



Scrutinizing Communication Gaps Bridging Efforts by Universities' Language Centers in Rwanda: The Case of AUCA, UTB and UNILAK

BY

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Abstract

Communication has always been a tool everyone needs to successfully accomplish their mission. This study aimed at assessing the efforts invested by universities in Rwanda through their language centers in bridging communication gaps. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the languages taught by universities' language centers in Rwanda, to indicate the rate at which languages are taught by centers and to suggest how possible communication constraints among students can be addressed. Moreover, three questions were asked to try to meet the aforementioned objectives: which languages are taught by universities' language centers in Rwanda? to what extent are the languages taught by universities' language centers? which solutions can adequately address the problems hindering communication among students? Indeed, the main problem that triggered the researcher to embark on this study is that no single research study has ever been conducted to find out ways of narrowing communication gaps among university students in Rwanda through language centers. Furthermore, a questionnaire, interview, documentation, and observation were used as techniques of data collection. The findings revealed that language centers play an important role in bridging communication gaps among students but with more efforts needed to satisfactorily meet this goal since the respondents confirmed that only English is taught at a greater percentage (85.1%). There is a need therefore to reinforce the teaching by introducing more languages. The study recommended that university centers in Rwanda introduce more languages to better close existing communication gaps.

Keywords: Communication, socialization, message decoding, multilingualism, and lingua franca.

INTRODUCTION

Rwanda is increasingly becoming an amazing destination for many people. People from all walks of life enter the country for a number of reasons including vacation, business, education, tourism, to mention but a few. With regard to this, a number of universities have tried to bridge this communication gap through the establishment of language centers in which a number of languages are taught depending on applicants' language of interest. Through observation, one can easily see that English as a global lingua franca takes preeminence over other languages. The work at hand sought to assess the efforts invested by universities' language centers in bridging communication gaps between local students and their international counterparts.

Research objectives

Like any other scientific study, this work at hand aimed at achieving a both the main and specific objectives.

Main objective

This study sought to scrutinize the efforts invested in bridging communication gaps among universities' language centers in Rwanda.

Specific objectives

The study intended to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To find out the languages taught by universities' language centers in Rwanda
- To indicate the rate at which languages are taught by centers
- To suggest how possible communication constraints among students can be addressed

Research questions

The following questions guided this study:

- ❖ Which languages are taught by universities' language centers in Rwanda?



- ❖ To what extent are the languages taught by universities' language centers?
- ❖ Which solutions can adequately address the problems hindering communication among students?

Hypotheses

According to Pandey and Mishra (2015), the word hypothesis consists of two words –Hypo+Thesis. 'Hypo' means tentative or subject to the verification. 'Thesis' means statement about solution of the problem. Thus the literal meaning of the term hypothesis is a tentative statement about the solution of the problem. Hypothesis offers a solution of the problem that is to be verified empirically and based on some rationale. In view of this, the researcher formulated two hypotheses: One null hypothesis and one alternative hypothesis as capture below:

- Universities' language centers in Rwanda do not teach languages at the same level
- International students have difficulty communicating with local communities

Problem statement

The conducive environment in Rwanda has continued to attract people from all walks of life. Not only do people come to Rwanda to do business or for sightseeing purpose, but they also land into the country for their education. Since some of these international students speak languages other than Kinyarwanda and English, the languages that are visibly predominant in Rwanda, they find it hard to socialize with Rwandans. Aware of these linguistic barriers, universities in Rwanda established language centers to deal with the matter. However, even if the centers are in place, communication gaps are still witnessed, especially when an international student has to go to the outside community for purposes such as shopping, touring the city, attending parties, to mention but a few. Also, since more Kinyarwanda is used outside the campus, the international students will always have difficulty interacting with many Rwandans out there. To hit the nail on the head, the problem is that no study has ever been conducted on ways through which Rwandan universities can adequately address communication gaps among students, yet it is clear that communication gaps are not fully bridged to enable international students to enjoy a wonderful stay in Rwanda where English and Kinyarwanda are predominant.

METHODOLOGY

This study was both qualitative and quantitative in that part of its data did not call for the use of statistics to be presented and interpreted. On the other hand, it used SPSS V.20 to analyze the findings. With SPSS, the researcher was able to present the data in figures (histograms) before interpreting them. Besides, the data were gathered using data collection tools including a questionnaire, interview, observation, and documentation. Three universities participated in the study, i.e., the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA), the University of Lay Adventists of Kigali (UNILAK), and the University of Tourism and Business Studies (UTB).

Population of the study

One hundred forty-five (145) respondents took part in the study as the total population. As the statistics indicated, AUCA was more represented than any other pilot university; and this was attributed to the fact that this university had more candidates in its language center by the time the study was conducted. It should be noted that respondents were solely the candidates who were enrolled for language training by the time the study was conducted. Not all university students were eligible for data provision. Consequently, UTB and UNILAK were respectively ranked second and third in terms of representation in the study.

Sampling

Given the fact that the total population was easy to manage, the researcher opted for one-stage sampling, also known as single-stage cluster sampling, because the latter is believed to be a method where every element within the selected clusters will become a part of the sample group¹. The clusters in this study were that of AUCA, UTB, and the one of UNILAK. In light of this, the entire population, 145 language candidates who were having language training at the centers, were considered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Under this section, the study discusses the write-ups by various scholars which in one way or another are related to the topic under discussion. But first, it is worth throwing some light on what the selected universities are.

More about AUCA

The Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) was founded in 1978. The official opening took place on 15 October 1984 and the university had its definitive operating license via the law n0 0056/05 of 3rd February 1988, granting AUCA the legal personality as a nonprofit-making association. At its inception, the University was located at Mudende, former Mutura Commune, Gisenyi Prefecture. Following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, AUCA temporarily suspended its activities. From 7 May 1996, University relocated to Kigali City, and reopened a transition Campus at Gishushu, Rukiri III, Remera Sector, Kacyiru District. From that time, the University operated with only four faculties: Business Administration, Information Technology, Education, and Theology.²

Information about UTB

The University of Tourism, Technology and Business Studies(UTB) began operations back in 2006 and it is renowned for having been the very first institution to introduce hospitality and tourism courses in Rwanda. before introducing business, arts, and social science programmes, the university was known as Rwanda Tourism University College (RTUC).³

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.voxco.com/blog/cluster-sampling/> on 01 April, 2024.

² Retrieved from <https://auca.ac.rw/auca-background/> on 28 March, 2024

³ Retrieved from <https://www.utb.ac.rw/utb-history/> on 28 March, 2024

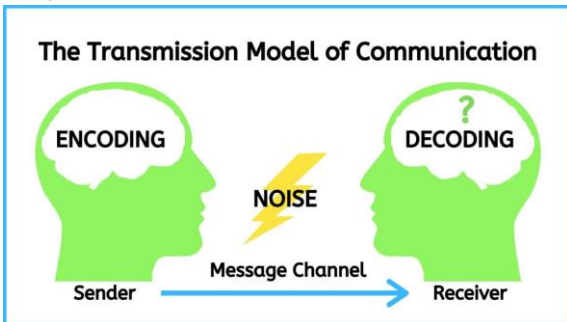
About UNILAK

The University of Lay Adventists of Kigali (UNILAK) was created by the Federation of Adventist Parents Associations for the Development of Education in Rwanda (FAPADER) which is an association of several lay Seventh-day Adventist proprietorship of secondary school associations UNILAK was approved through the Convention No. 001 of 03 February 1997, which was signed between the Government of the Republic of Rwanda, and FAPADER. The University’s Headquarters are located in the City of Kigali, Gasabo District, Remera Sector. UNILAK has also expanded its activities in the Southern province (Nyanza) and Eastern Province (Rwamagana) and the two campuses operate with a competitive modern boarding facility. UNILAK has four faculties offered both in undergraduate and master’s level.⁴

As WorldAtlas (2024) puts it, Rwanda is a small landlocked country located in East Africa. Language is central to the culture and belief system of the Rwandese people. The people of Rwanda mainly speak three major languages: Kinyarwanda, French, and English. These three languages are also official. Interactions with other members of the East African community have led to the introduction of the Swahili language into the country, especially for trade purposes. The pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial, as well as the post-genocide periods of the country have influenced the adoption and use of these languages.

Transmission Model of Communication

This study was guided by the Transmission Model of communication which describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver (Ellis & McClintock, 1990).



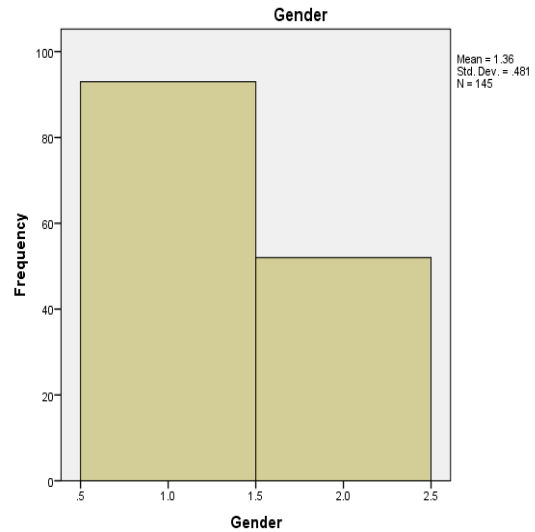
Source:⁵

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The tables and histograms presented under this section indicate the information got from 145 respondents from the three pilot universities.

Table 1: Respondents’ gender

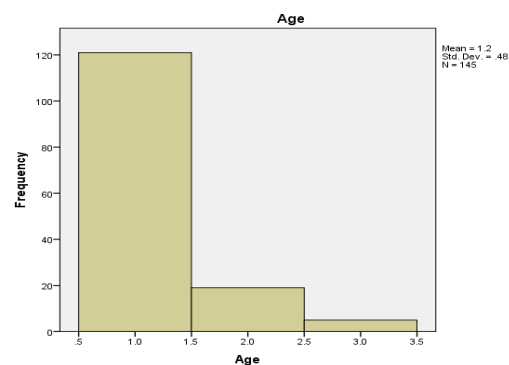
S/N	Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Male	93	64
2	Female	52	36
Total		145	100



As table 1 with its corresponding figure indicate, male respondents outnumber female respondents with 93(64%) representing male respondents against 52(36%) female respondents. This justifies that the study was not biased since it gave space to both men and women. This, therefore, leave no room for the questionability of the findings herein as the representation favored both sides.

Table 2: Respondents’ age

S/N	Age group	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Between 18-25 years	121	83.4
2	Between 26-35 years	19	13.1
3	Between 36-50 years	5	3.4
Total		145	100



⁴ Retrieved from <https://site.unilak.ac.rw/whoware/> on 28 March, 2024.

⁵ Figure accessed via <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/communicationnursing/chapter/transmission-model-of-communication/> on 28 March, 2024.



As table 2 with its corresponding figure reveal, 121 (83.4%) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years; 19 (13.1%) were aged between 26 and 35 years; whereas 5(3.4%) were aged between 36 and 50 years old.

It is worth noting that none of the respondents was aged above 50 years. With these age groups, it is obvious that the information provided by these respondents can be relied on since they are all mature enough to understand and respond to questions.

Table 3: Respondents' position

S/N	Position	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Student	138	95.2
2	Trainer	4	2.8
3	Director	3	2
Total		145	100

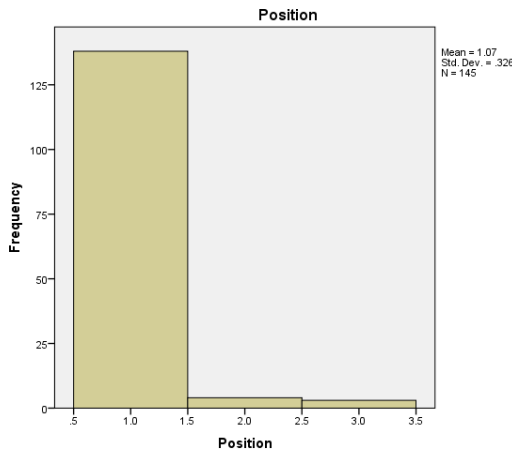


Table 3 with its corresponding figure indicate that respondents were made of students (95.2%), trainers (2.8%), and center directors (2%). As clearly indicated, the students outnumbered other categories. This was very helpful because the aim of the study was to find out whether learners do not face linguistic barriers inside and outside the campus.

Some hail from foreign countries, a factor that calls for the use of English to better interact with Rwandans since this is the leading language that easily connects foreigners to Rwandans.

The data provided by the students therefore enabled the researcher to have clear information on the status of communication barriers among university students in Rwanda.

Table 4: Respondents' university

S/N	University	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	AUCA	79	54.5
2	UTB	55	38.9

3	UNILAK	11	7.6
Total		145	100

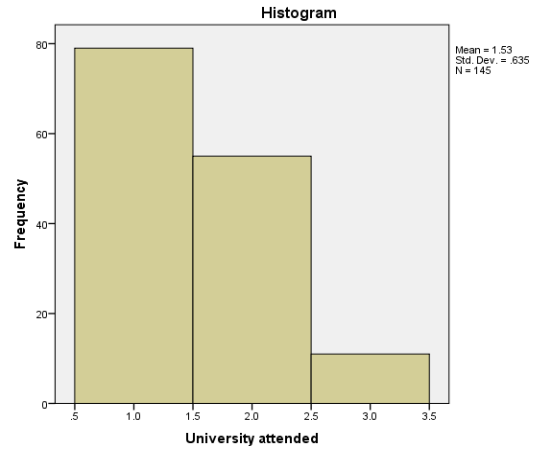


Table 4 with its accompanying histogram indicate that AUCA was represented by 79 respondents (54.5%); UTB by 55(38.9%); while UNILAK was the least represented with 11 respondents, i.e. 7.6%. The imbalance in terms of representation were due to the fact that only candidates who were enrolled by the time the study was conducted took part in the study. However, these imbalances did not prevent the researcher from getting the perceptions of respondents on communication barriers within their universities.

Table 5: Respondents' level of education

S/N	Level of education	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Secondary school	71	49
2	Bachelor's level	69	47.6
3	Master's	1.5	3.4
Total		145	100

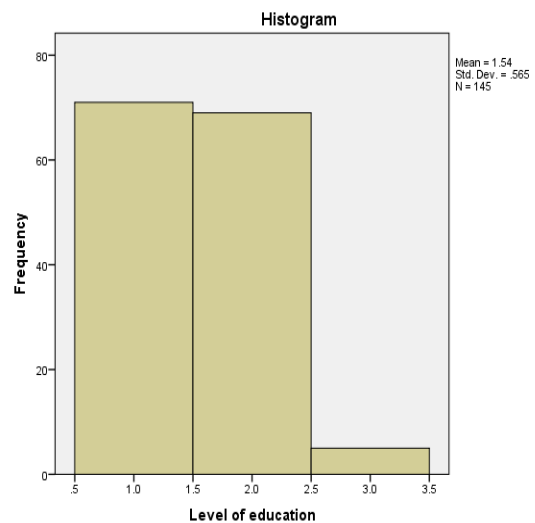


Table 5 with its corresponding figure highlight that respondents ranged from high school, bachelor's, and master's graduates.

The number of secondary school and bachelor's graduates were relatively equal with the former counting 71(49%) respondents while the latter counted 69(47.6%). Master's respondents were at a lower level, 5 (3.4%). This is understandable since most of the candidates at university language centers in Rwanda are high school and bachelor's graduates pursuing their studies at those particular universities. The small representation of master's respondents is expected to be that of center trainers and directors who answered the questions on the questionnaire.

Table 6: Languages studied at university centers

S/N	Position	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	English	57	85.1
2	French	11	16.4
3	Kiswahili	2	3
4	Kinyarwanda	15	22.4
5	Other	8	11.9

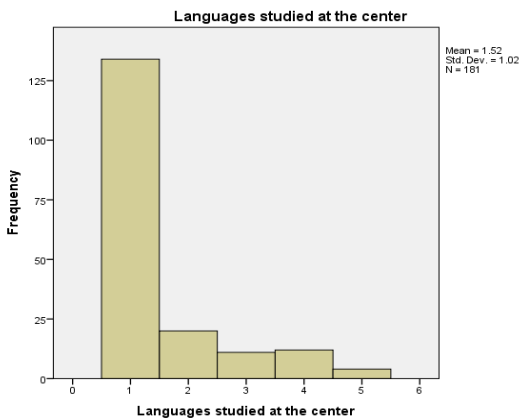


Table 6 with its corresponding figure show that centers teach a number of languages such as English, French, Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, and others. However, it was found out that they predominantly receive English language candidates; and this is what led to the highest rate of respondents who confirmed studying English as compared to other languages. This is a serious gap because Rwanda receives international students who wish to interact with Rwandans outside the classroom, and the only medium of communication one needs to talk to all Rwandans is Kinyarwanda. English language is spoken by a small portion of the Rwandan population (NISR, 2022) despite the fact that English is a medium of instruction in all public schools from primary to tertiary level.

Moreover, there are some Rwandans who wish to do business beyond the Anglophone hemisphere. Such Rwandans need centers which can train them in other international languages such as French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, German, etc. In an

interview with one of the directors of the centers, he confirmed that their center solely teaches English, nothing else. *“We don't teach various languages. We only teach English because this is the medium of instruction here, and it helps students from countries where English is not the medium of instruction to do better in the studies”*, he said.

Additionally, the researcher asked one of the directors of center if they have a written document stating clearly admission criteria to center language programmes, and the director underscored that there is nothing of the kind. *“We don't have a document on admission criteria. We only inform our students who have language difficulties to register on their free will for language short courses”*, he said. The absence of such a document was, through the lens of the researcher, perceived as a barrier towards high numbers of candidates learning languages other than English.

Table 7: Socialization between local and international students

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning at the center improves the level of socialization between local and international students	Strongly agree	90 (62.1%)
	Agree	40 (27.6%)
	Neutral	11 (7.6%)
	Disagree	2 (1.4%)
	Strongly disagree	2 (1.4%)
Total		145 (100%)

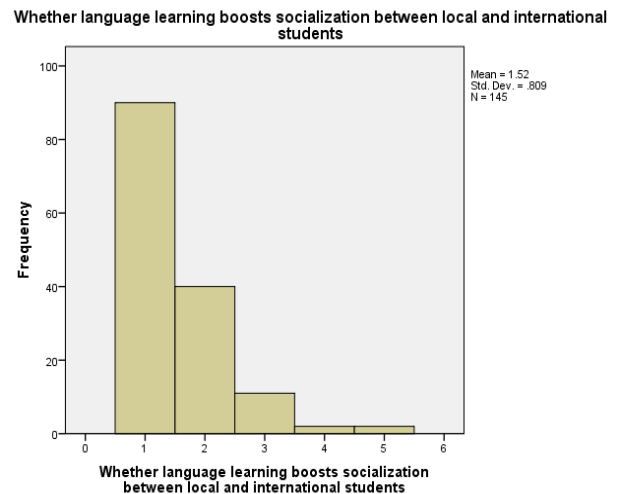


Table 7 with its corresponding figure succinctly show that most of the respondents (27.6% and 62.1%) agreed and strongly agreed that language learning enables them to socialize with their peers from other nationalities. This justifies therefore the relevance of language centers within the premises of universities in Rwanda. Also, the significance is justified by the smallest number of those who went neutral on the statement 11 (7.6%) and those who disagreed and strongly disagreed whose number was equal 2 (1.4%).



Table 8: Ability to understand other courses

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning enables students to understand other courses	Strongly agree	84 (57.9%)
	Agree	45 (31%)
	Neutral	10 (6.9%)
	Disagree	3 (2.1%)
	Strongly disagree	3 (2.1%)
Total		145 (100%)

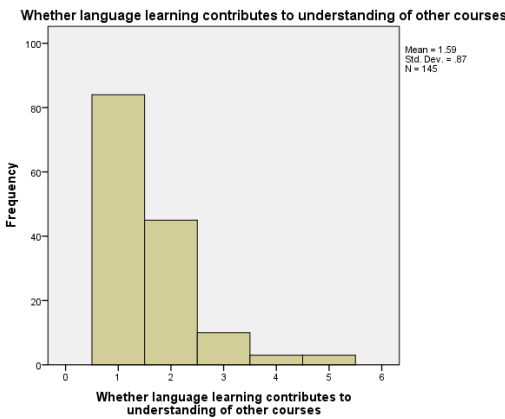


Table 8 with its corresponding figure show that the respondents' level of agreement is high with 57.9% having said that they strongly agree that learning a language enables them to understand other subjects, and 31% stressed the same. This signifies that universities need to put more efforts in teaching languages, especially the medium of instruction so as to help students digest contents of other courses(modules).

Table 9: Language learning and teacher-learner relationships

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning improves teacher-learner relationships	Strongly agree	77 (53.1%)
	Agree	52 (35.9%)
	Neutral	11 (7.6%)
	Disagree	2 (1.4%)
	Strongly disagree	3 (2.1%)
Total		145 (100%)

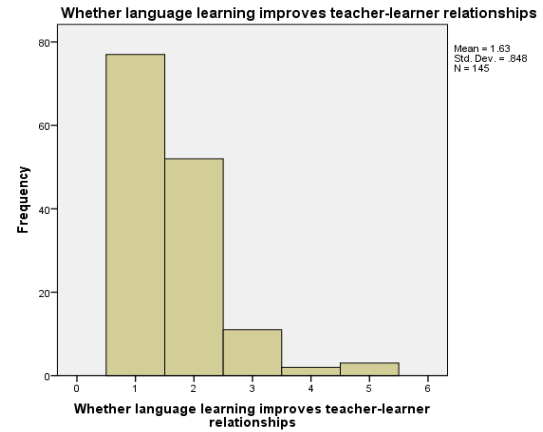


Table 9 with its corresponding figure indicate that the level of agreement is high among the respondents whereby 53.1% said that they strongly agree, while 35.9% agree that language learning enables them to enjoy better relationships with their teachers (lecturers). This stands as a convincing factor that for better relationships with their lecturers, students need to be taught languages since communication is held through languages especially the medium of instruction, English in the case of Rwanda. Moreover, one respondent stated in an interview that he can now communicate with everyone: “I came unable to speak English, but a few months have gone by, and I am able to speak my mind in English.”

Table 10: Ability to submit claims

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning enables students to submit claims	Strongly agree	76 (52.4%)
	Agree	48 (33.1%)
	Neutral	15 (10.3%)
	Disagree	2 (1.4%)
	Strongly disagree	4 (2.8%)
Total		145 (100%)

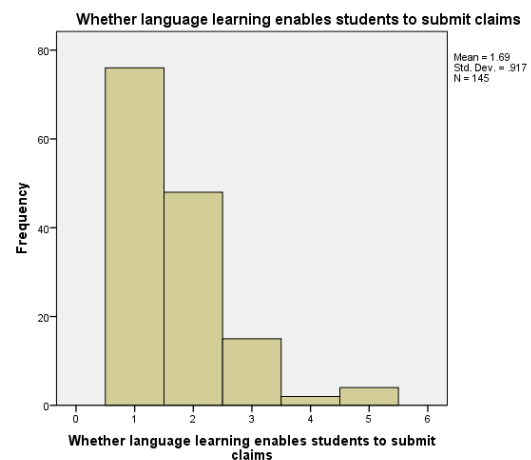
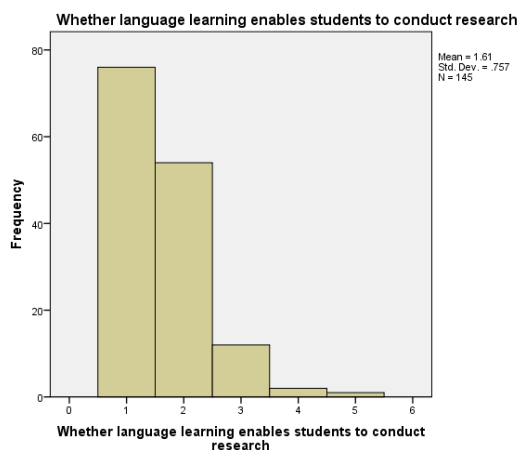


Table 10 with the accompanying figure highlight whether language learning enables students to submit their claims to their authorities. As the figures indicate, the majority of the

respondents said that with language learning they are able to submit their claims to university officials. Statistically, 52.4% strongly agreed, while 33.1% agreed. With this, it is clear that languages a language serves as a communication tool between students and university officials. With regard to this, it is imperative to teach languages to remove all barriers hindering the flow of information between students and officials. On the other hand, a small number of respondents opted for neutrality 15 (10.3%), while others 2 (1.4%) and 4 (2.8%) respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed to the statement that learning enables students to submit claims.

Table 11: Ability to conduct research

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning enables students to submit claims	Strongly agree	76 (52.4%)
	Agree	54 (37.2%)
	Neutral	12 (8.3%)
	Disagree	2 (1.4%)
	Strongly disagree	1 (0.7%)
Total		145 (100%)



Research is one of the assignments a university student cannot escape. It is conducted whether for acclimating with the way surveys are carried out or simply for completing some academic assignments handed to the student. Indeed, most of higher learning institutions recommend carrying out a study and compiling a dissertation/thesis before graduating. The level of agreement as indicated in table 11 therefore whereby 52.4% strongly agreed, and 37.2% agreed that they can conduct research after learning languages serves a testament that language teaching is the most powerful weapon to use among university students before conducting research. Indeed, the rate of neutrality (8.3%), disagreement (1.4%) and strong disagreement (0.7%) was very low.

Table 12: Ability to do assignments

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning enables students to do assignments	Strongly agree	97 (66.9%)
	Agree	37 (25.5%)
	Neutral	7 (4.8%)
	Disagree	4 (2.8%)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0%)
Total		145 (100%)

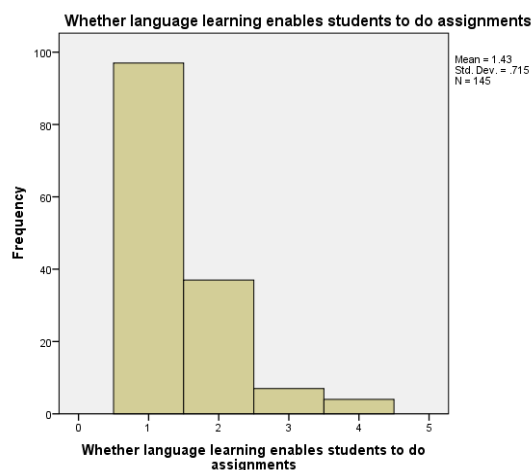


Table 12 clearly indicates that the respondents are confident enough that with language learning, they can easily complete their assignments. This is proven by the highest rate of agreement whereby 66.9% and 25.5% respectively said that they strongly agreed and agreed that learning a language enables them to do their assignments. This implies that in order for universities to have students who timely submit their assignments, there is a need to train them in languages, especially English, the medium of instruction.

Table 13: Use of English among students

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning boosts the use of English among students	Strongly agree	77 (53.1%)
	Agree	46 (31.7%)
	Neutral	12 (8.3%)
	Disagree	5 (3.4%)
	Strongly disagree	5 (3.4%)
Total		145 (100%)

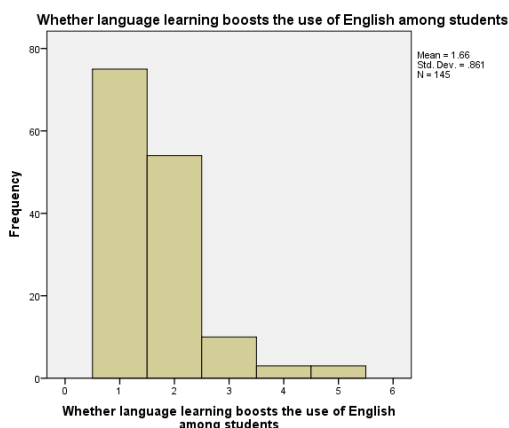


Table 13 reveals that the majority of the respondents agreed that language learning paves the way for the use of English among students. The level of agreement stands both at 53.1% and 31.7%. Indeed, this is true since most of the universities in Rwanda accommodate students from various countries, and the only way they can interact while on the campus, is through the use of English, the medium of instruction. This therefore calls for concerted efforts to teach English language so that the students can be speaking to one another with ease. Besides, a small percentage of respondents were neutral 8.3%, the disagreement and strong disagreement share the same percentage of 3.4%. This implies that despite the teaching of English, other languages are used at the campuses though at a lower rate.

Table 14: Qualification and competence of language trainers

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language are only taught by qualified and competent trainers	Strongly agree	87 (60%)
	Agree	37 (25.5%)
	Neutral	17 (11.7%)
	Disagree	4 (2.8%)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0%)
Total		145 (100%)

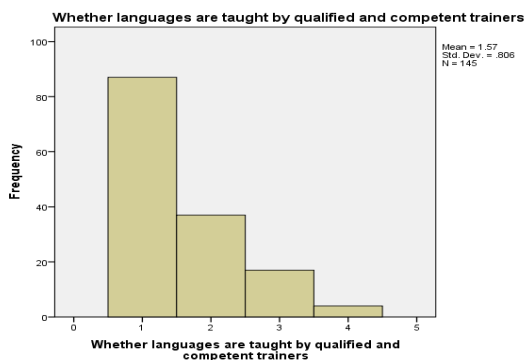


Table 14 with its corresponding figure disclose that 60% of the respondents strongly agree that languages are taught by

qualified and competent trainers; 25.5% agree that languages are taught by qualified and competent trainers.

The fusion of these figures indicate that the level of agreement is at 85.5%, which is high. This is something to salute since students learn better and faster when the trainer is endowed with whatever it takes to teach. However, 11.7% decided to be neutral, 2.8% disagreed, while no one strongly disagreed to the statement that languages are taught by qualified and competent trainers.

Table 15: Relationship between taught contents and fast learning

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Taught contents enable students to learn languages faster.	Strongly agree	68 (46.9%)
	Agree	49 (33.8%)
	Neutral	21 (14.5%)
	Disagree	4 (2.8%)
	Strongly disagree	3 (2.1%)
Total		145 (100%)

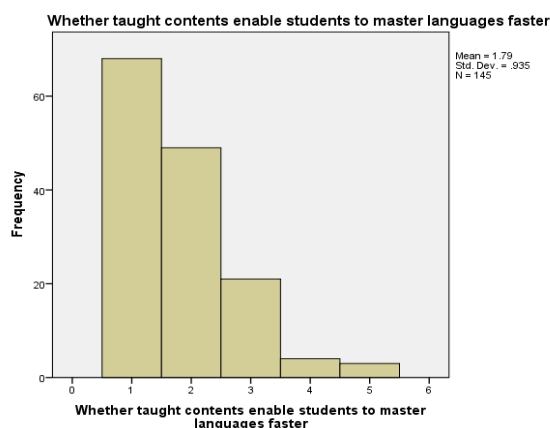


Table 15 with its corresponding figure indicate that the number of respondents who agree at a greater percentage that taught contents help them to master the language at a faster pace is high. This is vindicated by the fusion of those who agree and those who strongly agree, i.e., 33.8% together with 46.9% which gives 80.7%. However, there is no room for complacency since the remaining 19.3% decided to either abstain, disagree, or strongly disagree. More efforts are needed to improve the contents taught by university language centers so as to satisfy individual candidate.

Table 16: Teaching languages skills

Statement	Answers	Respondents with%
Language learning enables students to	Strongly agree	83 (57.2%)
	Agree	48 (33.1%)
	Neutral	8 (5.5%)

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submit claims	Disagree	3 (2.1%)
	Strongly disagree	3 (2.1%)
Total		145 (100%)

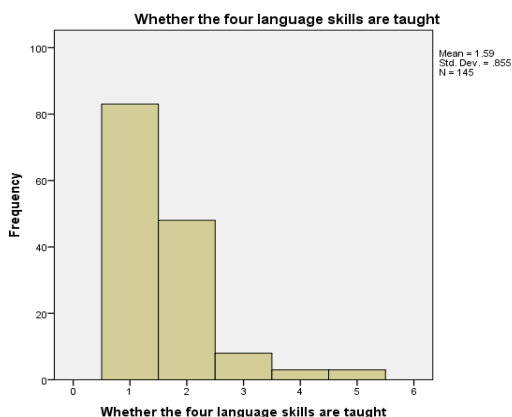


Table 16 with its corresponding figure show that 57.2% of respondents strongly agree that the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are taught by their language centers. On the other hand, 33.1% of respondents agree that the four language skills are taught. Besides, a small fraction decided to abstain while another tiny fraction disagreed to the statement of teaching the four language skills. With these figures, one can assert that the four language skills are taught by language centers.

CONCLUSION

The study discussed more elements as highlighted in the section above. Every step of the way, the researcher tried to answer the questions that were asked in the introduction, and they were all answered. The study aimed at assessing the efforts put in bridging communication gaps between local and international students studying in Rwanda with a focus on the role played by universities' language centers. Besides, the study sought to achieve three specific objectives: to find out the languages taught by universities' language centers in Rwanda, to indicate the rate at which languages are taught by centers, and to suggest how possible communication constraints among students can be addressed. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that universities' centers in Rwanda teach various languages such as English, French, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, and others, but not on equal footing.; and this affirms the first hypothesis which stated that Universities' language centers in Rwanda do not teach languages at the same level. Relatedly, the study found out that English is given more attention detrimental to other languages, and this stands as a stumbling block for international students who wish to be talking to everyone in Rwanda. and this led to the confirmation of the second hypothesis which put it that international students have difficulty communicating with local communities

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the study has unearthed some loopholes, the researcher found it worthwhile to recommend the following:

- Kinyarwanda, the national language that is spoken by every Rwandan, should be taught to international students to enable them to socialize with Rwandans at large;
- Universities' language centers should open doors to non-student communities so that they can study English and other international languages that will help in interacting with the increasing number of international students;
- There should be clear criteria for admission to the centers as a way of motivating more candidates to learn more languages.

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