



The English Curriculum Implementation Consistency: A Comparative Study of Urban and Rural Schools in Burundi

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ABSTRACT

Using a comparative, cross-sectional research design, this study explores the consistency of English curriculum implementation by comparing practices between urban and rural schools in Burundi. Different items were used to evaluate different aspects of teachers' practices, including lessons preparation, curriculum implementation, teaching approaches, assessment, lesson adaptation, and availability of teaching and learning materials. To collect data, a likert scale questionnaire was administered to a population sample of 32 teachers (16 teachers from urban schools and 16 from rural schools). The collected data were treated by using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and an independent sample t-tests. The findings of the study reveal significant disparities between urban and rural schools. In fact, urban teachers scored higher on most items related to resources and curriculum support, while rural teachers scored comparably high on pedagogical practices and even higher in lessons adaptation. The results also indicate that items related to resources and curriculum support are the ones which constitute key differences between urban and rural schools while aspects related to pedagogical practices and lessons adaptation appear to be similar across the two contexts. The study finally recommends targeted resources allocation, support for rural teachers, policy interventions prioritizing rural schools to promote equal learning opportunities.

Keywords: English curriculum, curriculum implementation, urban school, rural school

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum implementation plays a significant role in determining educational quality and equity. Consistency in curriculum implementation ensures that all learners have equal learning opportunities, regardless of school location (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Fullan, 2007). Additionally, quality education depends not only on formal curriculum design but also on how curricula are implemented in real classroom contexts. In many countries, there is a persistent divide between urban and rural schools: urban schools often benefit from better infrastructure, materials, and teacher support, while rural schools frequently suffer from resource scarcity and less favorable conditions (Wood, 2023; Sharma, 2009). This disparity can affect the degree to which the curriculum is delivered effectively and equitably, leading to differences in

learner outcomes.

The importance of learning English language has been growing in the last thirty years (Doughy, 2013). Around the World and especially in Europe, English is seen as the lingua franca because it is a medium of communication for speakers of different first languages and it is believed that English will become even more dominant in the future. Similarly, English has spread far and wide to the extent that it is often referred to as the "World Language," hence the World's lingua franca (Baker, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Burundi, therefore, has not been spared from the irresistible incursion of English. Many Burundians are significantly attracted to English, which they now use in some of their activities, including education. Though it was not inherited from colonization, as French was,

Submitted
14/08/2026

Accepted
21/08/2026

Published
01/09/2026

Citation	Bikorimana, E. (2026). The English Curriculum Implementation Consistency: A Comparative Study of Urban and Rural Schools in Burundi. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra</i> , Volume 5, Nomor 5, September 2026, 4009-4018. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v5i5.1811
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Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

one can say that its presence in the country is the outcome of transformations and innovations in post-colonial Burundi.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Sub-Saharan Africa points to a gap between the communicative goals of curricula and the reality of teaching practices, which is often remain centered on grammar (PUECH, 2018; CILLES, 2012). This gap between policy and practice is an issue in Global South education systems (Pillay, 2018). In Burundi, although studies exist on language policy and educational challenges (NSABIMANA, 2017), there is lack of empirical and critical analyses specifically focusing on the actual implementation of English programs across urban and rural schools in Burundi education system.

In recent years, the Burundi education system has undergone different reforms that aimed at improving the school curricula for the sake of quality education and meet the demands of the contemporary and globalized world. However, despite the official curricula being uniform, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how curriculum implementation differs between urban and rural schools in practice, especially in English language learning and teaching. Moreover, resource disparities, differences in teachers' access to materials, learning environment and contextual constraints result in uneven implementation, undermining educational equity and equal learning opportunities. As consequence, without assessing curriculum implementation issues, good educational reforms fail to achieve their intended impact, particularly in rural areas.

The present research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant differences in terms of English programs implementation and access to teaching and learning resources across the urban and rural schools in Burundi?
2. Which aspects of curriculum implementation are mostly affected by the urban - rural differences, and which ones appear similar across contexts?

This study will contribute on the existing knowledge regarding the issue of curriculum design, aims, content and its implementation. Since it was conducted in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in both urban and rural contexts where empirical evidence on the issue is scarce, the findings will be beneficial to different education stakeholders and decision makers in Burundi.

This study is significant in two ways. Firstly, it is meant to help decision makers, policy makers, materials designers and teachers to improve their work to make it possible that both learners from urban and rural schools have the same learning opportunities and meet the expected goals of the programs. This can help in exposing learners to a kind of curriculum which facilitates the achievement of the main goal of communicative competence. Secondly, this study will provide insights to different stakeholders in education concerning how to promote education equity in both urban and rural schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum Consistency

Curriculum consistency refers to the extent to which an educational programs are implemented uniformly across different learning contexts. Fullan (2007), Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), and Print (1993) state that consistent curriculum implementation implies that learners receive equal learning experiences regardless of their school environment. According to Glatthorn (2018), a consistent curriculum aligns intended, implemented, and attained learning outcomes. In African educational settings, Wanekezi and Okoli (2015) argue that inconsistencies in curriculum delivery often arise from disparities in resources, teacher qualifications, and contextual factors. In the context of language education, Richards (2013) and Nunan (2003) contend that curriculum consistency is crucial because language acquisition requires systematic exposure to structured content.



2. Urban and Rural Disparities in Curriculum Implementation

Global literature consistently documents differences between rural and urban schools. According to Akyeampong (2017), urban schools typically exhibit stronger instructional leadership and better access to professional development. In contrast, rural schools often operate with limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and overcrowded classrooms (Molina, 2015; Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2006).

Within EFL contexts, Asmad and Mahboob (2020) state that disparities in school contexts lead to inconsistencies in exposure to authentic language input, curriculum pacing, and assessment practices. In East Africa, Mismay and Abate (2018) observe that rural schools generally struggle in implementing communicative language teaching approaches due to constraints in teacher capacity and material availability. These disparities directly affect curriculum consistency. Additionally, Liu and Zhang (2020) explain that when schools differ significantly in readiness, curriculum implementation becomes uneven across settings.

3. Learning Resources and School Infrastructure

The availability of teaching materials, classroom environments, and technology influences curriculum consistency (UNESCO, 2020). According to Scheerens (2016), educational systems with unequal resource distribution often experience pronounced implementation inconsistencies. Burundian studies by Hakizimana (2018) and Ndikumana (2021) reveal that many rural schools operate with outdated textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to language learning aids. Urban schools, by contrast, tend to have better infrastructural support, enabling more faithful curriculum implementation.

4. English Curriculum Implementation in African Contexts

In Sub-Saharan Africa, research demonstrates significant gaps in curriculum implementation between rural and urban schools. Ottevanger et al.

(2007), Tikly (2011) reveal that rural schools often face shortages of trained teachers, instructional materials, and supportive supervision. For English as a foreign language (EFL), Adeyemo (2015), Omodan (2021) state that urban schools tend to benefit from better-equipped learning environments, thus achieving higher curriculum fidelity.

According to Banda (2018) and Chishimba (2019), inconsistent curriculum implementation compromises learning outcomes, especially in multilingual societies. Brock-Utne (2014) further highlights that language-of-instruction policies frequently exacerbate inequalities in curriculum delivery.

5. Curriculum Continuity

Curriculum continuity seems to be an issue to be taken into account while designing school programs. Recent research on transfer and transition (Galton et al, 2003) has pointed out the need for schools to work more on curriculum continuity and to pay attention to academic transfer and the specific strategies which help sustain pupils' progress. According to the above scholar Curriculum continuity refers to:

- 1) knowing which topics have already been covered;
- 2) knowing what skills and understandings have been well established;
- 3) knowing the pace and style of previous lessons in the subject.

This knowledge is then used to launch pupils' secondary education in a way that reassure them, challenge them and rapidly take them forward. As a minimum, it is essential that the upper-class levels know which topics have been covered by lower-class levels.

6. Components of Curriculum Continuity

6.1 Learning Environment

A learning environment plays a key role in the process of attempting to make continuum curricula. Learning environment is a learning setting consisting of the physical environment, psychological factors and social relationships (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004).

Ahmad (2013) says that the classroom environment also influences the learning and teaching process. For him, the physical aspects (size and shape, space, interior light, colour, thermal conditions, noise levels, furniture and seating arrangements, technological facilities) and psychological aspects (interaction between students, students and teachers, students and environment) of classroom contribute to teaching and learning satisfaction and have a significant impact on students' learning.

6.2 Teacher- Students' interaction

The interaction between the teacher and the students is of paramount importance in the teaching and learning process since it may impact both the classroom activities and atmosphere. The peaceful and comfortable school atmospheres are very important to students and teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning. This is because students spend most of their time in school.

Akcaay & Doymus (2014) highlights that the selection of appropriate teaching methods and techniques is vital to ensure students' understanding of issues and concepts at the highest level. In the classroom, there are various factors that determine the success of students' learning. Teachers, students and environment are among the determining factors that contribute to the success of the learning process in the classroom. Thus, good interaction between teachers and students will create positive relationships in the classroom and contribute to effective learning. In fact, effective teachers assess changes in students' behaviour and understand the needs of students in the classroom.

6.3 Parents' Support

Reglin (2002) asserts that the parent support describes the process in which parents or guardians responsible for a child promote actions that supplement and reinforce the knowledge, skills, competencies and interactive styles that the school intends to develop. In this way, parents complement the didactic practice by:

- 1) Providing assistance or support to the students for homework;

- 2) Providing time and adequate study space; and
- 3) Maintaining regular communication with the staff of the school.

6.5 Language Skills

Any language is mastered after the four language skills are sufficiently used. The language skills are broadly divided into two main categories, which are receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Those skills are related to each other and cannot be independent. This is supported by Uma & Ponambala (2001) who state that mastering language skills will determine the students' communicative competence in the target language. Curriculum designers are therefore there to ensure if while designing new curricula, all language skills are focused on and dealt with to let learners be able to develop their linguistic competence in a way to perform in the language.

6.6 Assessment

Moon (2000) sees assessment as "something that most teachers spend a lot of time doing" Because of this fact we have to define assessment, realize its importance and, according to Moon "consider what kinds of information it provides, and the decisions that might be taken based on that information." In other words, without assessment the teacher can provide feedback neither to the students nor to himself.

Ioannou (2003) defines assessment as "a general term which includes all methods used to gather information about children's knowledge, ability, understanding, attitudes, and motivation." Thus, the form and types of activities learners are given may constitute a handicap to the learners' developmental stage in terms of language learning.

6.7 Teachers' Qualification

Teachers' qualification may have an impact to the students' level of linguistic competence and even on the curriculum continuity. Loughran (2014) argues: "There is growing interest in the



professional development of educators as the demands, expectations, and requirements of teacher education increasingly come under scrutiny.” Additionally, what the teacher does, influences, the whole process of learning. Effective teacher produces better performing students (Akiri, 2013). Richardson (2008) indicates that measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student in reading and mathematics. The poor qualifications of teachers are a major problem in African schools.

Unanma et al. (2013) asserts that there is a relationship between Teacher’s academic qualifications and academic achievement. In this way, all teachers must possess instructional / intervention skills to maximize the learner’s outcomes. When talking about curriculum continuity, the issue of teachers’ qualification is very important to be raised.

7. English Curriculum Implementation in Burundi

Burundian scholars have also made studies on issues about language education and curriculum implementation. In fact, Nizigiyimana (2019) states that many basic schools are challenged with shortages of qualified teachers of English since the 2014 shift introducing English earlier in the curriculum. Additionally, Mukama (2010) notes that challenges in teacher preparation at the university level result in heterogeneous teaching practices across the country. Moreover, Ndayisenga (2020) notes that urban and rural schools disparities influence negatively the teacher training opportunities, pedagogical supervision frequency, and access to teaching and learning materials.

METHOD

This study used a comparative, cross-sectional research design, comparing curriculum implementation between urban and rural schools. It was conducted in Burundi in May 2025 and it used sixteen schools from urban and rural settings. The urban schools were located in Ntakangwa

communal directorate of education, in Bujumbura province and were mainly : Lycée Municipal Ngagara; Lycée Municipal Kinama; Lycée Municipal Cibitoke; Lycée Municipal Kamenge; Lycée Reine de la Paix de Ngagara; Lycée Sainte Famille de Kinama; Lycée Municipal Gasenyi I while the rural schools were located in Bururi Province and were mainly: Lycée Communal Bwatemba; Lycée Communal Bandage; Lycée Reine des Apôtres de Kaganza; Lycée Bururi; Lycée Kiremba Sud; Lycée Communal Bururi; Lycée Communal Kiremba; Lycée Communal Gahama. These schools were purposively chosen, of which thirty two teachers of English were randomly selected to constitute the sample.

To collect data, a structured questionnaire using a 5-point likert scale was administered to a population sample of 32 teachers among whom 16 were from urban schools and 16 others from rural schools. This research instrument was validated by an expert in the curriculum studies and implementation. As far as the analysis is concerned, the data were descriptively analyzed by calculating the mean and standard deviations, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The mean verbal interpretation that the researcher used was the following: 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. Finally, independent samples t-tests were also run to compare urban and rural teachers, highlighting significant differences in curriculum implementation and resources access.

RESULTS

This study sought to establish the extent to which the English curriculum implementation ensures consistency across urban and rural schools in Burundi and examine to what extent equal learning opportunities is assured across contexts. The tables below show the results of the study, and they are presented in the form of means and standard deviation.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics based on School Location

Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Lessons preparation	Urban	16	4,13	1,310
	Rural	16	2,94	1,289
Curriculum guidelines implementation	Urban	16	2,88	1,360
	Rural	16	2,63	1,025
Various teaching approaches	Urban	16	4,25	0,775
	Rural	16	4,19	0,750
Assessment	Urban	16	4,44	0,512
	Rural	16	4,19	0,981
Language skills	Urban	16	3,75	1,291
	Rural	16	3,25	1,342
Lessons adaptations	Urban	16	3,75	1,291
	Rural	16	3,13	1,360
Extrateaching Materials	Urban	16	2,94	1,569
	Rural	16	2,31	1,250
School libraries	Urban	16	3,38	1,455
	Rural	16	2,44	1,153
Use of authentic materials	Urban	16	3,38	1,455
	Rural	16	2,13	1,025
Association of Library and teachers' guide	Urban	16	3,06	1,806
	Rural	16	2,56	1,209

As it can be seen in the above table, the comparison between urban and rural respondents reveals notable differences in several aspects of English language teaching. On average, urban teachers scored higher than rural teachers across most items. Concerning the lesson preparation, urban teachers reported greater consideration of learners' levels during lesson preparation ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.31$) than rural teachers ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.29$). When one looks at curriculum guidelines implementation, both groups found the guidelines moderately implementable, with slightly higher mean for urban teachers ($M = 2.88$) compared to rural ones ($M = 2.63$). About the use of various teaching approaches, the means are nearly the same (Urban: $M = 4.25$; Rural: $M = 4.19$), implying consistent use of diverse teaching approaches in both contexts.

In assessment practices, urban teachers ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.51$) seem to use multiple forms of assessment more consistently than rural teachers ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.98$). When we look at how language Skills are assessed, urban respondents ($M = 3.75$) assess the four skills slightly more than rural ones ($M = 3.25$). Furthermore, urban teachers reported higher lessons adaptation to learners' levels ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1,291$) than rural ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1,360$). Regarding the extra teaching materials, urban areas appear slightly better resourced ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1,569$) compared to rural ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1,250$). With school libraries, urban teachers reported better library access ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1,455$) compared to rural teachers ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1,153$).

Taking into account the use of authentic materials while teaching, the gap is more evident here (urban schools: $M = 3.38$, $SD = 1,455$; Rural: $M = 2.13$, $SD = 1,025$), highlighting limited use if authentic materials in rural schools. Teachers were also asked to say if they associate their guidebooks with the



library. At this, both groups scored low, but urban teachers slightly scored more positively ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1,806$) than rural teachers ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1,209$).

In short, the above descriptive statistics reveal that urban teachers have better access to resources and more favorable teaching facilities, which may contribute to improved English teaching practices compared to their rural counterparts.

Table 2
Independent Samples t-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diffe- rence	Std. Error Diffe- rence
Lessons preparation	Equal variances assumed	0,785	,383	2,584	30	,015	1,188	,460
	Equal variances not assumed			2,584	29,992	,015	1,188	,460
Curriculum guidelines implementation	Equal variances assumed	5,479	,026	,587	30	,561	,250	,426
	Equal variances not assumed			,587	27,878	,562	,250	,426
Various teaching approches	Equal variances assumed	0,087	,770	,232	30	,818	,063	,270
	Equal variances not assumed			,232	29,969	,818	,063	,270
Assessment	Equal variances assumed	1,791	,191	,904	30	,373	,250	,277
	Equal variances not assumed			,904	22,615	,376	,250	,277
Language skills	Equal variances assumed	0,746	,395	1,074	30	,291	,500	,465
	Equal variances not assumed			1,074	29,956	,291	,500	,465
Lessons adaptation	Equal variances assumed	,888	,353	1,333	30	,193	,625	,469
	Equal variances not assumed			1,333	29,919	,193	,625	,469
Extra-teaching materials	Equal variances assumed	4,288	,047	1,246	30	,222	,625	,502
	Equal variances not assumed			1,246	28,571	,223	,625	,502

School libraries	Equal variances assumed	2,192 ,149	2,020	30	,052	,938	,464
	Equal variances not assumed		2,020	28,511	,053	,938	,464
Use of authentic materials	Equal variances assumed	6,020 ,020	2,810	30	,009	1,250	,445
	Equal variances not assumed		2,810	26,943	,009	1,250	,445
Association of library and teachers' guide	Equal variances assumed	12,831,001	,920	30	,365	,500	,543
	Equal variances not assumed		,920	26,198	,366	,500	,543

This research aimed at examining differences in English language teaching practices and resource availability between urban and rural schools in Burundi. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare responses from teachers based on their location (urban Vs rural).

The results revealed statistically significant differences in two key areas. Firstly, there was a significant difference in lesson preparation practices between urban and rural teachers ($p = .015$). Teachers in urban areas ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.31$) were more likely to consider students' levels when preparing lessons compared to their rural counterparts ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.29$). This suggests that urban schools may have more structured or flexible systems that allow teachers to tailor lessons to learners' needs.

A significant difference was also observed in the use of authentic materials such as internet resources, newspapers, and library texts ($p = .009$). Urban teachers ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.46$) reported higher usage of authentic materials than rural teachers ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.03$), indicating a disparity in access to supplementary learning resources. Although the availability of school libraries approached significance ($p = .052$), it did not meet the conventional threshold. However, the data trend suggests that this might be a potential area of concern worth exploring further.

For the remaining variables, including implementation of curriculum guidelines, use of various teaching approaches, assessment of language skills, and lesson adaptation, no statistically significant differences were found ($p > .05$). This implies some uniformity in these practices regardless of the school's location, though qualitative findings may provide further insight. In short, the findings underscore the need for equity in resource allocation and support systems, particularly in rural settings, to ensure that all learners have comparable opportunities to succeed in English language learning.

DISCUSSION

Research question1: Are there any significant differences in terms of English programs implementation and access to teaching and learning resources across the urban and rural schools in Burundi?

On the above question, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions on the implementation of English curriculum between the urban and rural schools. In fact, the implementation of English curriculum between urban and rural schools revealed notable differences in several aspects of English language teaching. On average, urban teachers scored higher than rural teachers across most items mainly on lessons preparation, curriculum guidelines implementation, assessment practices, language skills assessment, lessons



adaptation, extra teaching materials and school libraries. These results disagree with those by Fullan (2007), Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), and Print (1993) whose study indicated that consistent curriculum implementation happens when learners receive equitable learning experiences and opportunities regardless of their school environment. Additionally, Wanekezi and Okoli (2015) argue that inconsistencies in curriculum delivery often arise from disparities in resources, teacher qualifications, and contextual factors. However, Richards (2013), Nunan (2003) contend that curriculum consistency is crucial because language acquisition requires systematic exposure to structured content.

In short, the independent samples t- test results revealed statistically significant differences in two key areas such as lesson preparation practices and the use of authentic materials in the teaching and learning process ($p < .05$). On the other hand, for the remaining variables, including implementation of curriculum guidelines, use of various teaching approaches, assessment of language skills, and lesson adaptation, no statistically significant differences were found ($p > .05$).

Research question2: Which aspects of curriculum implementation are mostly affected by the urban - rural differences, and which ones appear similar across contexts?

On the second research questions, the results highlighted that the aspects of curriculum implementation which are mostly affected by the urban - rural differences include how teachers prepare their lessons, how well they make use of authentic materials and access to libraries. These results match with the ones found by Hakizimana (2018) and Ndikumana (2021) who revealed that many rural schools operate with outdated textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to language learning aids whereas urban schools tend to have better infrastructural support, enabling more faithful curriculum implementation. As for the aspects which appear to be similar across contexts, the findings of this study indicated for

instance curriculum guidelines implementation, lessons adaption to learners 'level, the use of various teaching approaches, and assessment of the four language skills. This implies some uniformity in these practices regardless of the school's location.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is clearly seen that the English curriculum implementation is uneven between urban and rural schools. While pedagogical and assessment practices are similar, resources availability remains a significant disparity across the two contexts. Recommendations include targeted resources allocation, support for rural teachers, policy interventions prioritizing rural schools, and use of alternative local materials to enhance teaching.

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