

## ***The Rwandan teachers' and learners' perceived speaking proficiency in both Kinyarwanda and English after 2008-2011 consecutive language-in-education policy shifts***

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### **Abstract**

*While several studies on speaking proficiency are found in various languages worldwide, there is a paucity of studies that investigated the learners' and teachers' speaking proficiency after language policy shifts. This article investigates the perceived speaking proficiency in English and Kinyarwanda among Rwandan lower primary school learners and their teachers after experiencing two consecutive language policy shifts, that is the shift from French-dominant medium to English-only in 2008 and the shift from English to Kinyarwanda medium in 2011. An attitudinal survey was administered among 324 learners and teachers, selected in six schools in both rural and urban settings of Rwanda. Interpreted within the lens of language preference model and integrative theories of communication competence, the main finding is that both urban and rural teachers and learners perceived themselves to have high proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda; while their perceived proficiency in speaking English is unbalanced. The paper argues that Rwandan learners' and teachers' characteristics, circumstances, exposure and endoglossic ideology have all led to uneven levels of proficiency in both English and Kinyarwanda, after the two consecutive policy shifts.*

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**Key words:** Language-in-education policy shifts; teachers' and learners' perceived speaking proficiency; endoglossic country; Rwanda.

### **Introduction**

A great amount of studies have investigated the speaking proficiency in English and other languages worldwide. They mainly focused on features of learners' oral language proficiency in first and second language, with particular attention on performance data which were obtained from various tests of speaking. These oral tests assessed individual features of speaking proficiency like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation/accent, fluency, expression, intelligibility, appropriateness and comprehensibility (e.g. Adams, 1980; Brindley, 1986; Higgs and Clifford, 1982; Magnan, 1988; McNamara, 1990; De Jong & van Ginkel, 1992; Douglas, 1994; Shohamy, 1994; Brown, Iwashita, McNamara & O'Hagan, 2002; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Brown, Iwashita & McNamara, 2005; Gottardo, 2002, in Geva, 2006; Iwashita et al., 2008). Notwithstanding these studies which tested these features of speaking proficiency, few studies investigated the learners' and teachers' speaking proficiency after language policy shifts. There are also few studies which explored the holistic perception of speaking proficiency among learners and teachers, based on the integrative theories of communication competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Furthermore, this component of attitudinal study towards languages is worth conducting as it might bring new insights from African endoglossic and unicultural countries, like Rwanda, since most attitudinal studies have been conducted mainly in multilingual and multicultural settings or in diglossic and exoglossic areas. As Adegbija (1994) has observed, there is a paucity of attitudinal studies in diglossic, exoglossic or endoglossic settings. There is also dearth of studies on attitude to balanced, organic or holistic bilingualism (Baker, 1992).

It is against this background that this article explores the learners' and teachers' perceived speaking proficiency in both English and Kinyarwanda after the 2008-2011 consecutive language policy shifts in the Rwandan

lower primary schools, as an implication of the implementation of language policy in education. The article is extracted from an extended empirical study, which investigated the lower primary school teachers' and learners' attitudes and experiences with the 2008-2011 consecutive language-in-education policy shifts in Rwanda. The exploration of attitudes in the extended study focused on components like learners and teachers' satisfaction with the policy shifts, their language preference, their actual language use and language proficiency after the two consecutive policy shifts. This article focuses exclusively on their perceived proficiency in speaking English and Kinyarwanda, after experiencing the shift to English medium in 2009-2010 and to Kinyarwanda medium in 2011-2012. It explores their perceived level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda and English, as yielded by quantitative data; and the reasons justifying their perceptions, as yielded by qualitative data.

### **Brief literature review and Theoretical framework**

This study was guided by two theoretical frameworks, namely the language preference model (Spolsky, 1989) and the integrative theories of communication competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990). The choice of two theoretical frameworks was dictated by the fact that this article focuses on speaking proficiency from a holistic perspective; and Canale and Swain's (1980) "integrative theories of communication competence" and Bachman's (1990) "communicative language ability-CLA" were found appropriate to guide the inquiry. These theories combine and integrate 'theories of basic communication skills' and 'sociolinguistic perspectives on communicative competence' (Canale & Swain, 1980), which inform communication skills that participants needed to have for their proficiency in speaking English and Kinyarwanda. The literature below describes the speaking proficiency assessed from an integrative communication competence perspective.

### **Speaking proficiency and its assessment theories**

The language theories in the 1960s tended to focus on four language skills or language abilities, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing; as well as on language components such as grammar, vocabulary, phonology and graphology (Baker, 2006, p.14). Recent theories added aspects that were ignored in the earlier theories, such as integrated skills, probing the competence of other people in a conversation, and socio-cultural and socio-linguistic context of language (Baker, 2006, p.14); but this article focuses on learners' and teachers' speaking proficiency only.

The term 'speaking proficiency' is still said not to be clear of what it entails (Iwashita, Brown, McNamara & O'Hagan, 2008); and it may be used quite differently from researcher to researcher (Galloway, 1987; McNamara, 1996). However, Iwashita et al. (2008) indicate that the term 'proficient' is often used interchangeably with terms like 'fluent', 'competent', 'knowledgeable', 'bilingual', 'good', etc, especially in Applied Linguistics literature. Speaking proficiency as part of language competence is still complex because it involves a number of aspects. Bachman (1990) describes it as the 'unseen' and posed the question "How do you accurately or adequately assess the invisible?" Also, the term 'language proficiency' overlaps with 'communicative competence' and 'language ability'.

Piggin (2012, p. 80) has put it that these three terms “describing L2<sup>9</sup> knowledge and use and performance...have become synonymous to some extent”. That is why speaking proficiency as a component and synonym of language competence is still said to be complex to define; but Canale (1983, p. 5) had defined communicative competence as “the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication”. The level of speaking proficiency in L1 is often higher than in L2 or in additional language. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines (1985 and 1999) present spoken proficiency in second language in terms of communicative growth, in which proficiency is constituted by four factors, namely function, content, context and accuracy; and these are elements of the types of language competence described below.

### **Assessing speaking proficiency from an integrative communication competence perspective**

Since competence in a language is viewed as an integral part of language performance, Baker (2006) observes that measuring language competence cannot simply use pencil and paper tests or classroom tests; it rather needs to use creative, unpredictable and contextualized communicative performance testing. It is likely the reason why, as Iwashita et al. (2008) have observed, a great amount of studies that investigated the character of language proficiency were based on performance data which were obtained from language tests, including oral assessments (e.g. Adams, 1980; Brindley, 1986; Higgs & Clifford, 1982; Magnan, 1988; McNamara, 1990; De Jong & vanGinkel, 1992; Douglas, 1994; Shohamy, 1994; Brown et al., 2002; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Gottardo, 2002, in Geva, 2006; Iwashita et al., 2008). These studies tested various individual features of performance to determine and judge their speaking proficiency. The salient features which were tested for speaking proficiency in some of the studies above included vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, expression, intelligibility, appropriateness and comprehensibility.

The perceived proficiency in this article implies a self-evaluative judgment which was made by teachers and learners in regard to their speaking proficiency in both English and Kinyarwanda after the two shifts. Their judgment was not based on a specific language speaking proficiency test or any other performance scale; it was rather based on broad estimation of their speaking proficiency. That is why it was guided by Canale and Swain's (1980) 'integrative theories of communication competence' and Bachman's (1990) 'model of language competence', as a theoretical framework.

Canale and Swain (1980) indicate that those theories are integrative in the sense that they combine what they described as 'theories of basic communication skills' and 'sociolinguistic perspectives on communicative competence'. The 'theories of basic communication skills' focus on “the minimum (oral) communication skills needed to cope in a second language situation” that the learner is likely to face (Canale & Swain, 1980, p.19). In this regard, they reiterated Savignon (1972) and Schulz's (1977) concerns about the skills that the learners need to have to get their meaning across or say what they really want to say. They also reiterated Van Ek's (1976) 'threshold level' which

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<sup>9</sup> Second Language

enables learners to linguistically survive in their spoken communication with foreigners/visitors in everyday situations or to establish and maintain social contacts (Canale & Swain, 1980). The 'sociolinguistic perspectives on communicative competence' focus on what Halliday (1973) and Hymes (1967, in Canale & Swain, 1980, p.19) described as "the interrelation between language situation and social context". This is what Hymes (1972, in Canale & Swain, 1980) referred to as communicative competence which entails an interaction of grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and probabilistic systems of competence. This entails Condition 1 of Spolsky's general theory, which suggests that the learner's knowledge of a second language form a systematic whole (Spolsky, 1989). Such a condition embeds the concept of interlanguage, which entails Spolsky's (1989) process and competence models.

As for Bachman's (1990) model of language competence, refined by Bachman and Palmer (1996) and critiqued by McNamara (2003) and Baker (2006), it considers both language competence and language performance. Language competence involves two kinds of competence, namely organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence also involves two aspects of competence, namely grammatical competence (like knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology or graphology) and textual competence, which involves knowledge of conventions for joining spoken or written utterances (Bachman, 1990; Baker, 2006). Pragmatic competence also includes two aspects of competence, namely illocutionary competence (like language functions and speech strategies) and sociolinguistic competence (such as sensitivity to the context where the language is used, appropriateness to the person or the situation, sensitivity to differences in dialects, registers and cultural variations (Bachman, 1990; Baker, 2006). Canale (1983) had earlier divided sociolinguistic competence into two separate components, namely sociolinguistic and discourse competence; then Bachman and Palmer (1996) added strategic competence, with personal characteristics of the individual language user, where individuals constantly plan, execute and assess their communication strategies. All these integrated components of language competence constitute the baseline for learners' and teachers' assessment of their proficiency in speaking a language. Although the participants in this study were not aware of these theories, the researcher deduced that their self-evaluative judgment was based on those 'integrative theories of communication competence' in estimating their perceived speaking proficiency English and Kinyarwanda after experiencing the two shifts.

### **Assessing speaking proficiency through BICS and CALP**

In addition to the learners' and teachers' self-assessment of their perceived speaking proficiency from a holistic and integrative perspective of communication competence, their own estimation of their speaking proficiency in Kinyarwanda and English also took into consideration BICS and CALP. These two concepts which were introduced by Cummins (1979, 1980) stand for Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1979, 1980) introduced these concepts to distinguish between language skills needed for social interactions and daily communication (BICS) and academic language or language used at

school for academic purposes (CALP). BICS entails less highly cognitively demanding tasks which mainly involve speaking for social and day-to-day interactions between people, while CALP is more highly cognitively demanding tasks like writing, reading, listening and speaking for any academic purpose, including subject area content material (Cummins, 1979, 1980, 2000; Haynes, 2007). In this regard, the teachers and learners estimated their perceived proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda and English by assessing simultaneously their ability in what Cummins (2000) described as conversational communication and academic language proficiency; which tends to be in line with what Ong (1982, in Spolsky, 1989, p. 43) described as “oral versus literate”, or what Gibbons (1991, in Cummins, 2000, p. 69) termed “playground language and classroom language”. Their estimation weighed up both BICS and CALP levels of their speaking proficiency component.

### **Assessing speaking proficiency through a language preference model**

In addition to integrative theories of communicative competence, Spolsky's (1989) language preference model was also found appropriate for guiding this inquiry because conditions 1, 2 and 7 of this model view the learners' language proficiency as their knowledge of L2 that forms a systematic whole, and they focus on learners' attainment of approximate native speakers' language as well as on their academic skills development.

Generally, this model describes 74 conditions that enable the achievement of various possible outcomes in second language learning (Spolsky, 1989). To be able to develop this theory, Spolsky (1989) based his observations on the “complexity of the circumstances under which second languages are learned, or failed to be learned” (Spolsky, 1989, p. 2), bearing in mind both the success and failures of several previous methods that had been used in language teaching in the world.

The innovation of Spolsky's (1989) model of second language learning is that it was presented in the form of a mathematic formula, which is applied to second language learning, and the formula is  $Kf = Kp + A + M + O$ . As Spolsky (1989) describes this formula, **K** stands for the knowledge and skills in the second language of the learner, **f** stands for future time and **Kf** stands for the learner's L2 knowledge and skills at some future time. **Kp** stands for the learner's knowledge and skills at the moment, including his/her knowledge of first language, third language and any other languages. **A** stands for components of learner's ability including psychological, biological, intellectual and cognitive skills. **M** stands for learner's affective factors such as personality, attitudes, motivation, and anxiety while **O** stands for opportunity for learning the language, including the time for learning, formal or informal situations where the learner is exposed to the language.

The additive symbol in Spolsky's formula indicates the interaction and symbiosis of all components in facilitating the learning. If any of the components is absent, there can be no learning and the greater the components are, the greater the amount of learning (Spolsky, 1989). Although this general theory focuses on the second language learning, Spolsky (1989) believes that its principles apply to the development of

skills and knowledge in the mother tongue and that is why it is useful in assessing participants' proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda and English after language policy shifts.

### **The 2008-2011 consecutive language policy shifts in Rwandan schools**

The two languages under investigation in this article, namely Kinyarwanda and English, are both official languages, but Kinyarwanda is also a national language. This is stipulated in Article 5 of the New Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, which was adopted on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2003: "the national language is Kinyarwanda; the official languages are Kinyarwanda, French and English" (Republic of Rwanda, 2003). While Kinyarwanda, English and French have different social statuses in Rwanda, they all have an equal status as official languages. This equal status started after 1994, because Kinyarwanda and French were used as media of instruction (Mol) before 1994, then English was also legalized by the 1996 constitution as a Mol and all the three languages were used as Mol and taught as schools subjects at different levels of education (Rwanda's Ministry of Education - MINEDUC, 1995, 2004, 2008). Such an equal status between the three languages after 1994 was also emphasized by the fact that they continued to be used on television, radio, newspapers and other types of media (Kabanza, 2003), and it continued up to 2008, when French was dropped as a medium of instruction at all levels of education. Hence, as Niyibizi (2010) and Sibomana (2015) argued, the adoption of English as a sole medium of instruction from grade one on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2008 and the dropping of French as a medium of instruction would definitely have affected the status of French and Kinyarwanda, even if the two languages were still taught as subjects and used in various areas, including mass media.

On 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011, the Rwandan Government opted to shift back to Kinyarwanda as a medium of instruction in lower grades. This seems to have uplifted the status of Kinyarwanda again, and it tends to contradict Rassool's (2007) assertion that Kinyarwanda has remained less developed because it was not the language of instruction beyond primary school; as well as Samuelson and Freedman's (2010, p.193) argument that "Kinyarwanda has received some of the benign neglect that has been the fate of many other African languages". Hence, after experiencing these two consecutive policy shifts, this article explores the learners' and teachers' perceived proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda and English.

### **Methods**

This article attempted to answer the following research question:

"What is the learners' and teachers' perceived level of speaking proficiency in both Kinyarwanda and English after the two consecutive language policy shifts?" A number of data collection instruments and analysis methods were used to collect and make sense of the data from 324 participants, as discussed below.

### **Participants**

The study was conducted among 324 Rwandan lower primary school teachers and learners who experienced the 2008-2011 consecutive language-in-education policy shifts. They were selected countrywide through a multi-stage sampling technique. While the pre-2008 language policy allowed lower primary schools to choose either French,

English or Kinyarwanda or a combination of two as a medium of instruction, the participating learners experienced the medium of either of the three at nursery school level, they then shifted to English medium in grade 1 in 2010, and shifted again to Kinyarwanda medium in grade 2-3 in 2011-2012. The 324 participants included 300 learners, 18 teachers and six heads of schools from six primary schools. The 300 learners were primary grade three pupils and were aged between 8 and 11; while the teachers are those who taught them in primary grade one, grade two and grade three. As for the principals or heads of schools, they are those who monitored both the learners and the teachers during those two consecutive policy shifts. Their teachers had used either French or English as media of instruction in teacher training colleges, and had learned Kinyarwanda as a school subject. The selected teachers had a long experience in teaching and had been teaching mainly in French before the shift to English medium.

These participants were selected from six primary schools countrywide, including two public, two subsidized and two private primary schools. One class of 50 learners was selected from each of the six schools. Schools were selected in both urban and rural settings and that is why three schools (with 150 learners, 9 teachers and 3 heads of schools) were selected in rural areas and other three (with same number) were selected in urban areas.

### **Instruments**

The instruments that were used for data collection included an attitudinal survey which was administered to 300 learners and 18 teachers; it was supplemented with 6 in-depth individual interviews with heads of schools, focus group discussions with 6 groups of learners and 6 groups of teachers, as well as 6 classroom observation sessions and 6 observation sessions on the school playground.

### **Analysis**

The research design was mixed methods, where both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed concurrently and integratively (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, with bivariate analysis for comparison between urban and rural teachers and learners. Quantitative analysis also highlighted the frequency distribution of their perceived proficiency in speaking English and Kinyarwanda after experiencing the two consecutive language policy shifts. Qualitative findings which were yielded by interviews and observations provided reasons for their perceptions.

As the study involved young learners whose age varied between 8 and 11 during data collection, the reliability and validity of their information were ensured by piloting the instruments, asking them simple questions, triangulating their information and drawing from experiences of other studies which successfully managed to investigate language attitudes among children. For example, Bokhorst-Heng and Caleon (2009) investigated language attitudes among Primary grade 5 pupils whose age was around 10 years, in Singapore; while Jardine (2008) investigated the language attitudes among the primary school children aged 10 to 11 in the Western Cape in South Africa, to name just two. The technique of triangulation was also used to ensure validity. Two types of triangulation which were used are mainly methodological triangulation, where different measures or research

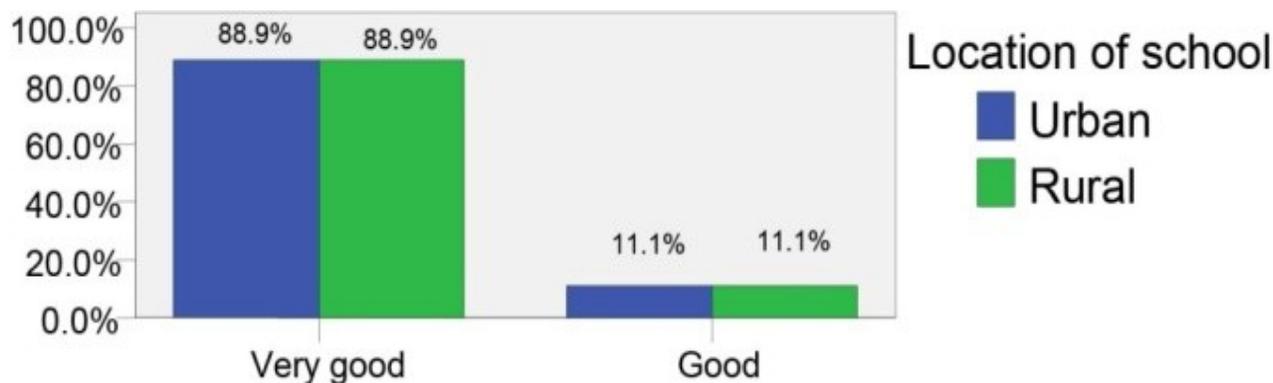
methods were used to investigate the phenomenon and theoretical triangulation, where two theoretical perspectives were used to interpret the same set of data (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Learners provided reliable information, which was triangulated with the one provided by their teachers and heads of their schools.

## Results

The results of the study are arranged starting with teachers' perceived proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda and in speaking English, followed by the learners' perceived proficiency in speaking each of the two languages.

### Teachers' perceived proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda after the shifts

Analyzing the data through bivariate analysis for urban-rural divide, it was revealed that a high number of urban and rural teachers perceived themselves to be highly proficient in speaking Kinyarwanda after the two consecutive policy shifts, as illustrated in Figure 4.1 below. They responded to the question: "Can you estimate your current level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda, after having used consecutively English and Kinyarwanda to teach your lessons from 2009 to 2012?"



**Figure 4.1: Comparison between urban and rural school teachers in terms of their perceived level of speaking Kinyarwanda after consecutive language policy shifts**

It is evident that both urban and rural school teachers perceived themselves as having high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda, with 88.9% in both groups indicating that they have a 'very good' command and 11.1% in both groups confirming that they have a 'good' command of Kinyarwanda. Figure 4.1 above illustrates that the two groups are equally equipped regarding proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda. While the 2002 national population census revealed that the speakers of Kinyarwanda in the rural area slightly outnumbered the speakers of Kinyarwanda in urban area, with 99.6% against 98.4% respectively (Rwanda's Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning - MINECOFIN, 2005), even if the census did not compare the level of proficiency among the speakers, the teachers who participated in this study revealed that both urban and rural school teachers perceived themselves to be on the same footing regarding proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda. This is a new insight in the body of knowledge because the urban-rural divide has always been a norm in the literature. There appears to be a small gap between urban and rural teachers' perceived levels of proficiency, as revealed in findings from quantitative data. The findings from qualitative data revealed that there is a high level of speaking proficiency among the majority teachers

and a limited level of speaking proficiency among a few teachers. It also revealed that the teachers' limited proficiency was due to lack of training in Kinyarwanda.

### ***High level of speaking proficiency among the majority teachers***

The interviews with teachers and heads of schools also confirmed that most teachers perceived themselves as having sufficient proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda. This was manifested when those who have limited proficiency in Kinyarwanda after the shift to Kinyarwanda medium in 2011 were asked whether they had been provided with assistance and training in Kinyarwanda and whether they had found it easy to shift to Kinyarwanda medium after experiencing another shift to English medium. The extracts below indicate how they confidently perceive themselves to have high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda:

*I think that there is no teacher who is not proficient in Kinyarwanda, because every lower primary school teacher has a secondary school certificate A2 in teaching; and everyone who has such education level has learnt Kinyarwanda at both primary and secondary school levels. Therefore, he/she is expected to be proficient in Kinyarwanda. [Extract 1: S4T10]*

*We enjoyed teaching in Kinyarwanda because it is our mother tongue; it was not difficult to teach the children because we had been teaching them in Kinyarwanda before the change. [Extract 2: S1T2]*

*It is not difficult to teach in Kinyarwanda, we even enjoy teaching in this language because you teach in a language you understand better, and children participate actively. [Extract 3: S1T1]*

*When we shifted again to Kinyarwanda medium, I felt relieved because Kinyarwanda is the language I understand and master, up to the extent that I feel confident in delivering the lessons and I have found that it is very effective for the learners' learning. [Extract 4: S5T10]*

The above extracts from interviews show that the participating teachers felt that they have a mastery of Kinyarwanda because it is their mother tongue, which they have been teaching even before the shifts. They also praised the fact that shifting to Kinyarwanda, the language they feel highly proficient in, facilitated their teaching. It is therefore evident that the Rwandan teachers' high proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda facilitated not only their social interactions, which entail BICS, but also their teaching or academic activities (CALP), even if their proficiency in writing, listening and reading Kinyarwanda was not the focus of this analysis. The findings in the extracts above reveal that teachers are aware of the advantages attributed to mother tongue education, which are in line with views from the proponents of mother tongue instruction (for example, Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Benson, 2003; Baker, 2006; Cummins, 2000, 2003; Spolsky, 2004).

### ***Limited level of speaking proficiency among a few teachers***

In spite of almost all the teachers claiming to have high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda, interviews with teachers and observations in schools revealed that a few teachers did not actually have high proficiency in this language. This was revealed and observed among teachers with Rwandan nationality, but who grew up and got their education from foreign (especially Anglophone) countries, and then joined the teaching profession in Rwanda to

teach English, especially in private schools. Extracts below give examples of some teachers who perceived themselves as having limited proficiency in Kinyarwanda:

*What I have seen is that speaking and teaching in Kinyarwanda is difficult to me because I was trained in Anglophone system, I am an Anglophone teacher. Therefore, I can fairly speak and teach Kinyarwanda; but in upper classes like grade 4, grade 5 and grade 6, I cannot teach it because I don't know the 'imigemo' [syllables], I don't understand those things. But in English, I do my level best to speak and teach it. [Extract 5: S5T14]*

*I had many problems because as a teacher who was acquainted with using English as medium of teaching, I met a problem of language of expression in Kinyarwanda in class. [Extract 6: S5T15]*

These two extracts reveal that some teachers are not highly proficiency in Kinyarwanda, but these are very few. They do not feel to have sufficient levels of CALP in Kinyarwanda, which seems to hamper mediation in teaching content and monitoring speaking activities using Kinyarwanda in class. This reveals that despite the endoglossic setting of Rwanda, where Kinyarwanda is the mother tongue for the majority of the population as it is spoken by 99.4% (MINECOFIN, 2005), some teachers do not master it and, therefore, cannot teach it with ease.

#### ***The need for training organized for teachers with limited proficiency in Kinyarwanda***

In the interviews with teachers and heads of schools, those few teachers who were not highly proficient in Kinyarwanda complained that the Government does not provide them with training on using Kinyarwanda, as expressed in the extracts below:

*...there was not any program for those [teachers] who do not know Kinyarwanda, they are just working for themselves, they are trying their best level to do it; but the Government should do that and organize training seminars for us. [Extract 7: S5T14]*

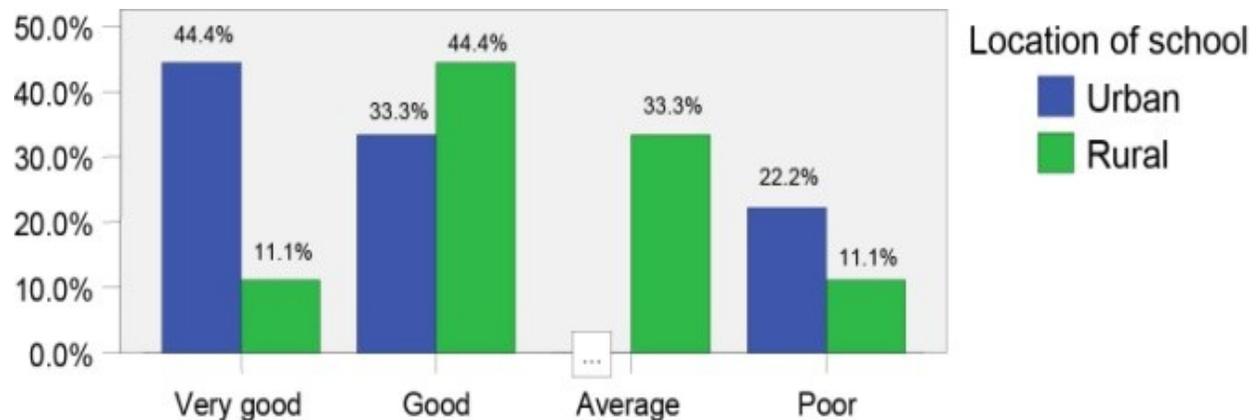
*... teachers got excited when they were informed to teach in English, and trainings were organized; but when we switched to Kinyarwanda again, nobody talked about training, which means that all teachers were conversant with that language; and it also helped the parents to follow up the progress of their children... [Extract 8: S1T2]*

The extracts above have revealed that after shifting to the Kinyarwanda medium in 2011-2012, there was no training organized for teachers who had insufficient proficiency in Kinyarwanda; as it was the case in 2008-2009 where the training in English was organized for all teachers, after the shift from French to English medium. They struggled on their own while the Government was supposed to provide refresher courses to teach them Kinyarwanda. The interpretation of lack of training in Kinyarwanda before and after the shift to the Kinyarwanda medium is that the teachers' level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda was not considered to be a serious problem. Furthermore, as indicated in extract 8 above, the fact that teachers managed to cope with the Kinyarwanda medium after the 2011 shift without claiming for training may be an indication that they generally did not encounter a lot of challenges, as has been previously mentioned. The majority of them identified with high proficiency in an African endoglossic language (Kinyarwanda), which means that they perceived their BICS and CALP to be high.

Despite the perceived high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda among the investigated Rwandan teachers, a simple comparison between the rates of proficiency in African endoglossic languages across the six African endoglossic countries (Burundi, Swaziland, Botswana, Somalia, Lesotho and Rwanda) shows some similarities. The most salient similarity is the high number of people who are proficient in those African endoglossic languages in their respective countries, even if their levels of proficiency are not always elucidated in some studies. In this regard, while Kinyarwanda is spoken by 99.4% of the population in Rwanda (MINECOFIN, 2005); its neighbouring Burundi also counts more than 99% of its population who speak Kirundi (Ndayipfukamiye, 1994). Similarly, 95% of the population of Swaziland speak Siswati as their native language (Mordaunt, 1991); while Setswana is spoken by over 80% of the population as their mother-tongue in Botswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1998; Baldauf & Kaplan, 2004). Similarly, Somali is spoken as the mother tongue by over 95% of the population of Somalia (Warsame, 2001); while Sesotho is spoken by the vast majority of the population of Lesotho (UNESCO, 1996). It is therefore evident that African endoglossic languages are spoken by almost the total population in the above-mentioned African endoglossic countries; and probably their perceived levels of proficiency in those languages are as high as it was revealed in this study among Rwandan teachers. Interpreted within Condition 2 of Spolsky's (1989) general theory, I can say that this high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda (their L1) as observed among the Rwandan school teachers served as a determining factor or a baseline for comparatively weighing up their level of proficiency in speaking English. This is due to the fact that condition 2 focuses on the native speaker target condition, where second language learner aims to approximate native speaker's level of proficiency. The next section cross-checks if the Rwandan teachers' perceived proficiency in speaking English is the same as in Kinyarwanda.

#### **Teachers' perceived level of proficiency in speaking English after the shifts**

Unlike their level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda, Figure 4.2 below indicates that teachers' estimation of their proficiency in speaking English after the two consecutive shifts is at different levels, among urban and rural teachers. In order to come to this finding, participants were asked to respond to the question: "Can you estimate your current proficiency in speaking English, after having consecutively used English and Kinyarwanda as a medium for teaching your lessons from 2009 to 2012?"



**Figure 4.2: Comparison between urban and rural school teachers in regard with their perceived level of proficiency in speaking English after the two consecutive language policy shifts**

From the observation in Figure 4.2 above, it is evident that more urban school teachers manifested higher level of English speaking proficiency at advanced level than rural school teachers, with 44.4% against 11.1% who rated themselves as ‘very good’ in urban and rural schools respectively. Rural school teachers rated higher than urban school teachers only for a ‘good’ command of spoken English (44.4% against 33.3%). Also, 33.3% and 11.1% of rural school teachers perceived themselves as having ‘average’ and ‘poor’ proficiency in speaking English respectively, but only 22.2% of urban school teachers perceived themselves as having ‘poor’ proficiency in speaking English. Hence, an imbalance is observed among the two groups, where high command is mainly owned by urban school teachers, if we limit our observation to the level of ‘very good’ and ‘good’. Such an imbalanced proficiency in speaking English between urban and rural school teachers still reflects the imbalance which was revealed by the 2002 and 2012 censuses among urban and rural dwellers. These censuses indicated that English was spoken by 6.0% of urban dwellers against 1.1% of rural dwellers in 2002 (MINECOFIN, 2005), and the number increased to 29.9% in urban areas against 11.3% of rural dwellers who could speak English in 2012 in Rwanda (MINECOFIN, 2014). Such an imbalance in English speaking proficiency is still observed among urban and rural teachers who participated in the study, even after the 2008-2011 consecutive language policy shifts. It still confirms that MINEDUC’s (2008) observation at the onset of the 2008 language-in-education policy shift that most of the teachers had insufficient proficiency in English, especially those who were teaching in Francophone schools before the shift to English, is still at stake even after the 2008-2011 consecutive policy shifts.

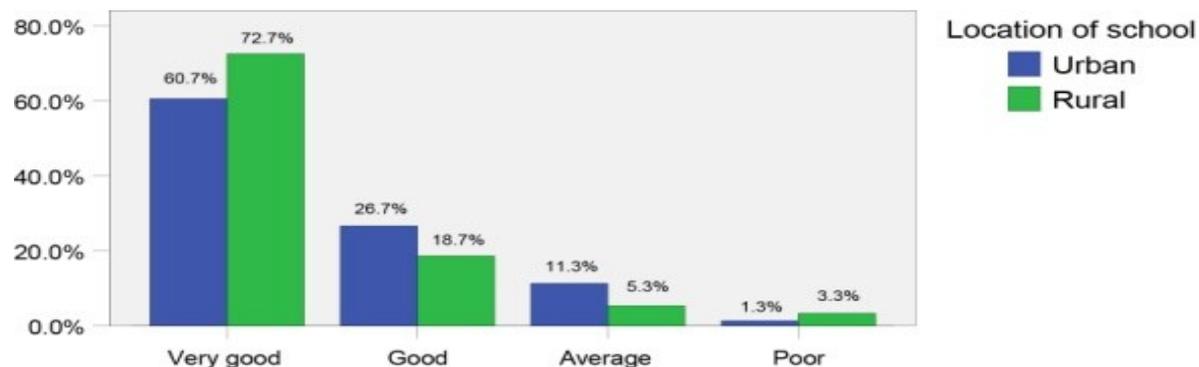
Interestingly, this finding on the limited proficiency in speaking an international language like English among teachers is not unique to Rwanda. It is rather a common feature in different parts of Africa and for different international languages, as summarized by Kamwangamalu (2000, p. 123) when he stated that *“research into language-in-education policies in Africa over the past four decades has shown comprehensively that despite all efforts to make the European languages available to the African masses, the efforts have been resounding failures: the majority remains on the fringe.”* For clear examples on such limited access and proficiency in various international languages on the African continent, Kamwangamalu (2000) cited a number of authors who elaborated on this issue.

For example, van Zyl Slabbert et al. (1994) indicated how the statistics from 1991 census in South Africa revealed that 49% of South African black youth aged between 15 and 24 could not speak, read, or write English. Similarly, Tripathi (1990) and Siachitema (1992) reported that the number of Zambians who were proficient in English in Zambia has dwindled since independence. In the Anglophone African countries as a whole, Samuels (1995) indicated that a small percentage of the population (i.e. between 5% and 20%) were the only ones who could communicate in English. Rubango (1986) described how only one person out of every twenty-five Congolese could speak French correctly; and only one out of every thirty Congolese could write correctly in French in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the then Zaire). As for the proficiency of speaking English in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kasanga (2012, p.51) indicated that *“the rise of the middle class has not been matched by a hunger for English language skills partly because mastery of French is still a badge of educational success. English in D R Congo is the preserve of a privileged minority among the highly educated, the upwardly mobile, the widely travelled and the diasporic returnees”*.

In African countries which used Portuguese as an international language, Heines (1992) indicated that the situation was almost similar. Such a situation on the African continent shows clearly that the limited proficiency in international languages is not limited to English only, but to other foreign languages as well. It is also not limited among teachers only as revealed in this study, but to other strata of the African population as well. The next section describes the levels of proficiency in Kinyarwanda and English among the Rwandan learners who participated in this study.

#### **Learners’ perceived level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda after the two shifts**

The majority of the learners investigated perceived that they have high level of proficiency in speaking their mother tongue, as illustrated in Figure 4.3 below, comparing urban and rural learners, who responded to the question: “In your own estimation, at what level do you put your current proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda in your classroom activities and when speaking at the school yard, having used English medium in grade 1 in 2010?”



**Figure 4.3: Comparison between urban and rural school learners in regard with their perceived level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda after the two policy shifts**

As revealed in Figure 4.3 above, more learners in both groups claim to have a 'very good' command of spoken Kinyarwanda, but rural school learners outnumber the urban ones in feeling more proficient in speaking this language, with 72.7% and 60.7% respectively. Also, 26.7% of urban learners and 18.7% of rural learners estimated that they had a "good" command of spoken Kinyarwanda. It is evident that the overwhelming majority in both groups rated themselves at "very good" and "good" levels in speaking Kinyarwanda, though rural school learners outnumbered the urban ones. Interviews with learners identified reasons for rural-urban divide in speaking proficiency by asking them if they found it easy or difficult to study in Kinyarwanda after the shift from English. The main reason was their opposing perception on how mother tongue medium mediates their subject content learning, as highlighted in the next section.

### ***Rural and urban learners understood content differently through Kinyarwanda medium***

After experiencing learning through both English and Kinyarwanda, more rural school learners than urban ones expressed that they found it easy to study through Kinyarwanda, as indicated in the extracts below:

*I found it easy and I could understand perfectly what the teacher was saying in Kinyarwanda.*  
[Extract 9: S2L12 from a rural school]

*I could understand perfectly what we were taught in Kinyarwanda and I was happy about it.*  
[Extract 10: S2L8 from a rural school]

*I found it difficult to study in Kinyarwanda because I was already acquainted with studying in English.*  
[Extract 11: S4L24 from urban school]

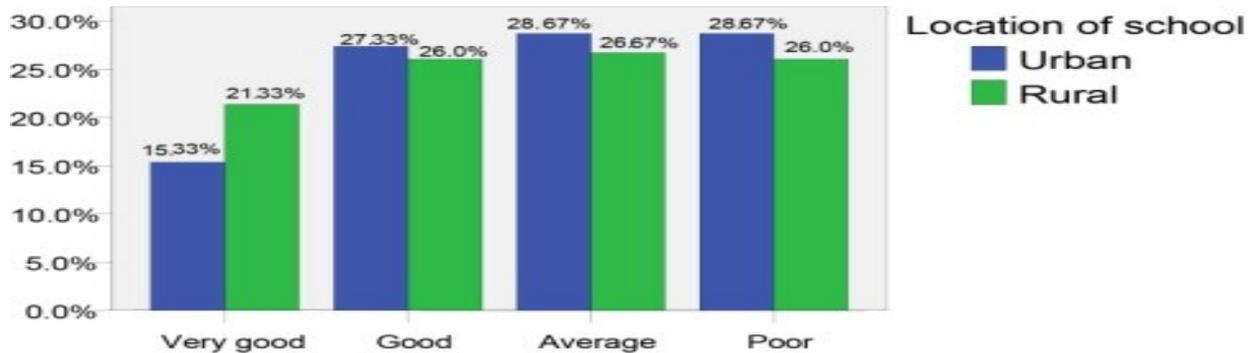
*We could hardly understand the subjects taught in Kinyarwanda.* [Extract 12: the whole group of S5 from an urban school]

The extracts above show how urban and rural school learners had different perceptions on how learning through their mother tongue facilitates the understanding of subject content. Having studied through English in grade 1 in 2010 and through Kinyarwanda in grade 2-3 in 2011-2012, more rural school learners indicated that they found it easy to learn through the Kinyarwanda medium, while more urban school learners indicated that they found it a bit difficult due to their initial acquaintance with English rather than with Kinyarwanda. It is evident that rural learners perceive that mother tongue instruction facilitates and promotes learning, while urban learners tend to say that it hampers learning. This situation can be explained by the fact that urban learners have more exposure to other languages like English, French and Swahili through various mass media (TV, Radio, newspapers, etc), while rural learners have more exposure to Kinyarwanda only, with limited access to various mass media when compared to urban learners. The next section is about their perceived level of speaking proficiency in English.

### **Learners' perceived level of proficiency in speaking English**

Unlike the proficiency in Kinyarwanda which tended to be high among urban and rural learners, their proficiency in English tends to be lower, as illustrated in Figure 4.4 below. The percentages in the figure summarizes their responses to the question: "In your own estimation, at what level do you put your current proficiency in speaking

English in your classroom activities and when speaking at the school yard, having shifted to Kinyarwanda medium in grade 2-3 in 2011-2012?”:



**Figure 4.4: Comparison between urban and rural school learners in regard with their perceived level of proficiency in speaking English after the two policy shifts**

Figure 4.4 above shows that only a small number of learners in both urban (15.33%) and rural (21.33%) schools perceived themselves to have ‘very good’ proficiency in speaking English. Those who rated themselves as having ‘good’ proficiency were 27.33% in urban and 26.0% in rural schools; while a higher percentage is found among learners who perceived themselves to have ‘average’ proficiency (28.67% in urban and 26.67% in rural schools). On ‘poor’ proficiency, urban learners were 28.67% while rural learners were 26.0%. These rates generally show that more learners (both urban and rural) felt that they did not have good command of spoken English, since the majority in both groups are found at the ‘average’ and ‘poor’ levels.

While statistics from the 2002 census indicated a big discrepancy between urban and rural dwellers in terms of speaking English in Rwanda, where only 1.1% of rural dwellers against 6% of the urban dwellers could speak English (MINECOFIN, 2005), the statistics from the 2012 census still reflects a big discrepancy between urban and rural population, but with a clear increase in the use of English in Rwanda. In this regard, urban dwellers who could speak English in 2012 were 29.9% against 11.3% of rural dwellers aged 15 and beyond (MINECOFIN, 2014). These statistics show that the number of English speakers has quadrupled within the Rwandan endoglossic setting, from 2002 to 2012. However, the frequency distributions reflected in Figure 4.4 above for a small sample of learners tend to reveal that such a discrepancy is currently minimized among learners. The evidence shown in Figure 4.4 above is that urban and rural school learners who participated in this study perceive themselves to have almost the same level of proficiency in speaking English, even if urban school learners slightly outnumber the rural ones in various levels of speaking proficiency. Of course the comparison might not be accurate because censuses include both literate and non-literate citizens, while participants in the study are counted among literate people only; but it shows the clear picture of their perceptions.

Despite the increase of English use over the years as reflected by the censuses, the perceived level of proficiency in speaking English is still limited among young learners, as revealed in Figure 4.4 above. This could be attributed, on the one hand, to their limited length of exposure to the English medium as they were still in grade 3

during data collection in 2012, having experienced the shift to the English medium for only one year (2010), before shifting to the Kinyarwanda medium in 2011-2012. It is likely that their BICS and CALP and all aspects of communicative competence have not yet developed fully at grade three level. On the other hand, it could be attributed to the Rwandan endoglossic setting, where the predominant use of Kinyarwanda is at stake at all the strata of the population, not only in Rwanda, but in the whole Great Lakes region, as emphasized by MINEPRISEC (1984), Munyakazi (1984), Nsanzabiga (1988), Karangwa (1996), Niyomugabo (2008), Niyibizi (2010, 2015), Samuelson and Freedman (2010), Sibomana (2015).

### **Discussion**

The discussion section in this article focuses on the salient themes of the findings and compares these findings with the existing literature, to elucidate the new insights from this study. The key findings are as follows:

#### **Higher level of speaking proficiency in mother tongue than in foreign language, with almost equal levels between urban and rural settings**

The key finding is that the majority of teachers and learners who participated in this study perceived themselves as having a high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda, with equal level of proficiency between urban and rural school teachers, but with a slightly different level of proficiency between urban and rural school learners. However, their perceived level of speaking proficiency dwindles when it comes to English.

The fact that teachers and learners manifested higher level of proficiency in speaking their mother tongue than English responds to UNESCO's (1953, 2003) advice that they should be encouraged to teach and learn in their mother tongue or the language they master best especially at lower grades. In the Rwandan endoglossic setting, teachers and learners felt to be more proficient in speaking their endoglossic language than English, which logically suggests that they performed better with the shift to the Kinyarwanda medium in 2011-2012, even if they also manifested more enthusiasm with the shift to the English medium in 2009-2010. Therefore, the shift to Kinyarwanda, in which the teachers and learners, who participated in the study had a high level of proficiency adumbrates that the Rwandan government adopted a right direction by shifting back to the use of the mother tongue medium in lower grades, as supported and recommended by UNESCO (1953, 2003), and many other scholars like Moumouni (1975), Pattanayak (1981), Ogbu (1982), Mackey (1984), Ngugi (1987), Rubagumya (1990), Phillipson (1992), Alexander (1999), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), Cummins (2000, 2003), Heugh (2002), Benson (2003), Baker (2006) and others who support mother tongue instruction from lower grades, which is said to accelerate learners' BICS and CALP development.

Similarly, several scholars, including Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) and Cummins (2000, 2003), contended that the level of development of young learners' mother tongue is a strong predictor of their proficiency in the foreign or additional language. They support the view that young learners who come to school with a strong foundation in their mother tongue manage to develop strong literacy abilities for academic language in both the mother tongue and the foreign language. In this study, their argument alludes that learners' proficiency in Kinyarwanda should have boosted

learners' proficiency in English. This study revealed that the Rwandan endoglossic setting boosted high level of speaking proficiency in Kinyarwanda, among both learners and teachers, and this prompts curiosity to compare Rwanda with some other African countries, in regard with levels of proficiency in various language skills, be it speaking, reading, writing and listening, in both the African mother tongues and foreign languages.

### **Comparison of language proficiency between Rwandans and other African teachers and learners**

Despite the fact that this article has focused on speaking skills, revealing the perceived high level of proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda among the Rwandan teachers and learners, studies which were conducted on other language skills, like listening, reading and writing in mother tongues among the Rwandan learners revealed interesting trends, especially in cases where the mother tongue was the medium of instruction in schools or not. For example Williams, de Montfort-Nayimfashe, Ntakirutimana and O'Sullivan (2004) tested the reading abilities among 251 grade six primary school learners in Rwanda and found that more than 90% were able to read adequately in Kinyarwanda, a language which they were using as a medium of instruction. If we compare the findings from the study conducted in Rwanda with the study that was conducted on reading abilities in both Malawi and Zambia on Chichewa and ChiNyanja among grade five primary schools learners (Williams, 1996), we observe similarities and contrasts, depending on whether the tested language was used as a medium of instruction or not. In Malawi for instance, the reading test was done on Chichewa and over 65% of the tested learners were "adequate readers in Chichewa", a language which was being used as a medium of instruction from grade 1 to grade 4. In Zambia however, the median score was 10% with only five students out of 227 scoring over 50% in ChiNyanja, which was not used as a medium of instruction in Zambian primary schools (Williams, 1996).

From the comparison above, it can be observed that reading proficiency in the mother tongue went higher when the mother tongue was used as a medium of instruction, in both Rwanda and Zambia. Likewise, speaking proficiency in Kinyarwanda in this study was perceived higher among grade 3 learners, after the shift to Kinyarwanda as a medium of instruction in 2011-2012. Even though the two language skills involved in the two studies, namely reading and speaking, are different, the commonality is that they both yielded positive performance when the languages involved were used as media of instruction; while it yielded poor performance when they were not used as media of instruction. That is why we can probably link this context of performance in the mother tongue with Heugh's (2000) conclusion in her study on South Africa that "the percentage of Black students who passed their exams went down every time the number of years spent through the medium of the mother tongues decreased". Such a conclusion also reminds Atkinson's (1987) conviction on the importance of the mother tongue, when he suggests that even in the English classes, about 5% of talk in the language class should be held in the learner's mother tongue because he believes that the mother tongue is compulsory for checking comprehension and for clarification of learning strategies and classroom methodology (Atkinson, 1987).

Despite the fact that Storch and Wiggleworth (2003, p. 760) indicate that such use of the mother tongue in L2 classroom is often discouraged, they are convinced that it provides “learners with additional cognitive support that allows them to analyze language and work at a higher level” than when those learners are not allowed to use their mother tongue in the classroom. This conviction is in line with CALP development, because Cummins (2000, 2003) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) contend that the level of development of children’s mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development and that children who come to school with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language. The findings in this study also showed high level of proficiency in Kinyarwanda and unbalanced proficiency in English, after the shifts to both English and Kinyarwanda medium. This partly supports Cummins’s (2003) argument that when children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain deeper understanding of languages and how to use them effectively.

The above-mentioned viewpoints support the argument that learners’ academic achievement in a multilingual classroom will be reached when proficiency, including CALP and BICS in the mother tongue, is developed thoroughly in order to contribute in the development of CALP and BICS in the additional or foreign language. That is why UNESCO (1953, 2003) and UNICEF (1999) recommend the use of the child’s mother tongue in his/her early education. In this regard, a committee of experts which was convened by UNESCO in 1953 to consider the question of the language that should be given priority for children to use as a medium of instruction recommended the following:

*It is axiomatic that the best medium of teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is a system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. (UNESCO, 1953, p. 11).*

### **Lower level of proficiency in foreign language than in mother tongue**

The level of proficiency either in mother tongue or foreign languages appears different when the medium of instruction is a foreign language. In this study, both the teachers’ and learners’ perceived level of proficiency in speaking English is not high when compared with Kinyarwanda, even if they experienced the shift to English medium. Such a situation of limited proficiency and access to international languages, such as English, is not found in Rwanda only, but also in other parts of Africa, as Kamwangamalu (2000) and Williams (2011) indicated.

Additionally, such limited access and proficiency to international languages, especially English, on the African continent is not limited only to speaking skills, as observed in this article about Rwandan learners and teachers, but to other language skills as well. Although the focus of this article is not on those other language skills, a comparison between three countries (Rwanda, Zambia and Malawi) on English reading proficiency can serve as an illustrative example for other aspects of language skills, or what Baker (2006) and Valdés et al. (2003) described as ‘four language abilities’, namely receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Based on this comparison between Rwanda (Williams et al., 2004; Williams, 2011), Zambia and Malawi (Williams,

1996; Williams, 1998), the findings on English proficiency showed striking features when compared to local African languages. In Rwanda for instance, Williams et al. (2004) tested the reading abilities among 251 grade six primary school learners in Rwanda and found that 99.33% of those learners were unable to read adequately in English, a language which some of them had been using as a medium of instruction from grade 4, alongside French. This shows that only 0.77% of 251 grade six primary school learners who were tested in five schools in Rwanda were able to read adequately for their studies in English at primary school level (Williams et al., 2004).

Similarly, two other studies which were conducted in both Malawi and Zambia (Williams, 1996; Williams, 1998) also found inadequate reading abilities in English, among grade five primary school learners. In this regard, 70% of the tested learners (i.e. 203 out of 290 investigated from six primary schools) in Malawi were judged to have inadequate reading comprehension in English; while 66.1% (i.e. 150 out of 227) grade five primary school learners who were investigated in Zambia, manifested inadequate reading comprehension in English (Williams, 1996). Another study which was conducted in both Zambia and Malawi among grade six primary school learners revealed almost the same results, because 74% of Zambian learners and 78% of Malawian students manifested inadequate reading comprehension in English (Williams, 1998).

The common feature is that the majority of the investigated learners in the three countries manifested inadequate reading abilities in English, even if the rates were different. It is therefore evident that limited proficiency in English is found in different parts of Africa, not only on speaking skills, but on other language skills as well, even if the illustrating examples focused on reading skills only. This insinuates that the limited levels of proficiency in speaking English which was observed among Rwandan urban and rural school learners and teachers in this study is not unique to Rwanda, it is likely to be a common features in different parts of Africa, and probably in different parts of the world.

### **Different development of BICS and CALP between mother tongue and foreign languages**

This study has shown that learners' and teachers' speaking proficiency is at different levels in Kinyarwanda and in English. For the learners' proficiency in speaking Kinyarwanda, their perceived level is high. Interpreted in Cummins's (2003) perspective, it can adumbrate that learners at grade 3 level felt that they had developed sufficient BICS and CALP in Kinyarwanda. Interpreted from integrative communication competence perspective, we can say that have some advanced levels of other types of language competence in Kinyarwanda like grammatical competence, textual competence, illocutionary competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; McNamara, 2003; Baker, 2006) due to endoglossic setting, even if these competences were not specifically tested in this study. In English, learners did not feel they had high level of proficiency, and these can be an indication that they had not grasped all these competences as they were still in lower grades.

For teachers, they felt they had high level of speaking proficiency in Kinyarwanda, which can be interpreted that their BICS and CALP had developed fully in Kinyarwanda, in all the skills and competences mentioned above. Such full development can be attributed to their long exposure and experience in teaching through Kinyarwanda; as well as the endoglossic setting which stimulates its frequent use. However, the majority of them did not feel they had full proficiency in English, which insinuates that they have not fully developed all levels of BICS and CALP in all competences of English. This can partly be attributed to the fact that they used English as a language of teaching in 2009 and 2010 only, before they shifted to Kinyarwanda medium. Overall, both teachers and learners are perceived to be highly proficient in Kinyarwanda as an endoglossic language, but not fully for English, after the shifts. This may imply that the two consecutive policy shifts and the Rwandan endoglossic setting had effects on the levels of proficiency in speaking English and Kinyarwanda in Rwandan lower primary schools.

### **Conclusion and policy implications**

It can be concluded that the arguments made in this article on the perceived speaking proficiency in English and Kinyarwanda among the Rwandan learners and teachers still support Spolsky's (1989, p. 31) claim that "learner characteristics, circumstances, kind of exposure, ideology, and goals will all lead to different levels of mastery of the various language skills". This is shown by the fact that teachers and learners in this study perceived their spoken proficiency differently, but both felt they have high level of proficiency in their mother tongue, the language to which they have plenty of exposure as their endoglossic language.

However, we are cognizant of the limited knowledge of the participating young learners in regard with assessing or estimating their level of speaking proficiency, and we are cognizant that no speaking test was used with learners and teachers. That is why Spolsky's (1989) Condition 1, 2 and 7 helped to analyze the learners' and teachers' perceived level of speaking proficiency in both Kinyarwanda and English after the two consecutive language policy shifts. In this regard, Condition 1 focused on the learner's and teacher's knowledge of a language as a systematic whole; Condition 2 emphasized on language learner's approximation to native speaker's language; while Condition 7 stressed the development of academic language skills, where a learner has to manipulate surface features of language beyond interpersonal contexts. This reminds the two theories that were used, namely Spolsky's (1989) language preference model and Canale and Swain's (1980) integrative theories of communication competence, which are supported by Cummins's (2000) CALP and BICS.

The implication of these findings is that this study supports other studies in the existing literature as well as authors who support the mother tongue medium in lower grades. The shifts to both English and Kinyarwanda as media of instruction left Rwandan learners and teachers feeling more proficient in their mother tongue than in foreign language; and this implies that the Rwandan Government adopted a right direction by shifting back to Kinyarwanda medium in grade 1-3 of lower primary.

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