and feedback.

CBE establishes the competencies to be acquired, and constructivism outlines how interactive, social learning practices promote these competencies. The integration influenced the aims of the study, the instruments and the analysis, as classroom practices were analysed with the intent of identifying competency-based alignment and active learning in these practices. It also puts into perspective problems, including those of class size, which reduces opportunities for social interaction.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

#### 2.2.1 Competency-Based Teaching Practices for Developing Speaking Skills

The empirical evidence shows that CBT contributes much to improving students' speaking performance as it puts an emphasis on participation and authentic communication. More specifically, CBT involves emphasising application instead of memorisation, and fosters the building of fluency by using communication-based activities, as mentioned by Açikgöz and Babadogan (2021). Role plays, group discussion, debate, and presentations, for instance, are effective methods to enhance speaking skills in the English language classroom context (Chappell *et al.*, 2020; Knapp & Ali, 2020). The activities encourage students to talk and develop their pronunciation and expression.

The other source of empirical evidence is related to the effectiveness of the collaborative environment in improving speaking performance. According to Catacutan *et al.* (2023), the students who were engaged in group work and who had interacted with their peers were more confident and had better skills. Furthermore, Yuldashova *et al.* (2025) noted that a CBT-trained teacher would tend to have a favourable setting for interaction and thus facilitate students to actively engage in speaking activity. However, the success of implementing these techniques relies mostly on the qualifications of teachers and the conditions of classes. Akinrinola (2021) emphasised the need for teachers' knowledge of the principles of CBT in his study.

As far as the African scenario is concerned, especially the African rural scenario, there are some limitations regarding the execution of CBT practices based on speaking. The research conducted by Atuhura and Nambi (2024) revealed several challenges in implementing speaking activities, such as classes being large and time being limited for instruction. Although teachers tried to utilise group discussions and role play activities, the fluency and confidence on the part of students in Tanzania were still quite low, as noted by Issa *et al.* (2024).

#### 2.2.2 Competency-based teaching practices to improve reading skills

The use of CBT in reading is associated with the active participation of learners in terms of comprehension and the application of reading skills as opposed to receiving information. Contrary to the traditional teaching and learning methods in which teachers do most of the work of presenting knowledge and skills to learners through reading, CBT adopts interactive reading methods, including guided reading, collaborative reading, discussion and

comprehension exercises to ensure that the learners can construct meanings from the texts they read. Chappell *et al.* (2020), and Knapp and Ali (2020) suggest that such techniques enable students to develop critical reading skills by interacting with texts. These interactions include understanding the main ideas in a text, making inferences and connections among the information given and the world. Furthermore, the vocabulary and context are taught while learners read in CBT to promote their English proficiency. Also, vocabulary and context are learned during reading in CBT in order to promote learners' English proficiency.

Empirical studies have also confirmed that structured reading approaches and joint reading of text enhance students' reading abilities. Especially, teachers' guided reading sessions enable students to understand information in the text. This method helps students understand better in the lesson and promotes active participation. Peer-assisted learning is another example of good strategies, such as group reading and discussion that allow students to discuss the meaning of texts and resolve misunderstandings. These claims can be substantiated by research that demonstrates that formative assessment in the course of CBT enables teachers to assess students' performance and provide timely feedback. Furthermore, when using interactive techniques such as asking questions, summarising, and making predictions about texts, learners' understanding of the text is enhanced. All of these strategies are indicative of CBT, since they all promote an active involvement and demonstration of skills the students have learned.

While CBT is highly promising as a way to enhance students' reading skills, some contextual constraints impede its effective implementation. A lack of learning resources, such as books, has been found to seriously restrict the opportunities to read independently to students in Tanzania (Nkya *et al.*, 2021; Kiswaga, 2022). Moreover, students' inability to work on tasks in small groups due to high numbers in classes hinders their development in interactive reading. Studies conducted by Mokoro (2020) also revealed a challenge that is related to the smaller number of teachers who are trained to design and use competency-based reading. So, teachers are using more traditional, teacher-centred approaches to reading in which there is little opportunity for students to interact with the texts being read. That is, although there are many potential advantages to CBT, how it is applied is crucially important to its success.

### 2.2.3 Strategies for Improving Listening Skills through Competency-Based Teaching

Listening skills in the use of CBT techniques are: Skills to listen to and process oral discourse, analyse and respond to oral discourse in real situations. Listening is not a passive process – it is an interactive process requiring comprehension, identification of salient facts and an appropriate response. Chappell *et al.* (2020) suggest that suitable CBT approaches for listening development include listening tasks in which one demonstrates listening skills, audio activities, role play, and storytelling. Moreover, these CBT techniques are designed to engage the learner's mind and language to enhance the listening and responding ability of the learner. Moreover, CBT incorporates listening skills with other language skills, such as speaking and writing skills.

There are several studies which have supported this claim that listening practices that include interaction and feedback positively affect the learning process. If the process of listening is accompanied by questioning, summarising, and talking, the student can improve his/her knowledge acquisition and retention in the classroom (Catacutan *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, Yuldashova *et al.* (2025) found that the learners who learned with the guided listening technique in the CBT context showed better results for their comprehension and appropriate response in the communication process of the English language. The use of formative assessment practices like feedback and clarification can be effective in assisting learners to identify errors in listening practice.

The advantages of competency-based approaches to listening skills are still limited in many rural areas, however. For example, the study in Tanzania found that with no audio-visual learning materials or technological devices, listening exercises are restricted (Issa *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, in most cases, students in each classroom are too numerous to be motivated to take part in a listening activity. Moreover, most teachers lack adequate knowledge of competency-based listening activities, thus using a lecturing method, which is shown in Msamba *et al.* (2023). This, in turn, takes away the opportunity to listen actively from the learner and thereby adversely affects listening abilities.

### 2.2.4 Competency-Based Teaching Practices Supporting Writing Skills

Writing instruction with CBT is instruction that develops the learner's ability to write clearly, coherently, and effectively. Conventional approaches simply teach learners grammar rules and memorisation techniques, while CBT treats writing as a process as the learners proceed through the process of drafting, revising, editing and reflecting on their writing. Açıkgöz and Babadogan (2021) suggest that guided writing, collaborative writing, and peer reviews enable learners to acquire writing skills through sustained involvement and collaboration with other learners. Furthermore, Chappell *et al.* (2020) suggest that CBT motivates students to write for purposeful uses, thereby helping them to develop their ability to effectively communicate an idea in the real world.

Research studies have validated the positive impact of interactive and feedback-oriented writing strategies on improving the writing skills of students. Catacutan *et al.* (2023) showed that the use of formative assessment and peer feedback significantly affects the students in structuring their ideas, using words and writing meaningful paragraphs.

In a similar vein, Knapp and Ali (2020) pointed out that collaborative writing tasks enable students to benefit from each other, polish their ideas, and become confident writers. Regular feedback from teachers is essential for learners to rectify their mistakes, thus improving their writing skills. From this evidence, it can be concluded that there is the potential to improve writing skills by practising, interacting and giving feedback regularly in a CBT paradigm.

However, the implementation of CBT writing instruction is faced with many difficulties, especially in rural secondary schools. Majiwa *et al.* (2025) reported that large class sizes prevent teachers from giving individualised feedback – a key element to the growth of students' writing skills. Likewise, Nkya *et al.* (2021) discovered that the shortage of instructional time because of excessive workloads makes it hard for learners to be actively involved in productive writing processes. Thus, the teacher-directed approach is the only way for teachers to go, as it is the only way to put an end to learners' freedom of expression. Further, weak instruction of teachers in CBT principles negatively affects the quality of writing skills instruction, as there is no consistency in using good writing skills instruction strategies.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Philosophy

The study was essentially qualitative, but a pragmatic research approach which sought methodological flexibility and suitability for dealing with the questions raised. The integration of qualitative data from interviews, observations and document review with descriptive quantitative information (e.g. frequencies and percentages of practices observed) was made possible by pragmatism, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of CBT implementation (Fisher *et al.*, 2023). This enabled subjective experiences for both teachers and students to be explored, as well as providing practical, context-specific insight, important in educational research (Chappell *et al.*, 2020).

#### 3.2 Research Approach and Design

The use of a qualitative case study approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of the context of the teachers' implementation of Competency-Based Teaching practices and the teachers themselves. The study was conducted in four public secondary schools in the rural area of Mbinga District; two schools were selected as the ones that had adopted CBT in English, while two schools were selected for comparative purposes. The case study design enabled the in-depth study of the actual classroom practices in the real context (Maciejewski, 2020). This qualitative approach was found appropriate in capturing the meaning teachers and students give to CBT practices, contextual implementation factors and processes for developing communication skills (Fisher *et al.*, 2023).

#### 3.3 Study Area

The context of the research was about Mbinga District in the lowland/mountainous geographical terrain of Tanzania, 28 geographical wards, rural public schools, which were represented by public secondary schools and little researched in the context of CBT in the context of geographical terrain in Tanzania, characterised by poor outcomes in English learning, linguistic diversification and poor infrastructure in schools. The choice of the specific geographical context was very important because the specific geographical context of Tanzania has proven to be understudied in relation to CBT, with a poor outcome for student English and linguistic diversification, as well as poor infrastructure within the schools.

#### 3.3 Target Population

The study targeted English language teachers and Form Three students of public secondary schools in Mbinga District, Tanzania, which are mainly located in rural areas. The teachers were targeted because they are directly responsible for implementing the Competency-Based Teaching practices in English language instruction. Students were included because they have experienced these teaching methods first-hand and can offer insight into the effect of CBT on their English communication skills.

#### 3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study was carried out in the four public secondary schools selected specifically to ensure the representation of schools in which CBT was implemented, in the rural area. In these four schools, 8 English teachers were selected (two from each of the schools) based on their level of exposure to CBT classroom practices. In addition, 20 Form Three students were selected (5 from each school) because they had experienced the CBT activities for at least one year, and hence they had the most information about the CBT teaching strategies used and their outcomes.

The purposive sampling technique was used in the study. It is most suitable for qualitative research because it is used to ensure that the people who have the most relevant experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon of interest are selected. In Purposive sampling, emphasis is placed on the depth of information retrieved, not the generalisation of

findings. The number of children was carefully chosen in order to gain detailed, rich information about the impact of CBT on students' English language skills.

### 3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected by using various instruments. Students' proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing was tested using pretests and posttests. Questionnaires used were semi-structured, which were used to evaluate the knowledge of CBT and the approach of the teachers and interviews that gathered the perception of the teachers, school heads and QAOs. The teacher–student relationship, the use of resources, and the interaction in debates, presentations, and reading were investigated through classroom observations (Catacutan *et al.*, 2023; Açıköz & Babadogan, 2021). Lesson plans, teaching notes and student writing were analysed and validated with CBT principles. The use of various methods has increased credibility, reliability and validity, thus giving an in-depth understanding of CBT practices in Mbinga District (Fischer *et al.*, 2023).

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from interviews, FGDs, classroom observation and document review were systematically arranged and analysed thematically. All interviews and FGDs were verbatim transcribed to ensure accurate words of teachers and students (Flick, 2014). The researcher subsequently coded the collected data to find common patterns and words concerning CBT and its effects on English communication skills. Codes were sorted into five categories based on the themes related to the study's goals: speaking, reading, listening, writing, and CBT-specific activities (group discussion, role play, reading practice, peer feedback). The thematic organisation allowed for a comparison across schools and emphasised the differences in the way they were teaching and engaging students.

After coding and identification of themes, the data were analysed narratively to produce detailed descriptions of CBT approaches that are dominant and the level of effectiveness in promoting communication skills. Comparisons between schools focused on similarities and differences in practice and response by teachers and students. To ensure the findings of the interviews and FGD were accurate and reliable, classroom observations and document analysis were conducted to validate the information (Fisher *et al.*, 2023). Key themes and evidence of practices were demonstrated by representative quotes from teachers and students. The analysis finally included an in-depth knowledge of the implementation of CBT by rural secondary school teachers and its effectiveness in increasing fluency, comprehension, listening and writing ability.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The whole research process was made sure to uphold all ethical principles. Consent was obtained from all research participants (teachers and students). The research participants were well informed about the purpose, significance and benefits of the research. The research participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity, such that no personal information was used in the research. The researcher ensured the readiness of the research participants to participate in the research, and they could withdraw from the research at any time they wished. Furthermore, the research study received the required permission from the relevant authorities (District Education Office) to conduct the research.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 Prevalent Competency-Based Teaching Practices for Developing Speaking Skills

This study aimed to obtain the most widely used Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) strategies for enhancing students' speaking ability in the English language in the rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District. The results indicated that teacher-centred, learner-centred, and blended teaching were adopted by the teachers, but in varying proportions. It was noted that 55% of the teachers adopted a blended method, which involved both teaching and engagement in debates, oral presentations, storytelling and role-plays. This enabled pupils to communicate with each other and to practise their English while the teachers remained in control of the learning process. On the contrary, 30% of the teachers used traditional teacher-centred approaches, and only 15% used learner-centred approaches, stressing the autonomy and participatory learning of the students.

It was also noted that oral activities were given great importance and the students were involved in discussions, dialogues and presentations to enhance their speaking ability. The teachers commented that the group discussion and role play were very effective, but limited by the time pressure of completing the syllabus and the many students and materials. During the interview, a teacher stated: -

*“Overcrowded classes (70 students) and insufficient textbooks compel students to resort to lecturing to practise the English language, which I encourage by practising with roles, stories and debates. There is very*

*little collaborative speaking, and learners' potential in speaking is not fully utilised because of the lack of practice.*" (Teacher, School K1S, November 16, 2025)

Further problems with teaching that aligned with CBT principles were found in the lesson plans during the review. No plans were prepared to develop and/or evaluate speaking skills in lesson plans. For instance, in School K2S, six out of eight lesson plans observed did not involve speaking skill development and assessment. This was confirmed by the teacher:

*"Overcrowding classes (seventy) and lack of books, I use role plays, storytelling, and debates to encourage English speaking, but classes are too large, and books are too few to rely on lecturing. There is very limited interactive speaking, and students' potential is not fully utilised because they have limited speaking practice opportunities."* (Teacher, School K3S, November 16, 2025)

Despite the difficulties, the teachers utilised guided oral learning, peer learning and formative assessments in enhancing the oral skills of the students. The students were asked to talk, to participate in a narration and to answer the teachers' questions orally, which enabled the teachers to correct their pronunciation mistakes, grammatical and sentence construction mistakes. Contrary to the fact that the students' CBT was not fully implemented, the study suggests that the hybrid approach was beneficial in improving students' speaking in English, particularly if the activities are interactive and participative.

Overall, observed practices of hybrid CBT were somewhat related to both CBE and constructivist theories. Interactive activities (role plays, group discussion, and peer feedback) were used in this course and were indicative of the theory of constructivist principles of social learning, and the focus on skill demonstration, through formative assessment, was congruent with the theory of CBE. As for the gaps between theory and practice, teacher-centred approaches were still evident and fully learner-centred activities were not always put into practice in the classroom, mainly because of contextual constraints.

**Table 1**

*Prevalent CBT Practices for Developing Speaking Skills*

CBT Practices for Speaking	Frequency of Use	Percentage (%)	Notes / Observations
Teacher-centered lectures	High	37.5	Dominant in large classes due to time constraints
Learner-centered activities (role-plays, debates, presentations)	Low	12.5	Fully student-led speaking sessions
Hybrid approach (lecture + participatory activities)	Moderate	50.0	Most commonly observed approach, combining teacher guidance with interactive tasks
Peer-to-peer speaking exercises	Moderate	25.0	Encouraged in small group work
Immediate feedback during speaking	Moderate	45.0	Used to improve fluency and confidence

#### 4.1.2 Commonly Applied Competency-Based Teaching Practices for Enhancing Reading Skills

The study examined the prevalent Competency-Based Teaching practices adopted by teachers to enhance students' reading skills in English in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District. Based on the study, it was concluded that the teachers adopted guided reading, comprehension and collaborative reading strategies for enhancing students' reading ability in English. For example, 60% of the teachers used guided reading strategies, in which students take turns reading the story and discussing it to ensure comprehension. Likewise, 25% of the teachers applied a teacher-centred reading strategy and only read the story in front of the students. Contrary to that, 15% of the teachers employed learner-centred reading strategies where students read a story with one another, review each other's work and tell a story with one another.

It was also noted that the techniques the teachers used were guided reading, which requires active involvement of the students in reading texts and the use of comprehension, pronunciation and expression of ideas in English. But some problems were encountered by the teachers even after their efforts. For instance, the size of the classes, availability of textbooks, time constraints and other factors influenced the efficiency of the techniques used. This was identified through the reflection of the teacher:

*"Engaging Reading lessons by using group reading and word discussions. However, with more than seventy students and limited books, I find it difficult to provide individual attention to the students and at the same time cover the syllabus. They would benefit greatly from additional resources and time to make good progress"* (Teacher, School K2S, November 15, 2025).

The analysis of the lesson plans showed that although the reading objectives are stated, very few lesson plans gave clear instructions to the teachers for them to evaluate the students' competence in reading. For instance, among the 10 lessons in School K3S, only 5 were accompanied by criteria for evaluating fluency, comprehension and engagement in reading activities. One of the teachers said:

*“I plan lessons to help with understanding, and sometimes have to forego interactive reading to cover the syllabus and exam preparation. Students face challenges in building their reading abilities due to limited time and resources, as they do not have enough practice to develop their skills”* (Teacher, School K3S, November 17, 2025).

In addition, observations of the classroom revealed that teachers used different techniques of interactivity, such as peer-assisted reading, discussing the plot of the stories, and vocabulary-building techniques, to improve comprehension. Immediate correction of pronunciation and comprehension was also made by using formative assessment after the reading process. This was not a typical assessment used in a summative setting, but there was a focus on the students' daily practice and participation to progressively develop their reading skills.

Despite the challenges, the study revealed that even though it was not fully implemented, CBT reading practices had a positive effect on students' abilities to interact with the texts, understand the meaning of the texts, and build their confidence in reading aloud. For instance, teachers observed improvements in students' fluency and comprehension in responding to questions about the texts among those students actively participating in the group and peer-assisted reading.

The findings indicate that although full learner-centred CBT for reading was not widely found because of contextual issues, hybrid learning (teacher-led and interactive reading) was effective for improving English reading skills for rural secondary school students. Teachers' reflections emphasised the necessity of more reading instructional materials, a smaller class size and having a structured lesson plan to gain the maximum advantage from the use of CBT in reading instruction.

**Table 2**

*Commonly Applied CBT Practices for Enhancing Reading Skills*

CBT Practices for Reading	Frequency of Use	Percentage (%)	Notes / Observations
Guided reading sessions	Moderate	40.0	Teacher reads first, students follow and discuss
Independent reading tasks	Low	20.0	Often constrained by large class size and limited books
Group comprehension exercises	Moderate	30.0	Students read collectively and answer questions
Vocabulary building exercises	Moderate	35.0	Integrated into reading activities
Peer discussion of texts	Low	25.0	Rarely used due to time limitations

#### 4.1.3 Strategies Employed to Improve Listening Skills through Competency-Based Teaching

The general objective of the study was to investigate the role of Competency-Based Teaching strategies in enhancing the listening skills of learners in English in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District. The results indicated that teachers chiefly adopted the techniques of interactive listening, audio materials to enhance the students' comprehension and attentive listening skills, as well as teacher discussion strategies to help students develop note-taking skills. 55% of the teachers observed engaged in a combination of listening and group discussion with questioning, making students process and respond to what they heard. Approximately 30% of the teachers employed teacher-centred oral presentations, while 15% used activities of learner-centred listening such as peer dictations, audio-response and role-play scenarios.

The listening work consisted of dialogue with audio recorders, oral summarisation of what they had listened to, and questions with answers, along with listening for gist after storytelling and dialogues from observations in the classroom. Feedback to correct pronunciation and to understand and interpret messages was also stressed by teachers. When interviewed by one of the teachers, she remarked:

*“With more than 60 students, an audio device, and limited time, it is challenging to engage the learners with listening practice with dialogues and summaries. Repetition and pair discussion are very useful, but many students still find it hard to understand and respond.”* (Teacher, School K1S, November 17, 2025)

The study of lesson plans revealed that in some instances, listening objectives were not clearly stated; in addition, there were inadequate indicators to measure listening ability. Out of 6 lesson plans in School K2S, only 4 lesson plans presented a framework to evaluate the listening skills. Another teacher said:

*“I plan listening lessons with follow-up questions and discussion, but because of syllabus pressure and time constraints, I cannot do everything that I would like. For effective practice, repetition and focus are vital, but when I am compromising, I feel that students are not reaching their potential.”* (Teacher, School K2S November 17, 2025)

Challenges have been overcome, and guided listening activities have assisted students in improving their comprehension during classroom observation. Skills reinforced with peer-assisted strategies, including listening and summarising, particularly in small groups. Immediate feedback and clarification corrected misconceptions and reinforced pronunciation and meaning, as reported by teachers.

The findings revealed that while the teacher-led parts of CBT were constrained by large classes and limited resources, the interactive student aspects of CBT, guided by the teacher, improved listening skills. The importance of structured guidance and active learner participation in the development of English listening competence was also highlighted, due to the teachers' emphasis on the effectiveness of CBT in that area, if they could implement it with a smaller class size and access to audio materials.

**Table 3***Strategies for Improving Listening Skills through CBT*

CBT Practices for Listening	Frequency of Use	Percentage (%)	Notes / Observations
Teacher oral explanations	High	40.0	Traditional method dominates in large classes
Audio-visual aids (recordings, videos)	Low	15.0	Limited due to lack of resources
Interactive listening exercises (Q&A, story retelling)	Moderate	35.0	Encourages active listening, comprehension, and response
Peer-to-peer listening tasks	Low	20.0	Rarely observed, mostly in small groups
Immediate feedback during listening	Moderate	30.0	Helps identify comprehension gaps

**4.1.4 Competency-Based Teaching Practices Supporting Writing Skills**

The study aimed to determine the extent to which the teachers in Mbinga District, public secondary schools in a rural area, used Competency-Based Teaching to enhance students' writing ability in English. It was concluded from the study that teachers made use of some methods, such as guided writing, group work, and composition in significant proportions. This study noted that 45% of teachers used group work and direct teaching methods in doing this, enabling students to write, review, and revise their work. On the other hand, 35% of the teachers mainly employed teacher-directed strategies, which allowed students to simply look at the work and imitate, without a lot of independence. A different 20% of teachers fully endorsed the learner-centred approaches to writing, where students wrote and were creative.

The teachers employed various techniques such as story building, reading a summary, and writing in a journal. This aimed to enhance students' grammatical, lexical and cohesion skills. Immediate feedback was also employed, with students being reminded of their strengths and weaknesses with regard to sentence construction, spelling and paragraph construction. One of the teachers commented on the difficulties in teaching:

*"I create story writing and summarising activities, but it is not possible to give detailed instructions when working with more than sixty children in one class and one class period. Group monitoring and peer review are helpful, but many children will still not be successful in organising their ideas well."* (Teacher, School K1S, November 17, 2025)

Analysis of the lesson plans indicated that students' writing purposes were unclear. Further, the assessment of the students' work was also unclear. For example, out of seven lesson plans taken from School K2S, five of these lesson plans did not clearly explain how the students' writing skills were assessed. A teacher thinks that: The teacher said,

*"My purpose is to allow students to enhance their sentence and paragraph construction skills, but creative activities are limited due to exam and course requirements, and the students do not get opportunities to develop their writing ability properly."* (Teacher, School KIS, November 16, 2025)

Despite all of these restrictions, it was noted that the students' writing had greatly improved as a result of the incorporation of formative assessment and collaboration. This was achieved by means of group writing, and the students were allowed to practice repeatedly.

However, difficulties arose in terms of the size of the class, which had an effect on the writing activity frequency and depth. However, teachers did not think that they found it difficult to provide individual attention to students. Despite this, with the addition of teacher-led, interactive and collaborative teaching methods, students were able to acquire the required writing skills, especially in terms of structuring ideas and making themselves understood in English.

Consequently, the study findings suggest that the students' writing skills could be enhanced by the use of CBT, as full learning-centred methods were not always practicable. The strategies, especially guided writing, group work and feedback, facilitated students to be clearer, more coherent and confident in written English. The teachers, however, believed that reducing the number of students, improving the resources, and matching the plans with students' competency would enhance the impact of CBT.

**Table 4***CBT Practices Supporting Writing Skills*

CBT Practices for Writing	Frequency of Use	Percentage (%)	Notes / Observations
Guided writing exercises (story, summary)	Moderate	45.0	Most commonly used for structured writing practice
Teacher-directed worksheets	High	35.0	Dominates when class size is large
Peer review and collaborative writing	Low	20.0	Encourages editing, feedback, and idea exchange
Journal writing / independent tasks	Low	20.0	Focuses on creativity and autonomy, limited by time
Formative feedback on writing	Moderate	50.0	Helps students improve clarity, grammar, and coherence

**4.2 Discussion**

The findings of this study showed that the practice of Competency-Based Teaching in Mbinga District rural public secondary schools was a mix of teacher-centred, learner-centred, and a blend of both approaches. The use of a combination of approaches suggests that although teachers are aware of the importance of student interaction and learner-centredness in the learning process, the problem of infrastructure and other barriers to effective teaching and learning may hinder their efforts to apply learner-centred approaches to a greater extent. This finding aligns with a previous study conducted in Tanzania and other African countries on problems of effective implementation of CBT in Africa and other parts of the world, which reported infrastructural problems as one of the problems that hinder the effective implementation of CBT in Africa and other parts of the world (Akinrinola, 2021; Muchira *et al.*, 2023; Nkya *et al.*, 2021).

The study also shows the importance of instructional planning and preparation in the mediation of the effectiveness of CBT. Most of the teachers tried to make their lessons based on the competency outcome, but their preparation was not complete; they did not have any learning objectives, and the activities given in their lessons did not focus on the development of English communication skills. This is in line with the work of Msamba *et al.* (2023) who found that the teacher's readiness, e.g. ability to develop and deliver competency-based lesson plans, is very influential in the realisation of CBT. Partial implementation of instructional strategies may be a sign that it is necessary to provide teachers with professional development and with ongoing in-service training for the successful implementation of CBT theory, particularly in rural schools that may have fewer resources.

The study indicates that CBT fosters the use of interactive methods (in relation to English communication skills development) such as group discussion, role play, guided reading and oral presentation. These methods can all be used as a reflection of the theoretical underpinning of CBT, which emphasises learning and mastering skills instead of memorisation of information (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021; Chappell *et al.*, 2020). However, the approaches were not found to be effective due to the low proficiency of the students in English and the lack of exposure outside the classroom. This is in accordance with the results of Issa *et al.* (2024), who suggested that schools in rural parts of Tanzania have little Basic English skills among their learners, thus hindering the effectiveness of learner-centred approaches. This means that CBT also has the capacity to improve students' English communication skills, but the students' capacity to learn English and frequent exposure to it will make a difference in the effectiveness of the CBT.

Additionally, the study also emphasises the importance of formative assessment as a tool to promote the acquisition of language skills. But the salience of the assessment framework is placed on the product of the assessment (the exam) rather than on communicative skills acquisition. This is a common trend observed in the assessment frameworks of other African countries as well (Ogembo, 2025; Venance, 2022). Assessment frameworks may be positive or negative to the core principles of CBT, depending on the focus placed on demonstrating competence as opposed to rote learning.

However, another dimension that emerged from the study is contextual factors like limited time, time demands, limited teaching resources, and large classes that affect the delivery of CBT. This not only reduces the number of interactive activities, but the teacher is sometimes forced to take a teacher-centred approach in order to meet the requirements of the syllabus. Muchira *et al.* (2023) and Mathias *et al.* (2023) highlight similar issues in their research on the challenges encountered in the delivery of CBT in other African countries. This suggests that the challenges of CBT delivery in rural schools are not unique and, therefore, need to be coordinated to tackle constraints and facilitate the delivery of CBT.

The findings of the study also provide insight into the differing use of CBT techniques to develop the four English language skills. The challenge was to integrate speaking and writing activities more often than listening and reading activities, as time and resources were sometimes limiting factors. The findings highlight the importance of equipping teachers with the proper skills needed to incorporate CBT effectively to achieve a balanced approach to

developing the four English language skills, the core of competency-based education (Catacutan et al., 2023; Thummaphan et al., 2022).

Overall, the discussion justifies the need for the successful implementation of CBT in order to effectively achieve communicative competence in English in rural secondary schools, as it highlights the process's multi-faceted nature. The findings of the study also shed light on the wider debate on how to implement competency-based education, specifically making sure that the theory is fully realised in the practice of the implementation by using appropriate strategies for implementing the competency-based education. Future interventions should focus on providing the needed tools to effectively help the rural learners develop their communicative competencies through the use of CBT.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study finds the implementation in rural public secondary schools in Mbinga District as partial Competency Based Teaching (CBT). The study saw that a mix of teacher-centred, learner-centred, and a mixture of both (hybrid) methods was used, with the latter being referred to as hybrid. In the study area, the teachers used a combination of the two. Even though the CBT method of group discussion, role play, guided reading, and oral presentations was observed to be effective in improving the students' communication skills in English, the full potential of the CBT method is yet to be realised. Further, the study reveals that the teacher's preparedness, lesson planning and assessment strategies are significantly affecting the effectiveness of CBT in the development of communicative competence among the students. The formative assessment strategies were used, although they seemed to be dominated by summative assessments. The students were not, however, prevented from actively involving themselves in the development and demonstration of their skills. The study shows that CBT can be used to enhance the speaking, reading, listening and writing skills of the students. Overall, the study suggests that CBT can enhance the English communication skills of students in the rural schools of Tanzania, but with the need to consider the interplay between the teacher, the resources and the context to make CBT work.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Teachers must receive continuous professional development training in applying the Competency-Based Teaching method in rural public secondary schools to ensure that the method is applied effectively. Such training should focus on building strategies for the classroom that will support learner-centred strategies. Learners should be actively involved in speaking, reading, listening and writing tasks. Also, the lesson planning should highlight that it is aligned with the competencies. This will mean that students will learn through a skill-based approach. Further, the availability of teaching resources, particularly books, images and technology, is crucial. Interactive learning is not well applied in rural areas due to the lack of resources. By empowering teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources for the application of the CBT method, the schools will be able to create a platform where students will be able to practice their English communication skills.

Beyond this, there should be structural and systemic changes made to help CBT be implemented as well. This can be achieved by things such as smaller class sizes and the creation of collaborative learning spaces that may offer greater opportunities for active student learning and peer-to-peer learning. In addition, using assessments such as regular formative assessments can be beneficial in monitoring student progress and closing any skill gaps. Finally, when developing and utilising the CBT approach for rural schools, it is important to consider the issues that might arise, such as limited materials and a high student population. But always the emphasis shall be on improving the communication skills of the students. This will help students develop their English language skills and make their learning more engaging and relevant.

### Declaration of Interest

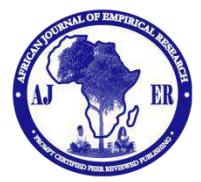
The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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