

# *Exploring the Complexities of Second Language Acquisition in Rwandan Public Schools*

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**Abstract:** This study compared second language acquisition processes among Rwandan school learners from different language environments. The primary focus was to evaluate the impact of neighbourhood conditions on learner's language proficiency. The research utilised the Social Interactionist Theory and mixed methods to gather and analyse data. A case study design was used, concentrating on specific cases to facilitate valid generalisations later. The population was drawn from two selected schools in the West Province of Rwanda. Various instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, and observations, were employed for data collection. Respondents were selected through a combination of systematic random and purposive sampling. The findings indicated that the language environment significantly influences a learner's second language proficiency, highlighting that a language-rich environment plays a crucial role in enhancing language skills, as opposed to a purely grammatical approach to language learning.

**Keywords:** Second Language Acquisition, Social Interaction, Language, Language Environment, Language Proficiency

## **Introduction**

In this captivating study, we dive deep into the challenges and nuances of second language acquisition within the vibrant educational landscape of Rwanda. By comparing various approaches and outcomes, we aim to uncover the unique complexities that shape language learning experiences for students across the nation. The thrust is to explore the factors influencing language proficiency and the paths to success in Rwandan classrooms. Language acquisition is a dynamic and continuous process that calls for exposure, continuous practice, and interaction with the target language (Arifin, 2020). Since learners are different, they pass through these processes at different rates and also with varying levels of proficiency. Gass, Behney, and Plonsky (2020) define language acquisition as the process of acquiring a language usually through immersion, that is hearing the language often and in everyday situations and contexts. Many people acquire a language just by being around others like elder siblings, parents, and friends. This therefore implies that the immediate social environment has a strong bearing on second language acquisition. As a result, the Rwandan government is making spirited efforts to encourage language-rich environments that encourage the development of English as a second language in the general populace starting from the school-going ages.

Rwanda's education system comprises a pre-primary school, primary, secondary, and higher education. In the language policy of 2003, Rwanda decided to develop a knowledge-based and technology-led economy (Education Sector Policy, 2003). Several decisions have been taken to make this spectacular and deliberate stance a reality. In 2016, the Rwandan Government through the Ministry of Education introduced a competence-based curriculum to replace a knowledge-based one that did not promote critical thinking in learners (Assan and Walker, 2018). The motive for reviewing the syllabi was to ensure that the syllabi were responsive to the needs of the students and to shift from objective and knowledge-based to competence-based learning, benchmarking with syllabi elsewhere with best practices.

The splendid and elaborate syllabi were designed in support of the government's 18 October 2008 declaration that assigned the English language as the major medium of instruction. This was decided in 2008 and implemented in 2009 and in addition, it was made the mode of communication in government businesses and schools (Assan and Walker, 2018). Thus English is the medium of instruction from upper primary up to university (Rwanda Education Board Curriculum Framework for Teacher Training Colleges, 2020). A major factor in Rwanda's post-genocide reforms, according to Samuelson and Freedman (2010), is the contemporary language policy. Thus proper language positioning is critical in the quest for economic and social advancements. The move hence necessitated the need to ensure that graduates from schools across Rwanda are empowered with the essential skills that would enable them to deliver in the world at large (Rwanda Education Board Curriculum Framework for Teacher Training Colleges, 2020). Being able to use English as a language of communication is an essential skill needed by Rwandan school' graduates. The elevation of English as a communication language is in tandem with contemporary global trends. Global languages like English are in most cases regarded as pivotal in nation-building endeavours, principally for economic reasons (Shohamy, 2005). Be that as it may, English proficiency is still very low in most Rwandan schools (Murape and Zimuto 2023). Most of the learners from the schools can hardly write or speak coherent English statements. To tackle such problems, the government of Rwanda through the University of Rwanda established a model group of schools in West Province in which it created a model environment for second language acquisition.

The group of schools is a public day school with a conducive environment for second-language immersion since English is used in all the official activities of the school. It is against this background that the researchers saw it worthwhile and prudent to compare second language acquisition processes between learners who hail from this model school and those who come from the neighbouring school with different language use setups. The specific objectives of the study were to: Expose some common challenges that learners in Rwanda face during the Second language acquisition process; Outline the specific strategies or resources that are essential to improving the language acquisition processes of learners in Rwandan schools and evaluate the language acquisition process and show how it differs for learners coming from different language environment backgrounds.

The researchers realise that language acquisition is a complex process whose proficiency and mastery could be influenced by several factors. In this regard, this study attempts to identify gaps by comparing learners from different language environments and bring to the fore possible reasons why some learners have problems in second language acquisition. The researchers' perception is that learners may not always be held liable for their inadequate level of proficiency in second language acquisition without considering their social backgrounds (Zimuto and Murape, 2024) and the environment from which they are coming. The researchers acknowledge that this is not a pioneering work, however, they feel obliged to make a contribution and forecast a new angle and dimension which may help the government, academics, language policy planners, and society at large in that whenever they are dealing with issues of second language acquisition proficiency they should consider its complexities in tandem with one's social background and the environment from which one hails from. On top of the rest, the researchers envisage informing future generations and the Ministry of Education that social values and language environments may seem insignificant but they play a critical role in second language acquisition since language carries the culture of the community.

## Literature Review

Nasution and Perangin-angin (2024) pursued an interactionist approach in trying to explain how the second language is developed. According to them, learners learn a language because of their desire to communicate with the surrounding world. This therefore means the environment one hails from affects heavily how well and how quickly one a language. Guided by this interactionist's view on language acquisition these researchers were then propelled to examine the extent to which the environment affects second language acquisition by giving a comparison of second language acquisition processes of learners from various and distinct socio-environmental backgrounds.

Bates, (1976) studied the relationship between language and development and also some other aspects of cognitive development which includes social cognition and problem-solving. In her study Bates, (1976) pinpoints the importance of input, interaction, and individual learner differences as far as second language acquisition is concerned. She further asserts that for a learner to acquire a language easier there should be enough input and reinforcement of the correct language. She also highlighted the importance of interaction among learners themselves and interaction with adult peers. From her research, Bates exalted interaction as the most important method a learner naturally learns a new language and develops proficiency in it. This research by Bates (1976), influenced the current researchers since it foreshadows to them never to underestimate the importance of interaction and reminds them of the connectivity between interactions in a language-rich environment and second language acquisition.

Bruner, (1990) researched second language acquisition and concluded that for a learner to develop faster language acquisition that particular learner should be immersed in the language they are learning. According to Bruner, (1990), learners learn a language most naturally through full immersion and exposure to the language. According to him the more a learner is exposed to and interacts with the language the faster they tend to develop it more naturally. He further argues that all human beings are born with an innate capacity for language and that innate capacity allows learners to develop and acquire the grammatical structures of the language and this in most cases is referred to as language instinct. Bruner, (1990) further asserts that although the innate capacity is critical for language development it should be born in mind that the role of input and interaction is also equally important. This input and interaction usually from teachers also enables a learner to acquire a language quickly. Bruner, (1990) is quick to note that learners do not acquire a language at equal paces and he proposes what he calls variation in acquisition rates where he argues that there is a glaring individual variation in the rate and manner at which learner acquire their second language and this is normally influenced by factors like, cognitive ability, socio-economic status and lastly exposure to a language. This research by Bruner, (1990) informed the current research to take note of individual differences of learners from different socio-environments and explore how their status and language environmental backgrounds could affect their second language acquisition process. It also informs the current research to acknowledge that the second language acquisition process is complex and multifaceted. It is influenced by both innate biological capabilities and environmental factors. This influenced this current research to keep on refining knowledge and understanding of this fundamental human ability.

Huang and Li (2024) investigated how technology-enhanced language learning environments enhance the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in second language (L2) learners. Citing MacIntyre et al. (1998), the authors define the WTC concept as representing the readiness of participants in a particular discourse event to enter into a conversation with a specific person or persons, using L2. Concerning L2 learning, the two variables that are believed to affect a learner's WTC are psychological and contextual. The psychological variables include L2 self-confidence, perceived communicative competence, L2 learning anxiety, L2 learning motivation, and personality. In contrast, the contextual or situational variables include teachers' roles or attitudes, task types, topics, classroom atmosphere, school culture, and interlocutors (Huang and Li, 2024; Tuyen and Loan, 2019). The environment in which learners operate is therefore crucial in shaping the learners' self-confidence, L2 learning motivation, and communicative competence. Thus, whilst they recognise the importance of a conducive school culture, Huang and Li (2024) argue for technology-

enhanced learning environments to support the expansion of learners' linguistic skills and reduce cognitive load, thereby facilitating learners' WTC.

## Theoretical Framework

The Social Interactionist Theory served as the foundation for this research. This theory posits that language acquisition results from the interplay between a learner's internal mechanisms and linguistic environment. Both Tomasello (2003) and Chomsky (2011) emphasise a teacher's significant role in shaping a learner's language development. According to the social interactionist perspective, language learning is fundamentally a social process through which learners acquire language by engaging in meaningful interactions and communications with their teachers and other social partners. Tomasello (2003) further contends that learners use language to express their needs, desires, and experiences, meaning that communicative intent significantly influences language development. It is crucial to highlight that the interactionist theory underscores the importance of social interaction, communication, and the learner's active participation in the language learning process, rather than viewing it solely as a cognitive or innate occurrence. These concepts will guide the researchers' approach in this discussion.

## Methodology

The research employed a mixed methods approach. Quantitative research, which focuses on quantifying and analysing variables to obtain results (Muzari, Shava, Shonhiwa, 2022), was primarily used to quantify the number of participants and represent their demographics as percentages. Similar responses from participants were grouped and also expressed as percentages of the total sample size, demonstrating the representativeness of the selected sample.

Qualitative research methods played a key role in various stages of the study, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. The purposive sampling method was utilised for sample selection. Data collection involved the use of observation, interviews, and questionnaires, while thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. The qualitative research method was also used in the data presentation and discussion sections, as the data was presented in descriptions (Bhandari, 2021). Using purposive sampling methods, the target population was selected from the Kayonza District. Two Public Group of Schools from the Gahini Sector were chosen, comprising two primary schools and two secondary schools. These schools were selected intentionally due to their relevance to the research problem, particularly concerning their location and language environments. For ethical reasons, the selected schools were given pseudonyms and are referred to as Schools A, B, C, and D. In addition, one hundred respondents were selected from these schools using a systematic random sampling method and purposive sampling. The administrators were selected purposively while for the teachers and learners, the researchers randomly chose the first participant and then selected every fifth person they encountered within the population. The participants in this study included five administrators, twenty teachers, and seventy-five learners. The number of teachers was greater than that of the administrators (20%), as teachers possess extensive knowledge of the contemporary curriculum and its requirements. They are also directly involved in assessing students' overall performance and language skills. There were fewer administrators, making up just 5% of the sample, since they typically do not engage in direct teaching. Instead, their role is to create and support the teaching and learning environment while fostering positive school cultures.

Learners constituted the largest group, representing 75% of the sample. Their inclusion was essential because they experienced the effects of different language use environments within the population being studied. Therefore, any research or fact-finding endeavour must involve their perspectives. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with both learners and teachers, while questionnaires were primarily distributed to administrators due to their busy schedules. This approach allowed administrators to provide their input at their convenience. Participant observations were also utilised to gather information about aspects not covered in the questionnaires. The researchers as members of the school community,

engaged in community activities while gathering data for the study. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the information and draw various conclusions. The collected data was analysed, and patterns emerging from the meaning of the data were used to generate key ideas (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022). These ideas served as the major points during the discussion.

### How the Environment Influences a Learner's Language Acquisition Proficiency: Findings and Discussion

This section examines the impact of the environment on a learner's ability to acquire language skills. The subsequent sections will present findings and a discussion on this topic. The research data has brought to the fore the idea that learners from schools C and D where English is continuously used as a medium of instruction except for deeper explanations when learners fail to grasp the concepts are better off in English proficiency as compared to those from schools A and B where teachers because of their competence in English language normally use Kinyarwanda for teaching and only give learners English notes. Participants interviewed unanimously agreed that learners from schools A and B experienced more difficulties with English, the second language, compared to learners from schools C and D. These challenges were observed across all four linguistic skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. This was attributed to schools C and D having a conducive environment for the second language acquisition process. This aligns with MacLean (2003), who suggests that learners with limited interaction with proficient elders in a language tend to develop their skills at a slower rate. This slower progress occurs primarily because these learners receive less stimulation, which is essential for language acquisition. Furthermore, Paltridge and Prior (2024) emphasise that the care and attention a learner gets from their parents and the wider social environment significantly impact language development. Learners who are exposed to a rich linguistic environment, where they can hear and engage in conversations with fluent speakers, are more likely to develop strong language skills. This was evident during the interview sessions, where learners from schools C and D spoke fluently with the researchers. In all four schools, both teachers and administrators agreed that a learner's environment significantly influences their proficiency in acquiring a second language. Out of twenty teachers surveyed, eighteen concurred that there is a strong link between the environment and second language acquisition proficiency. For example, learners from schools A and B were found to have limited access to resources such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which can enhance language acquisition. The researchers conducted interviews with teachers to determine whether environmental conditions impact the language acquisition process for learners.

**Table 1 below shows the responses of the informants (N=20)**

Question	Frequency	Percentage
1. Do you think there are certain environmental factors which retards a learner's second language proficiency?		
Yes	18	90
No	2	10
2. Does the cognitive aspects of a learner affect his/her language development process?		
Yes	15	75
No	5	25

3. Is it true that learners raised in second language-rich environments easily acquire a second language compared to those from environments where the second language is scantily used?		
Yes	19	95
No	1	5
4. Are there any resources which you think are necessary to enhance learners' language acquisition processes?		
Yes	20	100
No	0	0
5. Do all learners have challenges during the second language acquisition process?		
Yes	10	50
No	10	50
6. Is there any help which you give to learners facing language acquisition problems?		
Yes	18	90
No	2	10

Response to Question 1: Do you think certain environmental factors hinder a learner's second language proficiency? This question aimed to explore whether specific environmental factors might impede a learner's language development process. Among the 20 respondents, 18, which is 90%, indicated that the environment from which a learner comes affects their language development. These respondents concur with Paltridge and Prior (2024), who argue that the linguistic environment in which a learner grows up shapes their language proficiency levels. They suggest that cultural practices, values, and beliefs also influence language use, the topics discussed, and expectations regarding language skills. Therefore, learners acquire a language within the cultural framework to which they are exposed.

Response to Question 2: Do the cognitive aspects of a learner affect his or her language development process? This question aimed to explore whether the cognitive aspects of a learner impact their language development. Out of 20 respondents, 15 agreed that a learner's cognitive well-being significantly affects their language acquisition process. Their experiences as teachers suggest that learners with mental challenges often struggle to acquire language skills. Such learners tend to be withdrawn and have less interaction with their peers. Additionally, they may spend a lot of time feeling discomfort due to the stigma they face, which can result in them avoiding play and social interaction. Consequently, this lack of engagement can lead to delayed language acquisition.



Response to Question 3: Is it true that learners raised in language-rich environments acquire a second language more easily than those from environments where the second language is rarely used? Nineteen out of twenty respondents agreed that learners raised in second language-rich environments tend to acquire a second language more easily than those from environments where the second language is minimally used. One respondent elaborated, stating, "Learners from Schools A and B often show signs of struggling with second language acquisition. These learners can hardly read, comprehend, write or speak coherent sentences." According to the teachers, this situation is influenced by several factors, including poor language environments and a lack of supportive resources, such as information and communication technology (ICT).

This perspective is supported by Dalen (2001), who argues that learners from such environments often contend with problematic conditions, resulting in poor linguistic and emotional support that disrupts their language acquisition. Schiffman (1996) further argues that learners who are taught by instructors facing challenges in second language instruction often experience related difficulties, which may stem from their environmental conditions. Such conditions include limited interactions between teachers and learners in the second language and a deficient school language environment. These factors can negatively impact the language acquisition process and may even affect the learners' academic achievements later in life.

Response to Question 4: Are there any resources that you think are necessary to enhance learners' language acquisition processes? All of the 20 respondents agreed that certain resources can enhance language learning. During the discussions, teachers highlighted that while these resources are important, the language learning environment created within the school is crucial. One teacher mentioned, "This language-rich environment can be cultivated through talking, singing, and reading to learners. As you have observed from the books, learners from this school can write in good English, thanks to the resources we have and the school culture we've established." Another teacher praised the use of resources and argued, "The integration of ICT in the school's teaching and learning processes, along with age-appropriate books and reading materials that expose learners to diverse vocabulary, are key to successful second language acquisition in schools. Additionally, educational apps, games, and videos can significantly promote and enhance language learning." Tomassello (2003) supports this view, stating that teachers should encourage imaginative play with toys and role-playing. By doing so, learners have the opportunity to practice the language in a fun and creative manner.

Response to Question 5: Do all learners have challenges during the second language acquisition process? Out of the total number of respondents, 10 out of 20 indicated that all learners, regardless of their background, face challenges during the second language learning process. When probed for further insights, one respondent stated, "Language learning is a complex and difficult process for all second language learners. The challenges faced by students from Schools A and B are similar to those experienced by students in Schools C and D." Conversely, the other half asserted that language learning is merely a part of a learner's overall development, and they argued that the challenges encountered by learners are often exaggerated and not as significant as perceived. They maintained that language learning can be simple and requires minimal effort, provided that a conducive environment is established within the school.

In response to question 6 regarding assistance for learners facing language acquisition challenges, 18 out of 20 respondents indicated that they pay special attention to students who are struggling and falling behind their peers. One teacher commented, "At times, I try to make myself available to support the learners and provide them with additional stimuli. If resources are available, I ensure that struggling learners are the first to receive them." However, the teachers noted that, due to limited resources and time constraints, the attention they can provide may sometimes be insufficient. The remaining 2 respondents expressed that they often feel overwhelmed by the large number of students they teach, making it difficult to give adequate support to those who are struggling.

### Data collected from Questionnaires

To compare the language acquisition processes of learners from different backgrounds, the researchers conducted interviews with head teachers and deans of studies from the above-mentioned schools. Below are the questions asked and the responses given.

### Responses from the Administrators

Question 1: Do you often observe learners as they play and interact on their own? Response to Question 1: The respondents mentioned that they spend a significant amount of time with the learners, quietly observing them during play. All of the respondents agreed that this approach allows them to witness natural interactions among the learners and to identify any unique challenges that some may face.

Question 2: Are there any noticeable differences between learners from different second language backgrounds, such as those from private schools compared to those from government schools? Response to Question 2: One respondent noted that there are significant differences in the proficiency levels of the learners. He emphasised that these differences are largely influenced by the socio-linguistic backgrounds of the students. He argued that learners from second language-poor environments, such as those in public schools, face more challenges in using English as a second language in writing, listening, reading, and speaking. In contrast, learners from second language-rich environments, like those in private schools, tend to have fewer difficulties. These findings suggest that different language environments contribute to varying language abilities among learners.

Question 3: What are the significant challenges faced by learners in language acquisition that are related to teacher participation? Response to Question 3: Respondents indicated that many learners in Schools A and B are largely dependent on their teachers for language acquisition due to the lack of additional language-enhancing materials available in their communities. One administrator pointed out that teachers often feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities and the number of students they must attend to, which has a significant negative impact on the development of the learners' language skills. This observation is supported by Hough and Kaczmarek (2011), who note that there is limited language exposure in government schools, yet learners need to be immersed in a language-rich environment that promotes interaction.

Question 4: What are the practical disadvantages that learners from second language-poor environments face regarding language acquisition? This question aimed to explore the challenges faced by learners in their schools. The responses from the questionnaire indicated that learners from Schools A and B, unlike those from Schools C and D, are rarely taken out of their institutions and therefore miss the opportunity to benefit from exposure to diverse language models. Learners from Schools C and D participated in the I-Debate Rwanda competition in 2024 and the national robotics competition in 2025, engaging in important national and international activities. In contrast, learners from Schools A and B did not participate in such forums. The exposure that learners from language-rich schools have enables them to sharpen their language skills and at the same time encourages them to try harder to match the second language demands of the outside world. This situation supports the argument made by Gauthier and Genesee (2011) that interaction with the outside world is limited in some institutions and that staff often lack the time to help learners utilise the few ICT resources available for self-teaching and external interaction. Consequently, this restricts the language development of learners in Schools A and B and offers an advantage to those from schools C and D who are always out of their school vicinity. Furthermore, respondents noted that learners in Schools A and B tend to be grouped by age or ability, leading to minimal interaction with other age groups. This lack of interaction eliminates opportunities for older learners to model language for younger learners, further hindering language acquisition.



Question 5: What specific challenges do learners face in second language acquisition that can be mitigated by the provision of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and other resources? The question aimed to identify challenges that are particularly associated with the lack of additional language learning materials for learners' language development. Response to Question 5: The respondents emphasised that the absence of language acquisition-supporting devices should be considered when evaluating language proficiency in the schools mentioned above, as this deficiency can put learners at risk for language delays. One head teacher noted that learners who have access to ICT exhibit faster language development trends. Consequently, if ICT is introduced equitably in all schools, learners may achieve a similar level of language proficiency.

Another respondent stated, "If learners are provided with ICT and additional materials, they will be exposed to a variety of language-rich encounters, which will strengthen their vocabulary and address periods of stagnation in their language skills during writing and speaking." In line with Huang and Li's (2024) argument, this improved exposure alleviated confusion around word choice for learners and subsequently enhanced their WTC and overall language development.

To support the above viewpoint, Sari and Han (2024) argue that for some second language learners, the rate of transitioning from their native language to acquiring a new language often does not align. This misalignment can lead to periods of communication regression, characterised by behaviours such as pointing and gesturing, and even functional mutism—where learners refrain from using the language for a time. This squarely points to the need for gadgets which may help the learner enhance their vocabulary. Thus the findings prove that language dry spells which might be as a result of trying to adjust to the second language might be reduced through the use of language learning aids like ICT programs.

### Observations

The researchers also made observations in the above-mentioned schools to observe different types of learners as they naturally interact with each other. Whilst they were making the observations the researchers had the following in mind to check on: Language acquisition proficiency of learners from different socio-linguistic environmental backgrounds, the interaction between school teachers and learners, interaction between learners on their own, availability of resources which can enhance language acquisition and challenges in schools which may hinder language acquisition.

In all the schools visited the researchers were quick to note that the degree of challenges in second language proficiency differs depending on the language environment the learner comes from. Learners from schools C and D tend to have fewer challenges expressing themselves in the English language whether written or spoken as compared to learners from schools A and B. This was found to be mainly because learners from the former were used to conversing in English since it was the norm in their schools. Learners from the latter found it difficult because for some of them, it was their first time to have a conversation purely in English not mixing with Kinyarwanda. The learners from schools A and B's language was fragmented possibly because of the environment they have been exposed to before. They could not write and or speak coherently during lessons and interviews and this was mainly found to be because of the language environment they hail from. This justifies Sari and Han's (2024) claim that social interactive neighbourhood elements such as language exposure have emerged as important factors affecting learner language development. Of the 35 learners observed from schools A and B, 29 of them which translates to 83% had challenges or showed signs of second language acquisition delay as assessed through conversations, reading and listening lessons observed and written exercise, however, the other 6 which translates to 17% had no problems. Thus 83% of the learners from this second language-poor environment school showed signs of confusion and were timid, their interaction with the researchers was limited. To accentuate this observation, Dalen, (2001) says learners from language-rich environments show more hyperactive behaviour and have fewer language difficulties than those learners from language-poor environments.

In the observations of the interactions between school teachers and students, the researchers found that engagement in Schools A and B was minimal. This was primarily due to a shortage of teachers, which left them feeling overwhelmed. However, there were instances when teachers made a concerted effort to give extra attention to students facing challenges to help them keep up with their peers. It was also observed that some teachers did not speak the second language proficiently enough to effectively mentor learners. This lack of proficiency hindered interaction between the teachers and students, leaving the learners with few resources to support their language development.

The researchers discovered that schools C and D were equipped with various ICT gadgets that enabled teachers to effectively support their students in developing English language proficiency. As a result, learners from these schools demonstrated greater proficiency compared to their peers in other schools. However, this was not the case for schools A and B. The researchers noted that these institutions were lacking in resources to enhance language acquisition. Although there were some ICT gadgets available, most of them were not related to language development. The limited applications that appeared relevant to language development were largely unavailable to many learners who needed them the most. Instead, they were often taken by older learners who didn't require them as much as younger ones. Additionally, the number of ICT gadgets was insufficient for the number of learners at the institutions, leading to challenges with ICT interaction time for students. The little time learners had with the devices was also influenced by the type of software installed on them.

The learners in all the schools interacted well, and the environment was conducive to second language learning. However, in schools A and B, the students had limited proficiency in English, which led them to primarily communicate in Kinyarwanda. Additionally, there were fewer teachers than students, resulting in a lack of supervision to manage or correct the use of Kinyarwanda and grammatically incorrect English during lessons and general conversations. Correct language usage was not consistently reinforced, and there were limited stimuli available. Although the learners interacted in the schools mentioned earlier, they primarily communicated in their first language, which hindered their acquisition of a second language. In schools C and D, interactions did occur, and in many cases, they were conducted in the second language. This approach encouraged the development of the learners' proficiency. The learners supported one another and were able to enhance their vocabularies by exchanging ideas. As a result, the collaborative learning environment in schools C and D was productive. The participant observations made by the researchers showed that most of the learners produced good composition scripts as well as converse fluently in the English language. Thus students had access to the necessary language resources, and their acquisition process was further facilitated by teachers, ICT tools, and a supportive atmosphere fostered by the school administrators. This in the end produced second language fluent learners.

## Conclusions

The study aimed to explore the complexities of second language acquisition and to assess the impact of environmental factors on learners' second language acquisition processes. Based on the research findings, the researchers concluded that environmental factors play a critical role in the process of acquiring a second language in learners.

The study concludes that factors such as a language-rich environment and a stable, supportive school culture that emphasises English immersion can improve learners' processes of acquiring a second language. The findings indicate that students from schools without a rich second language environment encounter more difficulties in learning a second language compared to those from schools that prioritise the use of the language of instruction in all aspects of the school environment.

Additionally, the study indicates that a grammatical approach to language teaching is not effective for facilitating learners' acquisition of a second language or for fostering quick cognitive development. This highlights the importance of providing learners

in schools without sufficient interaction in the target language with real-life practice opportunities, which are essential for successful second language acquisition. Furthermore, access to language resources like appropriate language books and ICT tools was found to significantly impact a learner's second language acquisition processes. The absence of these resources can adversely affect a learner's language proficiency.

## Recommendations

The research advocates for comprehensive policy changes and legislation that prioritises the needs of learners in various institutions. Policy endorsements should aim to minimise the use of the mother tongue for basic instructions, allowing teachers to employ it only when learners struggle to understand concepts. While this perspective may clash with the views of many activist African linguists, it is essential to recognise that, at this stage of Africa's development, English must be utilised. Without robust industries and well-developed languages, rejecting the use of English could lead to global self-exclusion. By addressing the challenges faced by the learners in schools and promoting their language development, Rwanda can equip its youth with a solid foundation for a fulfilling and successful life.

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