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Students' English Language Proficiency in Public Secondary
Schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania**



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The Impact of the English Course Orientation Program on Students' English Language Proficiency in Public Secondary Schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania

 Flora Joel Mtali^{1*}, Dr. Upendo P. Biswalo²

¹Post-Graduate Student, St John's University of Tanzania

²Lecturer, St John's University of Tanzania

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7479-1305>



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Abstract

Purpose: This study evaluates the impact of the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP) on students' English language proficiency in Dodoma City public Secondary Schools, Tanzania.

Methodology: The study employed a cross-sectional design and mixed-methods approach. Data were collected through questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with students, and interviews with teachers. Quantitative data were analysed by using SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed through content analysis.

Findings: The study found that English language orientation program plays a critical role in supporting students' academic performance and boosting confidence in English-medium instruction. Quantitative findings revealed that 94.1% of students reported improvements in English proficiency, with enhanced reading, writing, and speaking abilities. Qualitative insights confirmed the program enhanced students' academic preparedness and increased confidence in participation in class activities. However, challenges such as limited content coverage, inadequate speaking practice, lack of adequate pre-service and in-service training for teachers, limited teaching and learning resources, and big class sizes were identified.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: Based on these findings, the study recommends the government to enhance teacher training, improve infrastructure and resource allocation, and extend program duration. These strategies will facilitate students' transition to English-medium instruction and, in turn, enhance their academic engagement and performance in schools. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis is relevant to this study on the impact of the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP) on students' English language proficiency in Dodoma City Government Secondary Schools because it provides a foundational explanation of how second language acquisition occurs.

Keywords: *English Course Orientation Program, Secondary School students, English Language Proficiency, Tanzania*

1. INTRODUCTION

This section presents the background of the study and outlines the statement of the problem concerning the impact of the English Course Orientation Program on students' English language proficiency in public secondary schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania.

1.1 Background Information

The global importance of English language proficiency in education and professional domains has become more pronounced in the 21st century. As a global lingua franca, English serves as a medium for knowledge dissemination, scientific research, and cross-border communication (Dearden, 2018). In many countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, English is also the language of instruction from upper primary or secondary levels, despite not being the learners' mother tongue. Research conducted continues to emphasise the role of English in facilitating academic success and socio-economic mobility (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2018).

In contexts where English is not the dominant language of the home or community, however, the research shows that transitioning to English-medium instruction (EMI) poses significant linguistic and pedagogical challenges. In South and Southeast Asia, studies have shown that students from low-income, rural backgrounds face difficulties in understanding academic content delivered in English, leading to learning inequalities and reduced self-confidence (Hamid et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2021). The same challenges are mirrored in sub-Saharan Africa, where early exposure to English is often minimal.

In African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya, research has revealed a widening gap between national EMI policies and the actual linguistic preparedness of students and teachers (Uwezo, 2019; Nyasimi, 2020). For example, in a recent study conducted in Kenyan secondary schools, (Otieno, 2022) found that 61% of students struggled with comprehension in English-medium science and mathematics classes, despite having completed an English induction course.

In Tanzania, the situation is equally critical. English is introduced as the medium of instruction at the secondary level after seven years of Kiswahili-medium primary schooling. This sudden linguistic shift has long been recognised as a barrier to effective learning, especially among students from low socio-economic backgrounds who lack exposure to English outside of school (Mosha & Mlowe, 2018). In response to this challenge, the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) introduced the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP), a three-month preparatory programme aimed at improving the English language proficiency of Form One students.

In Tanzania, ECOP focuses on equipping students with basic language skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening through communicative, learner-centred approaches. TIE (2020) emphasizes that the programme is designed not only to introduce academic vocabulary and grammar but also to build students' confidence in using English both in and outside the classroom. It encourages schools to integrate English into everyday routines, such as announcements, meetings, and clubs.

Despite its ambitious goals, the ECOP implementation has encountered several challenges. A recent study by Kisangiri and Mlowe (2021) in Singida and Morogoro found that only 36% of teachers used interactive strategies recommended by the ECOP, with most defaulting to teacher-centred teaching due to large class sizes and inadequate training. Similarly, Kapinga and Shoo (2023) found that while 78% of teachers acknowledged the importance of ECOP, only 40% believed that students gained meaningful proficiency within the three months.

In addition, resource constraints such as shortages of ECOP textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, and inconsistent school-level monitoring further hinder the programme's effectiveness. This is consistent with the study by Kisangiri and Mlowe (2021) conducted in Morogoro and Singida on how ECOP was delivered in 10 government schools. The study found that 60% of the schools lacked ECOP teaching manuals and practice books.

Dodoma City, as the national capital and a rapidly urbanising region, presents a relevant case for evaluating the ECOP. Government secondary schools in the city accommodate a diverse student population with varying levels of prior exposure to English. Thus, this study aims to evaluate the impact of the English Course Orientation Program on students' English Language proficiency in secondary schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The English Course Orientation Program was introduced as a strategic intervention to improve English proficiency among Form One students, however, current data and studies suggest that its impact remains limited. According to the NECTA 2022 and 2023 Form Two National Assessment Reports, many students continue to score poorly in English and struggle with content subjects that require English proficiency. A study by Lubuva (2019) noted that students' inability to understand basic English instructions in class undermines their academic performance across subjects.

Moreover, a study by Msuya and Ndalichako (2021) in secondary schools in Dodoma found that nearly half of secondary school teachers resorted to code-switching (between Kiswahili and English) during lessons to ensure student comprehension. This practice, while pragmatic, contradicts the goal of ECOP and highlights a disconnect between policy intentions and classroom realities.

Despite the rollout of ECOP across the country, little is known about how effective it is in developing sustainable English language skills. Most evaluations have focused on implementation processes rather than students' learning outcomes. With this, there remains a significant gap in empirical research examining whether ECOP leads to measurable improvements in English language proficiency among Tanzanian secondary school students, particularly in government schools where resources and support are minimal, like those in Dodoma City.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of literature related to the study on the impact of the English Course Orientation Program on students' English language proficiency in public secondary schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania. It includes both theoretical and empirical reviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study.

2.1 Empirical Literature Review

Recent global studies have highlighted the importance of structured language orientation programmes in enhancing students' proficiency in English, especially in countries where English is used as a second or foreign language. A study by Hashim and Yunus (2018) conducted in Malaysia evaluated the effectiveness of a transitional English programme for lower secondary students from rural schools. Their findings revealed that students who participated in structured orientation sessions demonstrated improved reading fluency and oral communication skills compared to those who did not, particularly in schools where teachers used interactive and communicative methods.

Similarly, a study by Nguyen (2021) in Vietnam investigated the impact of short-term English bridging courses for students transitioning into English-medium universities. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests, finding that students' academic vocabulary, reading comprehension, and grammar use improved significantly after an 8-week orientation course. However, the research revealed that the long-term impact depended on continued exposure and follow-up support during the academic year.

In Africa, language orientation programmes have been introduced in response to the language gap created by the use of former colonial languages (English, French, Portuguese) as media of instruction. A growing number of empirical studies have assessed the effectiveness of these programmes. For instance, a study by Asare and Adzroe (2017) conducted in Ghana studied a transitional English language programme introduced for junior high school students in urban Accra. Using focus groups and language assessment tools, they found that students who underwent the programme performed better in listening and reading comprehension than those who did not. However, rural students showed less improvement due to a lack of qualified teachers and limited access to learning materials.

Moreover, a study by Otieno (2022) conducted in Kenya examined English language orientation interventions in Kisumu County and found that students' confidence in English speaking improved by 45% after completing a 10-week course. However, Otieno observed that students from overcrowded classrooms did not benefit as much due to reduced teacher-student interaction. The study recommended policy alignment between language transition programmes and curriculum pacing to ensure sustainability.

Similarly, a study by Nambi (2019) conducted in Uganda explored how English induction programmes affected secondary school learners' performance in English and science subjects.

Results showed that students who received language support early in Form One were more likely to excel in content-based subjects. The study emphasised the need for integrated programmes that continue beyond the orientation phase.

In Tanzania, several empirical studies have investigated the implementation and outcomes of the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP) introduced by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE). These studies highlight both the potential and the limitations of ECOP in government secondary schools.

Kisangiri and Mlowe (2021) conducted in Morogoro and Singida assessed how ECOP was delivered in 10 government schools. The study found that although most schools implemented ECOP as per schedule, only 36% of teachers used communicative approaches. The remaining relied on grammar translation methods, contradicting the programme's learner-centred aims. Additionally, 60% of the schools lacked ECOP teaching manuals and practice books.

Kapinga and Shoo (2023) conducted a comparative study on ECOP's effectiveness in rural and urban schools. Using a sample of 240 Form One students, the study found that urban students showed more improvement in writing and comprehension than their rural counterparts. The authors attributed this to better access to ECOP materials and greater teacher exposure to English language pedagogy in urban settings.

Moreover, a study by Lubuva (2019) focused on the impact of ECOP on students' classroom interaction in Dar es Salaam. Through classroom observations and interviews, it was revealed that while ECOP helped improve oral expression, students reverted to Kiswahili in peer discussions, particularly when discussing subject-specific concepts. Teachers expressed the need for ECOP to be extended beyond three months to maintain momentum.

Also, a study by Msuya and Ndalichako (2021) conducted in Dodoma Region explored how ECOP influenced language use in science classrooms. The study found that although students could follow simple instructions in English after ECOP, teachers still relied on code-switching to ensure understanding. This highlighted that ECOP's gains were not always sustained once formal subject instruction began.

Tanzania Institute of Education (2020) released a monitoring report showing wide variation on how ECOP was implemented across schools. In some districts, the programme was well-supported with teaching materials, peer learning, and supervision, while in others, there was poor adherence to ECOP guidelines. The report concluded that ECOP required stronger institutional backing, better-trained teachers, and integration with broader English language teaching strategies throughout the school year. This study, however, investigates the impact of the English Course Orientation Program on students' English language proficiency in public secondary schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language when exposed to meaningful input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. ECOP is expected to provide such input through structured lessons and classroom interaction. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis is relevant to this study on the impact of the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP) on students' English language proficiency in Dodoma City Government Secondary Schools because it provides a foundational explanation of how second language acquisition occurs. The hypothesis asserts that learners acquire a language most effectively when they are exposed to meaningful and comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of language competence, referred to as "i+1". In the context of the ECOP, the program is designed to expose students who are transitioning from Swahili-medium primary education to English-medium secondary education to English in ways that are understandable and engaging. This aligns with Krashen's emphasis on the importance of natural, contextualised language exposure rather than rote memorisation or explicit grammar instruction. The ECOP encourages the use of English in classroom activities, group discussions, and informal interactions, creating immersive environments that promote language acquisition as Krashen advocates.

Also, the Input Hypothesis offers a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the ECOP by assessing whether it provides sufficient and appropriate language input to support students' development. By grounding the study in Krashen's theory, the research can justify the program's focus on communication, understanding, and gradual progression in language use, which are key to improving learners' proficiency.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which involved the collection of data at a single point in time to examine the current status of a specific phenomenon. The cross-sectional design was particularly appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gather a picture of students' language proficiency levels, their experiences during the ECOP, and the immediate impact of the program on their academic preparedness.

The cross-sectional nature of the study also allowed for the efficient collection of data from a diverse group of participants within a relatively short period, without the need for long-term follow-up. Also, this design was supported by a mixed-methods research approach, which integrated both quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen the study's validity, breadth, and interpretive depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Data analysis

Data were analysed by using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative procedures to ensure comprehensive interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Quantitative data collected through student questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis process involved several stages, including data entry, cleaning, coding, and statistical computation. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and tables were used to summarise student responses on key variables, including levels of perceived improvements, and the usefulness of the programme content. The use of SPSS allowed for the presentation of findings in a structured, visually accessible format that supported clear interpretation and informed discussion.

On the qualitative, data gathered from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews were analysed using content analysis. This method involved systematically reviewing, coding, and categorising textual data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights. Transcripts from the FGDs and interviews were carefully examined to extract significant statements that reflected participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP). Content analysis enabled the researcher to capture the emotional, social, and contextual dimensions of the ECOP experience elements that could not be fully represented through quantitative statistics alone. The integration of these qualitative insights with statistical data enriched the overall interpretation of findings and led to a more nuanced understanding of the programme's effectiveness and areas in need of improvement.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results obtained from the study on the impact of English course orientation program in the selected public secondary schools in Dodoma. The results are presented based on themes.

4.1 The impact of the English Course Orientation Program on language skills

The findings revealed that the English Course Orientation Program was effective in improving students' English skills, with 94.1% of respondents, based on data collected through student questionnaires, reporting noticeable improvement. The findings have shown that students gained confidence in reading, writing, and speaking, especially through interactive methods like group work.

Table 1 The impact of the English Course Orientation Program

Variables	Yes	No
Have you experienced any improvement in your English language skills after completing the program?	113(94.1%)	7(5.9%)
The program's pace was suitable for learning needs	113(94.1%)	7(5.9%)
Have you noticed any improvement in your ability to understand and use English in real-life situations?	113(94.1%)	7(5.9%)
The program's online resources help supplement your English language learning	93(77.3%)	27(22.7%)
Do you experience any challenges in using English language learning technology during the program?	86(72.3%)	34(27.7%)

4.1.1 English Course Orientation Program improved students' English language skills

The results from Table 1 above indicate that the English Course Orientation Program had a significant positive impact on students' English language proficiency. A vast majority of respondents (94.1%) reported experiencing improvements in their English skills after completing the program, suggesting its effectiveness in enhancing language acquisition.

One student said,

“English orientation course helps me a lot in improvement to pronunciations of words and being able to read, write and speak well English, before the course it was hard for me to speak English language” (FGD with students, School A May 2025)

Multiple intelligences' theory (1983) posits that, linguistic intelligence is especially relevant for English language learning, as it encompasses sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn new languages, and the capacity to use language effectively to achieve personal, academic, and professional goals. Students with strong linguistic intelligence tend to excel in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension

Moreover, the program's pace was deemed suitable for learning needs by the same percentage of students, indicating that the structure and delivery were well-aligned with their expectations. These findings corroborate with the findings of a study by Mwila and Yohana (2022) in Kinondoni Municipality, which found that structured baseline courses significantly enhance students' ability to grasp English concepts, particularly when interactive teaching methods such as peer tutoring and teacher-student engagement are employed.

In the focus group discussion, several students reported increased confidence in reading, writing, and speaking English by the end of the course.

One student said;

“Before the programme, I couldn’t form a full sentence in English. But now, I can write essays and participate in class discussions.” (FGD, Secondary School A, May 2025).

The statement above supports the findings of Mbwapbo’s (2021) study in Morogoro region, which emphasized the importance of well-designed orientation programs in secondary schools, noting that students who participated in structured learning sessions demonstrated higher retention and application of English writing skills

Although the findings in Table 1 indicate that the English Course Orientation Program was largely effective, however, certain gaps remain in its curriculum. A notable 79% of students reported that certain topics were insufficiently addressed, indicating a need to enhance the programme to provide more comprehensive language instruction. This aligns with Mbwapbo’s (2021), conducted in Morogoro region, which found that orientation programs in Tanzanian secondary schools often lack sufficient coverage of advanced English language skills, leading to gaps in students’ proficiency.

Moreover, during Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), several students expressed concerns about the program’s duration and content coverage.

One student said;

“We didn’t have enough time for speaking practice and advanced grammar topics; the course was good, but too short to cover everything we needed before Form One classes started.” (FGD, Secondary School B, May 2025).

The finding reveals that 94.1% of students reported an improved ability to understand and use English in real-life situations. This means that nearly all participating students experienced noticeable progress in their capacity to comprehend spoken or written English and apply it effectively in everyday contexts, such as conversations, following instructions, or expressing ideas clearly. The finding implies that when English teaching is practical, interactive, and relevant to students’ real-life experiences, it leads to meaningful improvements in language ability, benefiting not only academic achievement but also personal and social development. For example, a study by Mlay and Sane (2016) conducted in Morogoro and Mvomero Districts revealed that 94.2% of urban students strongly agreed that English was useful both in academic settings and in everyday communication. This confirms a widespread recognition of the practical benefits of English language acquisition among students, such as vocabulary quizzes, oral presentations, and listening tasks, which significantly contribute to students’ ability to use English effectively outside the classroom.

Students in their focus group discussions (FGDs) agreed that role-playing, pair discussions, and group presentations were particularly helpful.

One student said,

“We used English in group work and even during break times, which made it easier to get used to thinking and speaking in English.” (FGD, Secondary School C, May 2025).

These findings align with a study by Mlay and Sane (2016) conducted in the Morogoro region, who observed that increased exposure to English through peer interaction and informal settings significantly enhanced students’ confidence and fluency in using the language in both academic and social contexts.

4.1.2 English Orientation Program improves academic performance

The study’s findings have shown that the English Course Orientation Program significantly improved students’ English language proficiency, supported their academic preparation, and boosted their confidence in using English. Most students reported better understanding, communication, and performance in academic tasks. However, some students noted gaps in the program, particularly in content coverage and speaking practice.

4.2 English Orientation Program’s impact on academic performance

Sections below present the impact of English Course Orientation Program on students’ academic learning outcomes. Students’ responses are presented in table 2 below, followed by critical discussions.

Table 2 English Orientation Program’s impact on academic performance

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
How did the English Course Orientation Program help you prepare for your academic courses?	Not at all	6	5.00%
	Somewhat	45	37.80%
	Very much	69	57.10%
Did the program provide you with the necessary English language skills to succeed in your academic studies?	No	5	4.20%
	Yes	115	95.80%
How did the focus of the program on academic English language skills (e.g., reading, writing, presenting) affect your confidence in using English in academic settings?	Not at all	6	5.00%
	Somewhat	58	48.70%
	Very much	56	46.20%

4.2.1 The English Course Orientation Program helps students prepare for academic courses

The results in Table 2 indicate that the English Course Orientation Program significantly impacted students’ academic preparation. A majority of respondents (57.1%) reported that the program helped them “very much”, while 37.8% found it “somewhat” helpful. Only a small fraction (5.0%) stated that it did not help at all. This suggests that the program is crucial in equipping students with the necessary language skills for academic success. This aligns closely with research studies in the Tanzanian context. For example, studies show that limited proficiency in English remains a

significant barrier to learning. Otieno's (2019) study found that poor English proficiency contributed to lower academic performance among secondary students in Dar es Salaam's Temeke Municipality.

Similarly, the study by Wilson and Komba (2012) conducted in the Morogoro region focused on examining the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance among secondary school students in Tanzania. The study was conducted in selected public secondary schools in Tanzania and used a correlational research design to analyse the link between students' English language skills and their performance in various academic subjects. The findings revealed that English proficiency had a significant but modest positive correlation with academic achievement. This suggests that while other factors also contribute to academic success, English language competence plays an important role in helping students understand and perform well in subjects taught in English.

In this study, students in their Focus group discussed and revealed that the English course orientation programme provided a solid foundation that made subsequent academic courses more manageable.

One student said,

"The orientation helped me understand the kind of English I need for my studies and assignments. Without it, I would have struggled a lot more." (FGD, Secondary School C, May 2025).

Another student said,

"It prepared me to follow my studies and write essays, which was a big challenge before" (FGD, Secondary School C, May 2025).

Students' statements above reflect the overall improvement in students' confidence and academic engagement in classroom activities.

4.2.2 English Language Program provides students with the necessary skills to succeed in academic studies

The results in Table 2 indicate that the English Course Orientation Program was highly effective in equipping students with the necessary language skills for academic success. An overwhelming majority (95.8%) of respondents affirmed that the program provided them with the required English proficiency, while only a small fraction (4.2%) felt otherwise. This suggests that structured language training plays a crucial role in preparing students for academic challenges.

These findings align with those of the study by Msigala (2019) in Temeke Municipality who found that students with higher English proficiency performed better academically. The study recommended investing in structured English programs to enhance learning.

In a similar vein, a study by Escobal et al. (2024) was conducted in the Philippines and focused on Grade 12 students under the K–12 basic education curriculum. The study aimed to determine the relationship between English language proficiency, specifically in reading, speaking, and listening skills, and students' academic performance across different learning areas. The findings demonstrated that higher proficiency in these language domains significantly contributed to better academic achievement. This supports the need for comprehensive language training to enhance overall academic success in contexts where English is used as a medium of instruction. This is consistent with the findings of Wilson and Komba (2012), whose results affirm that structured language support significantly improves students' readiness to navigate academic demands. In Tanzanian secondary schools, where English proficiency is often a barrier to performance across subjects, such orientation programs are not only beneficial but essential.

4.2.3 Impact of Academic English Skills Training on Learners' Confidence

The results in Table 2 indicate that the English Course Orientation Program had a notable impact on students' confidence in using English in academic settings. Nearly half of the respondents (48.7%) reported that the program helped them 'somewhat,' while 46.2% stated that it helped them 'very much'. Only a small percentage (5.0%) felt that the program did not contribute to their confidence at all. These findings suggest that structured academic English training plays a crucial role in fostering students' self-assurance in reading, writing, and presenting in educational environments. For example, Mwakyusa and Kimaro (2021) conducted their study in selected government secondary schools in Mbeya Region, Tanzania. They found that English Orientation Courses helped Form One students' transition more smoothly into English-medium instruction by improving their basic communication and academic English skills.

Additionally, studies on debate skills have demonstrated that structured academic engagements, such as presentations and discussions, significantly enhance students' confidence in using English (Chavez, 2023). Olutola et al. (2023) conducted a study in Dutsin-Ma Local Government Area, located in Katsina State, Nigeria. The study involved 124 Senior Secondary Two (equivalent to Grade 11) students selected through purposive sampling from a population of 3,026 students. The findings indicate the importance of implementing strategies such as presentations and debates in secondary schools to enhance students' confidence before examinations, which may contribute to improved academic performance.

During interview sessions with teachers, it was reported said that students who completed the orientation programme appeared more willing to participate in class discussions and deliver presentations confidently, as stated:

"Students who attended the course showed remarkable improvement in their ability to express ideas clearly and participate actively, which is a major boost to their academic confidence." (Interview with teacher, Secondary School C, May 2025).

The findings above corroborate with that of Mlyakado (2019) carried out a study in secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality, which revealed that students perceived the English orientation program as effective in enhancing their confidence in speaking, reading, and understanding academic content delivered in English. These findings support the idea that structured language training, especially in the early stages of secondary education, plays a significant role in fostering learners' self-assurance and academic engagement. Moreover, teachers observed increased classroom participation and improved language use among students who completed the course.

4.3 The role of support systems in enhancing students' language skills

Teachers reported that ECOP's resources, such as one-on-one tutoring, group discussion sessions, and access to academic support services like language labs and peer mentoring, were adequate in helping students overcome language learning challenges. These resources provided personalised guidance, opportunities to practise English in interactive settings, and targeted support in areas like grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension, thereby enhancing students' confidence and language proficiency. For instance, a study by Mgaya and Mmbaga (2020) in secondary schools in Mwanza region, found that well-structured tutoring and academic support significantly improved students' English language proficiency and confidence.

During an interview with teachers, one teacher highlighted the importance of teaching and academic support services in helping students overcome language difficulties and enhance their learning outcomes.

"Our school has prioritized the provision of comprehensive teaching and academic support services, recognizing their crucial role in helping students overcome language barriers, especially in English. We have observed that students who actively engage with these support mechanisms demonstrate noticeable improvements in both their confidence and proficiency (Interview, Head of School B, May 2025).

These findings underscore the critical role of academic support programs in enhancing student-learning outcomes in Tanzanian secondary schools. Similarly, these findings align with a study by Samwelly and Shao (2023) in Arusha region, who reported that access to targeted academic support services positively influenced students' ability to tackle difficulties related to language learning, especially in grammar and pronunciation.

4.4 Challenges experiences by teachers during the implementation of ECOP

Although ECOP has proved to enhance students' English language skills for academic learning and achievement, however, several challenges were highlighted by teachers, during interviews with English language teachers and school heads, several challenges encountered during the implementation of the English Course Orientation Program were consistently highlighted:

One teacher said,

"The training we received before starting the programme was too short and lacked practical strategies. Many of us were not confident with the learner-centred approaches that ECOP demands." (Interview, Teacher, Secondary School D, May 2025).

Another teacher added,

"We were given the mandate to implement ECOP, but the necessary teaching materials like textbooks and visual aids were either insufficient or completely missing. It was challenging to teach effectively under those conditions." (Interview, Teacher, Secondary School B, May 2025).

Teachers' comments above support the study conducted by Mlay and Sane (2016), who found that many schools in Tanzania lacked adequate instructional materials, making it difficult for teachers to adopt learner-centred and communicative teaching approaches as required by the curriculum, support these findings. Similarly, Mkwizu and Nyundo (2021) also found that teachers often lacked adequate pre-service and in-service training focused on practical classroom application of learner-centred and communicative language teaching methods. As a result, many teachers implemented ECOP with uncertainty and limited pedagogical confidence.

Another teacher explained about the challenge of having a big number of students in class, which limits the application of pedagogical approaches required by ECOP, saying:

"We have over 70 students in one class. It is very hard to do group work or follow the communicative teaching methods recommended by ECOP." (Interview, Teacher, Secondary School C, May 2025).

Teacher's experience above is consistent with findings by Mkwizu and Nyundo (2021), who reported that large class sizes in Tanzanian secondary schools significantly hinder effective student-centred and interactive English instruction, making it difficult for teachers to monitor group activities or provide individual support.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the English Course Orientation Program (ECOP) played a significant role in enhancing students' English language proficiency in Dodoma City government secondary schools. A majority of students began the programme at the beginner level, reflecting broader systemic challenges related to the transition from Kiswahili-medium primary education to English-medium secondary instruction. But the programme proved highly effective in improving learners' skills in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension, with over ninety percent of participants reporting noticeable gains. The structured lessons, interactive teaching methods, and emphasis on real-life communication contributed greatly to students' confidence and academic preparedness.

Also, students and teachers alike acknowledged the value of ECOP in supporting academic performance and classroom participation. Despite its overall success, some gaps were noted, including limited time for advanced grammar, speaking practice, and inconsistent use of learning technology. These limitations point to areas for improvement in the programme's design and implementation. The evidence presented confirms that structured language orientation programmes are not only beneficial but essential for facilitating a smoother transition into English-medium education and enhancing learners' academic engagement and outcomes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) should prioritise teacher training and continuous professional development to strengthen the capacity of educators delivering the English Course Orientation Program.

Second, the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), with support from development partners, educational NGOs, and Local Government Authorities (LGAs), should provide additional learning resources and expand access to digital learning tools. These resources will equip students with practical skills in using English inside and outside classrooms.

Third, District Education Officers (DEOs), School Quality Assurers, and Heads of Schools should establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the progress of students who have completed the English Course Orientation Program. The feedback will assist in preparing teaching and learning resources appropriate to learners to enhance their English proficiency level.

Lastly, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), in collaboration with the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), should consider extending the duration of the English Course Orientation Program to provide students with more time to build a stronger foundation in English proficiency, which would enhance their confidence and academic performance in subsequent subjects taught in English.

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