

The impact of classroom context on learners' achievement in the post-basic school English curriculum in Burundi

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Abstract: In Burundi, the academic performance in English for post-basic school leavers is wanting. Many researchers attribute poor academic achievement to the quality of teaching but fail to investigate the role the classroom context plays in learners' academic achievement. This paper is a report of part of a study that was undertaken in 2023 on an evaluation of the instructional influences of the post-basic school English curriculum for learners' achievement in Burundi. The paper specifically reports on the impact of classroom context on learners' achievement in the post-basic school English curriculum in Burundi. The study used a convergent mixed methods design and was guided by Communicative Language Teaching and Social Learning theories. For data collection, learners' questionnaires, teachers' interviews, and classroom observations were used. The research participants were sixteen teachers of English and three hundred and thirty post-basic school learners in the second and third years of the languages section in the Bujumbura Municipality. The research participants were selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data was analysed using descriptive and thematic analyses. The study revealed that teachers provided a welcoming learning atmosphere in their respective classrooms and promoted peer assistance. It was also established that teachers motivated learners to speak English in different ways, which enhanced the learning process. It was revealed that teachers inspired learners in matters of using the English language (mean = 4.29, SD = .883). Moreover, the results showed that the classroom surroundings were generally perceived as noisy (mean = 2.95, SD = 1.327), and most of the classes were overcrowded (mean = 2.81, SD = 1.360). The study established that the classroom learning context had a high influence on learners' academic achievement (mean = 3.405, SD = .5030). The study recommended that the government should improve the classroom context for learners' optimal academic performance in English.

Keywords: Post-Basic English Curriculum, Classroom Context, Academic Achievement

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INTRODUCTION

Learners' academic performance is one of the salient objectives of education around the world. All parties involved in educational institutions have long been interested in learners' achievement (Ampofo & Osei-Owusu, 2015). For this reason, all countries need competent labour to fill the gaps in the labour market. This situation puts much pressure on all stakeholders to get a high level of achievement. Producing qualified human labour is an asset that may speed up economic development and address pressing social issues in a community (Tadese et al., 2022), and that is why all educational systems work hard to reach quality

education in order to generate excellent learning outcomes. In language learning, language use is one of the academic achievements learners should possess. However, a lot of people, including parents, learners, and even teachers, simply consider academic achievement in terms of learners' grades (Ambei, 2022; Noemy et al., 2017) and fail to think beyond the numerical marks or grades. In language instruction, reaching a high level of language use, which leads to improved communication, becomes its primary goal.

Globalization has made English a widely spoken language, making it a universal language in every aspect of human life (British Council, 2015; Crystal, 2003; Mohamadaid et al., 2018; Northrup, 2013). Following that trend, teaching English has increased globally (Rao, 2019). Drawing on that, several nations—including Burundi—are progressively making substantial investments in teaching their citizens the English language to compete on a global scale. In an endeavour to produce outstanding academic leavers, the government of Burundi, through the Ministry of Education, invests heavily in things like constructing schools, recruiting and training teachers, providing additional teaching materials, and much more (World Bank Document, 2018). But despite all of the government's efforts, the outcomes have not been up to par. Research done in Burundi showed that post-basic school leavers in the language section have a low level of English communication (Mbonigaba & Muhimpundu, 2018; Nimpoza, 2018). If nothing is done about it, reaching outstanding levels of academic achievement is nearly impossible. In fact, some aspects will be overlooked, given the multitude of factors that impact learners' academic performance. A number of studies across the world have examined a range of variables in relation to the elements that affect learners' academic achievement (Ambei, 2022; Paul, 2015), but most of them have concentrated on pinpointing variables that influence learners' academic performance without considering how much they affect learners' academic achievement. For example, Koçak et al. (2021); Maganga (2016); Maponya (2020); Naftali and Rugar (2022), encountered that factors relating to students, parents, schools, and teachers—psychological, socioeconomic, sociodemographic, learning theories, and teaching strategies—are among the most important ones. However, very few studies, if any, have so far examined how much school learning environment factors impact learners' achievement; hence, the purpose of this study. To fill this knowledge gap in the literature, the goal of this study is, therefore, to assess the extent to which the classroom learning environment influences the academic achievement of post-basic English curriculum learners in Burundi. The aim of this study was to evaluate how much the classroom environment affects learners' academic achievement of post-basic English curriculum learners in Burundi.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura and Walters (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) constituted the theory of this study. It puts emphasis on how important the learning environment is to fostering learning. This theory takes a more natural approach by enabling people to learn from their surroundings, where they learn from one another through their various interactions in a given social context. As Bandura and Walters (1977) put it, a new behaviour, which is English used in this study, is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning before being imitated. In other words, this theory states that learning occurs by observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviour, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others.

By observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and this coded information serves as a guide for action on subsequent occasions. According to Bandura and Walters (1977), SLT serves as a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories, and consequently, it involves reciprocal interactions between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences. As an implication, this theory shows how the learning environment

influences the way students learn from a model, be it their peers, teachers, or other symbolic models they can learn from (TV, Radio, or books, for instance). Consequently, it influences learners' academic success in the English language either directly or indirectly. This study was an evaluation of the extent to which the classroom learning environment influences the academic achievement of learners in English at the post-basic school level in Burundi. Drawing on SLT, the dependent variable is the learning environment, and the independent variable is the learners' academic achievement in English use. To be effective, this learning environment should be as conducive as possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learners' Academic Performance

Learners' academic performance is one of the key elements that determines the success or failure of not only the learners but also the institutional aims. Ambei (2022) mentioned that it is a crucial variable in education that is taken as the hub around which the entire educational system hinges. Academic achievement has been defined differently by numerous academics and from different perspectives. According to Naftali and Rugar (2022), learners' academic achievement is regarded as the aggregate grade obtained by learners in each course they take in school. Ambei (2022) defined as the knowledge that learners gain and is characterised by marks from a teacher and/or educational goals set by learners and teachers to be fulfilled over a particular length of time. This is proven by the degree to which learners have imparted knowledge and skills at a particular point in their learning activities. According to Steinmayr et al. (2015), it symbolises the outcomes of learners' performance, which displays how far they have gone in reaching the goals set by entities like schools, colleges, and universities. Maganga (2016) regarded it as the end product of the teaching and learning process, measured by the knowledge and skills learners get on the Certificate for Secondary Examinations. To put it another way, it is the advancement made towards the pursuit of obtaining educational skills, materials, and knowledge, typically across a range of disciplines (Bolt, 2011), and its core objective revolves around helping learners enhance their educational knowledge. In a nutshell, it can be thought of as the product of the teaching and learning process.

To be more productive, educational institutions deploy lots of resources to assist learners in getting good academic performance in their scholastic endeavours. Reaching good learners' academic achievement is demanding in that there are many influential factors that must be taken into consideration. As evidenced by research, there are numerous factors that have an impact on learners' academic performance that should be taken into consideration if learners' academic performance is called upon. As evidenced by research, there are numerous factors that have an impact on learners' academic performance. According to Akomolafe and Adesua (2015), these factors may include things like the classroom's physical climate, the decor and design, lighting, a noise-free setting, the school's furnishings, and how the space is organized. Additionally, Olufemi et al. (2018) came to the realisation that students' socioeconomic characteristics, parental background, home-related issues, availability of school facilities, and instructional materials are other significant and influential elements to consider in learners' achievement.

Classroom Learning Environment and its Implication to Learners' Academic Achievement

The different physical settings, contexts, and cultures in which students learn are referred to as the classroom learning environment (Ibem et al., 2017). Similarly, anything that occurs in a

department, classroom, faculty, or institution can be viewed as a component of the learning environment (Ibem et al., 2017).

Reading between the lines of the same source, the learning environment is frequently described as the classroom, even though students may occasionally learn in a number of settings, such as places other than schools and in the outdoors. Since the term "classroom learning environment" can have different connotations depending on how it is used (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015), this work at hand will limit it to the classroom context (outside and within the classroom). Although students may occasionally learn in a number of settings, such as outside of the school and in outdoor settings, the learning environment is frequently referred to as the classroom if one reads between the lines of the same source. Since the term "classroom learning environment" can have different connotations depending on how it is used (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015), the task at hand will only consider the classroom context (both inside and outside the classroom).

In saying so, the culture of a school or class, or its governing values, principles, and characteristics, must be mentioned when talking about learning environments. This includes the various interactions and interpersonal dynamics between students and their teachers, as well as the various ways in which teachers may set up an educational environment to support learning. According to Özerem and Akkoyunlu (2015), the learning environment is made up of all the surroundings that enable the learner to solve problems and have access to the resources that will help them attain their goals.

From there, we understand that it is concerned with the physical environment of the classroom as well as the social structure, atmosphere, norms, and values. As a result, having access to the learning environment—that is, interactions between students and resources, students and students, and students and teachers—helps students learn effectively. Studies on learning environments have been shown to concentrate on a variety of factors, including behavior management, classroom rules and discipline, student motivation, class size, teaching methods, the arrangement of classroom tools (tables, desks, etc.), and even the color of the classroom (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). For the sake of the students, school officials, teachers included, should try their utmost to create a positive or healthy learning environment. Planning classes without taking into account the classroom environment will make it challenging, if not impossible, to accomplish instructional objectives (Irambona & Kumaidi, 2015).

On the same note, Brown and Lee (2001) emphasizes that teachers should create a favourable, stimulating, and energizing environment by building connections with their pupils, achieving a balance between praise and criticism, and creating "energy." According to the same source, "rapport" is defined as the bond you develop with your students that is based on mutual respect and trust, which makes them feel capable, creative, and competent. To achieve that level, we believe that students require not only a comfortable environment but also a free learning environment that is established by their teachers by treating them with respect, providing them with assistance, paying close attention to what they have to say, and embracing their differing viewpoints. In such a supportive setting, there is no reason why students shouldn't feel inspired to actively participate in class. As a result, their academic achievement will improve accordingly.

According to Brown and Lee (2001), the term "energy" is used to mean a creative atmosphere that is sparked by the interaction of learners' engagement and propels them towards higher attainment. In order to attain meaningful learning, Gondwe (2020) states that teachers should create conducive learning settings. In this regard, learners are encouraged to explore their ideas, concepts, and challenges. Furthermore, teachers should know that a conducive

classroom setting is one that facilitates teaching and learning processes (Prameswari & Budiyanto, 2017). One strategy is for teachers to set up a variety of stimuli in the learning environment, and then learners are free to collect the information that they choose from these available stimuli (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). It was found that students are profoundly affected by what is around them—what they see, hear, and feel—when they enter the classroom (Brown & Lee, 2001).

The process of learning and academic accomplishment in a learning environment is influenced by a variety of elements, both natural and man-made. Given that the learning environment is made up of all the physical, and sensory components such as colour, lighting, space, social interaction, and furniture that characterise the place in which learners are expected to learn (Brown & Lee, 2001; Ibem et al., 2017), the classroom learning environment should be taken into account when developing teaching programs or curricula. On the same note, (Lewinski, 2015) highlights a few factors of the learning environment (classroom architecture) that may have an impact on the learners' learning results. They include light, colour, acoustics, seating arrangement, and temperature. To create a healthy learning environment, Brown and Lee (2001) suggests that teachers should control, if they have any power over them, the following elements and make sure that: (1) The classroom is neat, clean, and orderly in appearance; (2) Chalkboards are erased; (3) Chairs are appropriately arranged; (4) If the room has bulletin boards and you have the freedom to use them, can you occasionally take advantage of visuals?; (5) The classroom is as free from external noises as possible (machinery outside, street noise, hallway voices, etc.); (7) Acoustics in your classroom are at least tolerable; and (8) Heating or cooling systems (if applicable) are operating.

A supportive physical learning environment, according to Paul (2015), is one that maximizes interactions between teachers and students as well as between students. They continued by stating that it should have other environmental features that do not negatively affect the students' mental health and, as a result, provide a conducive learning environment in addition to being secure, orderly, and clean. It should also be well-ventilated, spacious, and adequately lit.

Teachers and respective Ministries of Education all over the world should value learners' ideas and ways of thinking by ensuring that the classroom situation provides opportunities to encourage learners to be engaged in their learning process, which is the bridge paving the way to their good academic achievement. They should remember that learners spend most of their time at school, which is considered their second teacher as it shapes them into what they will become in the future by teaching them knowledge and skills of life (Akamolafe & Adesua, 2015). The classroom setting appears to be the only place, in a foreign language environment like Burundi, where learners have the chance to put their communicative abilities into practice and strengthen them. As a researcher, I can say that teachers should bear in mind the role played by the classroom environment and get prepared accordingly in whatever they do in language teaching, starting from lesson planning till the evaluation stage, as it is one of the pertinent factors affecting the learners' achievement. Teachers are then advised to create a learning environment that is conducive and sparks learners' enthusiasm for learning. Furthermore, positive teacher-student relations matter a lot in that they have the power to either facilitate or hinder learners' success. For instance, it has been demonstrated that positive relationships between teacher and learner are crucial in establishing a setting that promotes learning (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2010). Under such a condition, ALSadoon (2017) notes that the classroom learning environment minimises behavioural issues and maximises learning results. In this light, it can be worked on by improving it for the sake

of learners' benefit. More importantly, learning environments should be designed in line with the needs of learners as research showed that learning environments designed with learners' needs in mind and their characteristics increase their motivation and positively impact their academic success (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). In the same vein, the learning environment should be inclusive, a place in which each and every individual learner feels at home. That is what Mavidou and Kakana (2019) mean when they say that a learning environment that welcomes every difference and provides appropriate challenges to everyone enhances self-efficacy and facilitates learning.

Although it has been observed that many teachers do not pay attention to the role of learning environment in their teaching activities (Kabir, 2010), numerous studies have conclusively shown that the classroom learning environment is one of the potent factors that contribute to students' success in reaching good academic achievement (Balchin & Wild, 2022; Irambona & Kumaidi, 2015; Odeh et al., 2015).

In a nutshell, the learning environment significantly influences how learners learn and impact their academic achievement (Ibem et al., 2017; Odeh et al., 2015). That influence could, however, be negative or positive. As an illustration, some research findings show, on the one hand, that the learning environment has a negative influence on learners' achievement (Odeh et al., 2015), and that is the case when the classroom setting lacks "good school climate, instructional materials, discipline, physical facilities, or when it has poor teacher quality." "The type of location of the school is also questionable, or when the classroom size is small and yet it is overpopulated." On the other hand, other research findings show that the school environment can positively influence learners' achievement if it is improved (Odeh et al., 2015). From these findings, we can deduce that learners always perform or respond to the circumstances or situations prevailing in their surroundings.

METHODS

This study employed the convergent mixed methods design, also known as the concurrent or parallel design. It entails gathering qualitative and quantitative data at approximately the same time, analysing each type independently, contrasting or combining them, and then interpreting the results prior to drawing possible conclusions. The target population for this study consisted of all public post-basic schools in Bujumbura Municipality, Burundi, that have a language section. This research area encompasses 32 post-basic schools with a language section, 29 teachers of English, and 1860 learners in the second and third years of the language section as constituents of the target population.

Referring to Kothari and Garg (2014), 50% of the post-basic schools in Bujumbura municipality in the languages section were applied, which came to a sample of sixteen schools that were randomly selected. Consequently, sixteen teachers of English were randomly chosen, each from the sixteen sampled schools. Using Slovin's formula and stratified sampling techniques, a sample of three hundred and thirty students was selected.

For the purpose of data collection, the researcher made use of data triangulation tools. A five-point scale questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from learners, while a fifteen-minute semi-structured interview involving four questions was addressed to teachers, and classroom observations were utilised to gather qualitative information. The interview data was recorded to be transcribed afterward. Each interviewee was assigned a code number (I1-I12) in the transcription for anonymity purposes. The validation of the data collection tools was done using expert judgment by specialists in the domain of curriculum studies. Essential corrections to the data collection tools were provided, and the researcher made sure that the

questionnaire’s items were appropriately framed in such a way that they produced what they were designed to produce. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted, and the Cronbach’s alpha test yielded a coefficient of 0.778. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively with the help of the Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22, where the mean, standard deviations, and percentages or frequencies were calculated. The mean limits that were applied to this research were interpreted as follows: 1.00–1.79 = Very Low, 1.80–2.59 = Low, 2.60–3.39 = Moderate, 3.40–4.19 = High, and 4.20–5.00 = Very High. The qualitative data were analysed using theme analysis. It involves transcription, reading and familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finalising the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A descriptive analysis was done to determine the extent to which the classroom learning environment influences the English academic achievement of learners at the post-basic school level in Bujumbura Municipality, Burundi. The results are presented in Table 1, along with the standard deviation, means, and percentages.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Table of the Classroom Context

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
Our teacher creates an inclusive and caring classroom environment in which I feel welcome	12	26	57	121	100	3.85	1.072
	3.8%	8.2%	18.0%	38.3%	31.6%		
Our English teacher greets us when he/she enters the classroom	10	8	29	97	172	4.30	.964
	3.2%	2.5%	9.2%	30.7%	54.4%		
Our English teacher motivates us to speak in English	6	10	24	121	155	4.29	.883
	1.9%	3.2%	7.6%	38.3%	49.1%		
Our English teacher calls us by name	9	20	49	136	102	3.95	.994
	2.8%	6.3%	15.5%	43.0%	32.3%		
In our classroom, we as learners collaborate by studying together	22	31	59	113	91	3.69	1.185
	7.0%	9.8%	18.7%	35.8%	28.8%		
Our classroom surroundings are quiet (free of noise from outside)	55	76	57	84	44	2.95	1.327
	17.4%	24.1%	18.0%	26.6%	13.9%		
Our classroom is overpopulated,	74	65	59	80	38	2.81	1.360
	23.4%	20.6%	18.7%	25.3%	12.0%		
The class size has a negative effect on the English learning process	102	91	51	52	20	2.35	1.260
	32.3%	28.8%	16.1%	16.5%	6.3%		
The physical conditions of school and classroom have a negative effect on my English learning process	112	76	49	47	32	2.40	1.363
	35.4%	24.1%	15.5%	14.9%	10.1%		
Overall Mean and Standard Deviation						3.405	.5030

Legend:

(SD) = Strongly Disagree, (D) = Disagree, (N) = Neutral, (A) = Agree, (SA) = Strongly Agree, Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation (Source: Research Data (2022))

The majority of students (69.9%) agree that their teachers fostered a friendly and inclusive classroom environment, as shown by the mean of 3.85 and its corresponding standard deviation of 1.072 in the Table 1. Similar to this, 85.1% of students (mean = 4.30, SD = .964) reported that their English teachers greet them when they enter the classroom. In the teachers’ interview, every teacher admitted that they greet their learners before teaching them when they enter the classroom. Additional evidence for this came from the researcher's observations of classroom activity. Respondent I5 asserted that before doing anything else, she always extends a greeting.

We can infer from the findings above how close the majority of the teachers were to their learners. Greeting and welcoming learners in class prior to classroom instruction creates positive feelings in learners and boosts their engagement. According to [Ahmed \(2022\)](#), when teachers started class by welcoming students at the door, academic engagement rose by 20 percentage points, and disruptive behaviour dropped by nine percentage points. In the same way, it was discovered that if learners get greetings from their teachers at the onset of class, this means that they are prompted to engage in a good academic atmosphere and therefore exhibit on-task behaviour more quickly than those who do not receive this kind of attention ([Allday et al., 2011](#)). In other words, this demonstrates that all teachers made an effort to provide a supportive classroom learning environment for their students. According to them, dealing with individuals when you don't know who they are or how they feel can be challenging. Therefore, if you want to build a solid relationship with your learners, you must learn everything there is to know about them, including their names. In addition to feeling supported and respected in their learning environment, learners must also feel physically and mentally safe. These results are in agreement with [Baafi \(2021\)](#) findings. Student-teacher relationships were found to have a strong impact on students' academic achievement ($r = 0.60$; $p < 0.05$). Similar findings were found in [Kerubo \(2020\)](#) study, which indicated that students' academic performance is influenced by their teachers' positive interactions with them.

In terms of language learning, teachers should ensure that the learning environment they provide for their learners is conducive. [Dewaele and Pavelescu \(2021\)](#) meant the same thing when they asserted that teachers are the primary actors in fostering delightful environments in the ecology of second language instruction. This means that they should establish a learning environment designed to encourage interactions between learners and teachers as well as between learners and instructional resources that allow them to communicate effectively using the language. It is generally acknowledged that it is the duty of the teacher to establish a "favourable learning environment" that gives learners opportunities to interact with one another in communicative ways while engaging in real-world activities. This is what [Corder \(1990\)](#) meant when she said that learning can only take place in an appropriate environment. This backs up [Syomwene \(2016\)](#) statement that a positive learning setting improves communication, while a nervous and stiff one brings invisible hindrances to it. English teachers must then foster a welcoming learning environment in the classroom in order to encourage students to feel included and engaged in the teaching and learning process. Teachers should, however, keep in mind that developing welcoming learning environments does not happen overnight. It is a protracted process that calls for patience and self-involvement in the beginning. According to [Loveless \(2022\)](#), it is a protracted process that is done through deliberate actions, such as having positive interactions with learners, acting pleasantly, etc., which promote learning activities in the learning environment. Teachers should always remember that they are parents of their learners at school; thereby, they should develop positive relationships with them so that they feel welcome and encourage them to approach or ask questions freely whenever needed. Teachers should then make an ongoing effort to build and sustain a favourable rapport with their students. This falls in line with the OECD's (2010) findings, which say that effective teacher-student interactions are vital for establishing an environment that is conducive to learning. [Pishghadam et al. \(2021\)](#) stated that for them to be effective, teachers need to be taught how to create a joyful learning environment by exhibiting respect and care for pupils and building on positive teacher-student interpersonal ties.

Table 1 also indicated that 87.4% of the respondents asserted that they were highly motivated by their teachers to speak English (Mean = 4.29, SD = .8830), and this coincided with

the information collected from teachers' interviews. When asked if they motivate learners to learn English and why they do so, most of the interviewees answered that they motivate them by focusing on the importance of English. One of the respondents (I9) stated that he does it because knowing English is like holding the key to the universe. He stated it in the following words: "I always motivate them. I do it because I want them to know why they are learning English and to see the importance of it. I tell them that if they know English, the door of the universe will be open for them." Another teacher (I2) claimed that he inspired his learners by emphasising that English is used everywhere, from their immediate surroundings to the rest of the world. He outlined the many benefits of knowing English for individuals looking to continue their education abroad. The way I2 put it was as follows:

"I motivate them when teaching, for example, by showing them the importance of English, especially in our everyday lives, because, as you see, even when you look around us, many things are written in English, and even when they go to study outside of this country to continue their studies, most of the countries use the English language. That's why most of the time I emphasise the importance of learning the English language."

The researcher saw in the classroom that some teachers made an effort to inspire their learners. The majority of them used a variety of strategies, such as presenting brief stories, to get the pupils in the right frame of mind for studying.

The results of the learners' questionnaire revealed that they were very motivated to speak English. This is an excellent beginning because motivation is crucial for any activity, especially in the language-learning process. This is consistent with [Daif-Allah and Aljumah \(2020\)](#) study, which revealed that the students had a strong desire to learn English. They went on to say that motivation plays a key role in shaping students' perceptions of learning a foreign language. The claim made by [Mehndroo and Vandana \(2020\)](#) that motivation is viewed as a significant component of everyone's desires, actions, and needs is also consistent with this. It is therefore, straightforward to argue that motivated learners develop the eagerness, excitement, desire, and curiosity necessary for grasping the value of learning.

Similarly, motivation plays a significant role in achieving good linguistic outcomes, which traditionally include the language's knowledge structure—vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation—as well as its four fundamental language skills—listening, understanding, reading, and writing ([Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015](#)). This was witnessed by the researcher in some schools where the majority of the learners were engaged, attempting to communicate in English. The enthusiasm to learn English was also validated by the fact that a number of learners approached the researcher after he had finished making classroom observations and asked for advice on how they could enhance their English communication.

Despite the fact that motivation by itself cannot predict a learner's academic progress, it matters more in determining their success. It keeps students informed about their educational endeavours. Without motivation, it is hard to expect positive rewards. This viewpoint is in line with [Bandura and Walters \(1977\)](#) assertion that any work requires motivation to be accomplished. Either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation may be present. This is consistent with [Xu \(2011\)](#) findings, which proved that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a significant role in determining language learning success. This goes in tandem with other studies, such as those by [Qin and Wen \(2002\)](#) and [Qing \(1991\)](#), which revealed that motivation is an important aspect of learning a second language as well as affecting learners' academic achievement. Since motivation directly affects all aspects of the learning process, including how frequently the learner uses their learning strategies, their learning willpower, the way they set their study goals, and their learning persistence, it has been discovered that motivation can influence learners'

success or failure when learning a second language. In a similar vein, this can be inferred from [Guo and Bai \(2022\)](#) research findings, which demonstrated that academic achievement rises or falls according to how great or low the motivation is. It emerged that the stronger the motivation to learn English, the higher the English academic performance, and the weaker the motivation to learn English, the weaker the English academic performance. Consequently, when learners are not motivated, there is no pulse, and thus, there is no life in the class ([Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015](#)).

Moreover, learners were asked to rate how they got along in terms of working and studying together. The findings showed that 64.4% of the learners had positive interactions since they claimed to work together while studying (mean = 3.69, SD = 1.185). This was backed up by the interview's findings, where teachers said that learners helped one another. One of the interviewees (17) acknowledged that even without their teachers, her learners had grown to have a spirit of cooperation, and this was confirmed by the classroom observation's findings when the researcher witnessed how they were cooperating and having group discussions once assigned topics for debates. They were supporting each other, and this was approved by the classroom observations. This is backed up by [Surr et al. \(2018\)](#) when they stated that collaborative learning is a good educational strategy to use among other teaching tactics because it aids learners in solving their social-emotional needs and is linked with a number of extra advantages such as increased motivation and a deeper understanding of fundamental concepts.

According to [Chang and Brickman \(2018\)](#), group work works under certain conditions. To be effective, however, each learner needs to participate with the help of their teachers. To encourage each learner to participate, they suggested a series of techniques teachers should use, including but not limited to assigning roles to learners, group contracts, anonymous peer evaluations, and peer ratings. On the basis of that, the researcher noticed that students were working in groups during some speaking comprehension lessons when they were given themes to work on before sharing them with the entire class. However, some teachers failed to monitor whether learners were doing what they were assigned to do. One of the teachers (19) admitted that it is not easy to keep track of all learners' activities due to the large number of students they have. On top of that, some teachers were asking the volunteers to respond or present what they came up with after their group work. These findings agree with those of [Darko and Wang \(2021\)](#), who observed that teachers' poor management in coordinating group members during collaborative work and learners' unequal engagement in the groups were among the major issues found in group work. Drawing on [Bandura and Walters \(1977\)](#) Social Learning Theory, collaborative work should offer learners chances to observe what their teammates are doing. In doing so, they support one another by showing, demonstrating, or modeling how a particular task is done before retaining it through rehearsals. Collaborative learning also gives learners an advantage in replicating what they have seen, retained, or learned from their peers as observers. Learners become more inspired as they keep repeating what they have seen or heard from their peers based on social (classroom) comments or feedback.

In regard to the surroundings of the respective schools, 40.5% of the total respondents responded that the noise from outside their classrooms kept them from paying attention in class (mean = 2.95, SD = 1.327), which implies that the area around the schools was moderately noisy. That was witnessed by the researcher during his classroom observations. It was noticed that some schools were built in relatively quiet places, far from any significant disturbances, but there were others that were situated in busy cities with lots of traffic, people, and even machinery noises. One of the teachers (13) who took part in the interview complained that teaching a large number of learners in a noisy environment is a double challenge since he has

to shout to be heard. That was supported by the classroom observations when the researcher saw that there are some schools that are built next to the road. We can point out, for instance, Musaga and Kanyosha Municipal Lycées, whose walls are erected less than 10 meters from the road. Other schools were either located in busy areas, like near markets or simply close to the roadways. We can mainly mention Gikungu Municipal Lycée, Mutanga Municipal Lycée, COMIBU Buyenzi Lycée, Buyenzi Municipal Lycée, and Kamenge Municipal Lycée. These findings are consistent with those from teachers' interviews. The majority of the teachers from the sampled schools reported that it made their teaching activities challenging because they had to shout to get everyone's attention. They also confirmed that learners had a hard time catching what was being taught. This obviously indicates that the current scenario jeopardizes teaching and learning activities by impairing learners' ability to hear lessons clearly and exhausting teachers. On the learners' end, it kills their interest in learning and lowers their academic performance because it's difficult for them to learn effectively.

According to [Buchari and Matondang \(2017\)](#); [Connolly et al. \(2015\)](#); [Gilavand and Jamshidnezhad \(2016\)](#), their findings demonstrated that noise had detrimental effects on learners' academic achievement. For instance, the findings of research by [Connolly et al. \(2015\)](#) on the perceptions of school acoustics and the impact of noise on teaching and learning in secondary schools found that noise has a negative impact on learners' learning. Additionally, it was found to be worse in schools with open classroom layouts or those built near sources of external noise. According to [Buchari and Matondang \(2017\)](#) research, the noise might impair learners' ability to speak effectively and make them lose focus while working on their school-work. The results also showed that noise might even cause learners' achievement to decline because they are constantly exposed to noise. All of the above information indicates how learners who attend schools in busy or noisy settings endure during their academic journeys. The government should, therefore, take into account the effect of noise when it comes to building schools. The sites of schools should be one of the other important things to think about. If not, learners will become scapegoats.

On top of that, the table indicated that 37.3% of the learners said that their classrooms were overcrowded (mean = 2.81, SD = 1.360), which suggests that their classrooms were moderately crowded. However, the findings from classroom observations were different. In most of the visited schools, only six of the sixteen visited schools had a few learners in each class, with a range of eight to forty learners per class. Other classes were overpopulated. It was obvious that teachers were struggling to engage all learners in the learning activities. Teachers found it challenging to walk freely across rows to help students who were working in groups, and this had a bad effect on learners' academic performance. It was found that in such conditions, it is hard for learners to pay attention or participate with the required level of intensity due to the noise made by peers and their restive character, which negatively affects learners' academic achievement ([Marais, 2016](#)). In light of the current situation, teachers of English were asked to suggest some changes that may be made to the classroom learning environment for its improvement. Most of them argued for building more schools or adding classrooms to help balance out the large class numbers.

When asked if the number of their classmates had a negative impact on how they learned, the vast majority of the learners (61.1%) indicated that their respective class sizes had a low or little impact on their English learning process (mean = 2.35, SD = 1.260). In contradistinction to the above findings, [Park et al. \(2020\)](#) found that overcrowding conditions in classrooms affected students' academic performance negatively since it made it difficult for them to concentrate. Oddly, this research found that only a small percentage of learners (22.8%)

acknowledged that the class size had a negative impact on their ability to learn English when asked if they felt that the size of the class hindered their progress. The standard deviation was 1.260, and the mean score was 2.35. In their opinion, class size had little impact on the students' learning of English. In contrast, 61.1% of the students said that the size of the class had no effect on their progress in learning English. Most interviewees, nevertheless, didn't agree with that idea. It is challenging to support every learner in huge classes, according to the results of their interviews. As a result, learning becomes challenging, especially for students of languages like English, where they must learn the language through practice. Most of the classrooms the researcher visited each had more than 50 learners. Teachers complained about the enormous number of learners they had and suggested that the government build more classrooms or enlarge schools in order to get rid of that situation. In certain schools, three or even four students would share a bench. The researcher pondered how learners would complete their homework because they were not comfortably seated. This is yet another element that could affect their academic achievement.

As an example, it was observed how few learners were given chances to talk during a lesson. This is a major problem, especially for language learners, as we know that practice makes perfect. Learners should be taught how to communicate in both written and spoken English. To put it another way, it shows that learners' English learning was impacted in some way. The learners' points of view are different from [Ayeni and Olowe \(2016\)](#) study, which discovered that classroom size had an impact on learners' teaching and learning. The latter claimed that managing large classes, controlling learners, preparing and assessing lessons, and not forgetting copymarking are all more difficult tasks when dealing with large classes. They added that it is simpler, for instance, to identify problems among learners and provide them with feedback in smaller classrooms, as well as to recognize their unique needs and modify the teaching tactics accordingly, which is not possible in large classes. In a similar vein, Bethel University's research on students' achievement in 2019 found that the 32% decrease in class size enhanced learners' achievement. According to the study, teachers have the chance to give their students personalized education when there are fewer students in the class, something that is not possible in larger classes.

These findings are in tandem with many other studies that found out that the smaller the class size, the higher the learners' academic achievement, in that all parties, that is, parents, teachers, and learners, are involved, collaborate easily, and consequently make it easy to help each other when needed ([Barrett et al., 2019](#); [Mondjila, 2019](#)). From this, we can say that it is incumbent on the government to build more schools so that learners can study comfortably. If nothing is done, students and teachers will be held accountable for problems over which they have no control. Learners, especially, will be scapegoats, and using the English language communicatively will only be in official documents.

Finally, the findings of this research indicate that the overall mean of how much the classroom context affects learners' achievement is 3.405, with a standard deviation of 0.5030. This suggests that, in the eyes of the learners, the classroom context has a high influence on their achievement. These findings may be explained by a number of research results where it was found that different factors, including lack of good class climate, instructional materials, discipline, physical facilities, or teacher quality, school location, conditions of school buildings, class sizes, as well as the learning environment, have a big influence on learners' academic achievement ([Abdullah et al., 2020](#); [Aneke, 2022](#); [Odeh et al., 2015](#); [Shamaki, 2015](#); [Usaini et al., 2015](#)).

In a nutshell, as the classroom learning context affects learners' academic achievement, teachers and respective governments, each at their own level, should ensure that the learning

environment is conducive. It needs to be adjusted from time to time to appeal to learners, depending on what is being targeted and their level. On the same note, Abdullah et al. (2020) noted that it is essential to reform the learning environment so that it becomes reliable and realistic in relation to real-world situations or contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to determine how much the classroom environment influences the academic achievement of post-basic English curriculum learners in Burundi. Drawing on the findings of this study, it was discovered that the classroom learning environment influenced learners' academic achievements at a high level (overall mean = 3.405; SD: 0.5030). This might have been the result of some factors, including overcrowded classes, noisy environments, and the condition of some classrooms, just to mention a few. This high level of influence it had on learners' academic achievement should not be overlooked.

Drawing on these study findings, the Ministry of Education in Burundi should establish optimum conditions in classroom settings to raise learners' academic achievement, be it by constructing new, sufficient, and modern classrooms or renovating the ones in dilapidated conditions. In addition to that, the government of Burundi should consider relocating schools built in noisy environments. It was shown how important the classroom learning environment is in influencing learners' achievement. Teachers of English were also recommended to pay attention to the classroom learning environment and modify it to reduce the high impact it has on learners' academic achievement.

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