

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Establishing the English Language Competencies of Refugee Teachers: Evidence from Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Dadaab Camps in Kenya¹

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Abstract

Concerns have been raised about teacher quality issues in refugee camps in the wake of extremely low learning outcomes in these contexts. In this regard, this paper reports the findings of a project that sought to establish the English language competencies of refugee teachers in Kenya, focusing on the following core skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The aim was to identify relevant interventions that can support these teachers' instructional communication competencies across curriculum content delivery. Using questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs) and the English Language Diagnostic Tool (ELDT), data was collected from 343 teachers in Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Dadaab refugee camps from April to June 2024. A participatory mixed-methods research design was applied, combining quantitative English language proficiency assessments with qualitative inferences from key education stakeholders to generate insights. Findings revealed significant gaps in English language competencies across all four language skills, with particularly low performance in writing and speaking competencies. Qualitative results also highlighted contributing factors including limited prior training, inadequate institutional support, and sporadic in-service professional development opportunities. There is an urgent need for context-responsive English language enhancement programmes to strengthen instructional quality and improve learner outcomes in fragile education settings. The findings support the need for providing English language

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enhancement Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programmes to support refugee teachers whose proficiency in the language is very low.

Key Words:

Communication, English competencies, language enhancement, refugee teachers, Kenya

1 Introduction

This paper explores the English language competencies of refugee teachers in Kakuma, Kalobeyi, and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. The aim is to establish their capacities to support quality education in the camps. It also generates evidence to inform the design of contextualised English language enhancement and teacher professional development support programmes aimed at improving instructional quality in refugee education settings. This focus is critical because refugee camps in Kenya are struggling with acute shortages of trained and qualified teachers to guarantee quality education to thousands of school-age children in these fragile contexts (UNHCR, 2019; UNHCR, 2018; Mendenhall, 2017). As a result, key education actors such as non-governmental organizations involved in education support in these contexts often hire refugee teachers to supplement teacher shortages (Mendenhall & Falk, 2023; Bellino & Dryden-Peterson, 2019). Refugee teachers in this context refer to teachers who are drawn from the refugee population in the camps, but do not have formal teaching qualifications, since the majority of them have at most secondary level education (Mendenhall, 2017; World Bank, 2023). Most worrying is the fact that these teachers are faced with English language deficiencies, which impede their delivery of curriculum instruction (Mendenhall, 2017). While existing research has documented structural challenges in education provision for refugees, such as overpopulated classrooms, scarcity of resources, and precarious teacher employment, limited empirical evidence remains, specifically focusing on refugee teachers' English language competencies in relation to instructional quality. This raises a question about the challenges that this trend presents to an education system that relies heavily on the use of the English language to facilitate learning. It also points to the urgent need to invest in building TPD for refugee teachers (Mendenhall & Falk, 2023; Mendenhall, et al., 2015), especially in the areas of language proficiency.

In order to support the key actors in their efforts to improve the English language competencies of refugee teachers, empirical evidence on their receptive and expressive skills is needed. Additionally, although existing scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa's refugee contexts highlights the critical role of teachers' competencies and pedagogical skills (Mendenhall & Falk, 2023), few studies interrogate how the English language proficiency of refugee teachers affects their curriculum delivery. Addressing this gap is the goal of this initiative. The project is funded by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and focuses on enhancing the communication competencies of refugee teachers to improve curriculum delivery at the primary and junior secondary levels in the three camps. In this paper, we focus on the initial phase of the project, which included conducting a Teacher Needs Assessment (TNA) to establish their English language proficiencies. By systematically profiling teachers' language skills across the three camps, we seek to address a documented gap in scholarship concerning evidence-based design of language-focused TPD interventions in refugee settings. These components of the TNA are described more fully in the research design section.

Against this background, the study sought to answer the following question: What are the English language competency levels of refugee teachers in Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Dadaab refugee camps across the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing?

2 Background and Context

Refugees' right to education is articulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28/7/1951, entered into force 22/4/1954, 189 UNTS 137, 1951 Refugee Convention) to which Kenya is a party (UNHCR, 2019). The country is also a member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which is a multi-stakeholder partnership and funding platform that helps developing country governments improve equity and learning by strengthening their education systems (GPE, 2020). While these global agreements exemplify refugees' right to education, within the framework of the host country's existing provision, significant gaps remain especially in terms of provision of qualified teachers in the aforementioned refugee camps. This is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of ensuring quality and inclusive education for all by the year 2030 (UNHCR, 2019; World Bank, 2023). Yet, policy formulations to support access do not always match teacher capacities, especially in relation to English language competencies, which are central to effective curriculum implementation under Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE) reforms. Kenya's transition from the 8-4-4 system to CBE is guided by key policy frameworks, including the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF), the National Curriculum Policy, the National Competency-Based Education and Training Policy, and the Competency-Based Assessment Framework (CBAF). These frameworks emphasize learner-centered approaches, competency development, and assessment practices that require teachers to possess adequate pedagogical, content, and communication competencies. Therefore, refugee teachers' English language proficiency is an important factor in determining their readiness to effectively implement competency-based curriculum requirements in refugee education settings.

In Kenya, teaching is a regulated profession under the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Act, and all individuals engaged in teaching are expected to meet the professional requirements established by the Commission, including teacher registration. The number of Government of Kenya (GoK) teachers employed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) in the refugee camps are much lower than the demand for education in refugee camps, and alternative key actors who help in supplementing education in these areas have hired refugee teachers to bridge the human resource gaps (Mendenhall, 2017; Bellino & Dryden-Peterson, 2019). However, more than 85% of these refugee teachers hired to supplement the GoK teachers do not have the required training (Burde et al., 2015), which raises the question of the quality of education offered to learners in such marginalized areas. While hiring untrained refugee teachers provides a short-term measure to address teacher shortages in the camps, it risks creating an unequal education system in which refugee learners are taught by underqualified personnel. Many of these teachers are not registered with the TSC. Such practices undermine equitable access to quality education articulated in international and national education commitments. This is also a worrying trend considering the fact that the qualification of teachers is critical in determining the quality of education offered in refugee camp settings and subsequent students' academic achievement (Dorn et al., 2017; Evans & Popova,

2016). Moreover, refugee teachers are among the most marginalized human resource providers globally, and thus, examining their English language competencies is significant for understanding and bridging quality gaps in education (World Bank, 2023). Unlike refugee camp schools, public schools in host communities are staffed primarily through the formal TSC recruitment and registration system, although they may also experience broader national teacher distribution challenges. Such practices raise concerns regarding equitable access to quality education articulated in international and national commitments.

Research indicates that refugee teachers have limited training opportunities (Shepler & Routh, 2012) and in-service TPD remains theory-laden and distant (GPE, 2020; Power, 2019; Care et al., 2018). Given this, the refugee camps in Kenya are filled with teachers who have limited language competencies to deliver quality education (Mendenhall, 2018). Despite the urgent need for strengthening TPD in refugee contexts, research indicates limited evidence of purposeful language enhancement programmes contextualised to the needs of refugee teachers. There is a need for a TNA to establish skill gaps in key areas, such as basic English language skills required for effective classroom communication. This is because available literature has shown that little to no learning takes place in refugee contexts (Dryden-Peterson 2016; Mendenhall, et al., 2015).

3 Literature Review

To meet the needs of the multifaceted nature of children across refugee contexts, the education levels and qualifications of teachers must be taken into consideration. Such considerations can be used as a basis for planning their recruitment and related TPD needs. This is particularly critical in refugee education, where teacher preparation and support need to respond to the specific and unique needs of the refugee learners, (Aden, 2024). However, as observed by Mendenhall (2018), most needs assessment surveys in refugee contexts often focus on children's enrolment and educational profiles, excluding the details of teachers. Given this, teacher-related variables affecting education implementation in these contexts, such as content mastery, pedagogical competence, and English language proficiency remain under-documented and insufficiently integrated into educational policies and plans. For instance, although research reveals that education in refugee contexts, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, has been characterized by poor pedagogical practices and a lack of structured TPD opportunities for teachers, interventions by stakeholders and key policymakers to address these teacher quality issues have been sporadic, with limited attempts at scaling them widely for meaningful impact (Mendenhall & Falk 2023).

Given this, learners in such contexts have limited access to trained and qualified teachers with the necessary expertise to address their multifaceted cognitive, social-emotional and inclusive needs (UNESCO, 2020). In Kenya, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) implements pre-primary, primary, and junior school education in Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Dadaab refugee camps, being the implementing partner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2019). The program comprises 44 primary schools and 36 ECDE centres (23 in Dadaab and 13 in Kakuma), with over 90,000 learners. All the children in the pre-primary and primary schools in the refugee camp study the validated Kenya curriculum, Competence-Based Education (CBE). However, the camps are faced with acute shortages of trained and qualified teachers to take care of the rising population of learners. For instance, the UNHRC (2017) reports that the average student-

teacher ratio at the primary level in Kakuma camp stands at 96:1. This might not be much different from the Kalobeyei and Dadaab camps. Such high pupil-teacher ratios, coupled with teacher quality issues, may compromise the standard of education offered to the refugee children.

Kakuma refugee camp, located in Turkana County, northern Kenya, is one of the largest and oldest refugee camps in the world, hosting over 200,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2026). It was established in 1992 to take care of Sudanese refugees who were fleeing a civil war in their country. However, other refugees from other countries, such as Ethiopia and Somalia joined the camp. According to UNHCR (2018), the camp was created for social and economic integration of both the refugees and the Kenyan nationals living in the neighbourhood, a marginalized region.

The Kalobeyei settlement was later created in 2016 to decongest the Kakuma camp and also integrate the settlement into the Turkana County Integrated Development plan (UNHCR, 2026). By now, the settlement was hosting over 82,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2026). Research indicates that most teachers in this camp are young and have recently finished their secondary education (Mendenhall, 2018), and thus lack the formal teaching qualifications. In addition, the newly recruited teachers receive very little TPD support before entering the classrooms. This is a worrying trend that reflects the complex realities of recruiting unqualified teachers while compromising the quality of education offered to refugee children across the globe, with little support for the teachers (Kirk & Winthrop, 2013). The need for locally grounded approaches is therefore necessary in such contexts, where teacher preparation needs to address the needs of refugee learners (Aden, 2024).

The Dadaab camp, which was constructed in 1992, is located in Garissa County in Kenya. It was originally intended to temporarily house refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia. As of 31 May 2026, Kenya hosted over 850,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers, the majority residing in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee complexes (Department of Refugee Services, 2026). Dadaab which hosts approximately 417,767 refugees has four camps: Hagadera, Dagahaley, Ifo and Ifo 2, Hagadera, Dagahaley (Department of Refugee Services, 2026). The majority of refugees in Dadaab are Somali, and the host population in the surrounding Garissa region is also predominantly Somali. This shared linguistic and cultural background may reduce the immediate need for refugees to acquire English or Swahili for everyday communication. This situation differs from that in Kakuma and Kalobeyei camps, where with 314,888 refugees, the population is more linguistically diverse and interactions between refugees and host communities often require the use of broader languages of communication, including English and Swahili. Such linguistic differences are significant in refugee education because language can shape refugees' access to learning within fragile contexts (Reddick & Chopra, 2023).

In Kenya's refugee camps, refugee teachers make up over 85% of the teaching workforce at the primary levels of education (Mendenhall, 2017). However, these teachers face multiple challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms and a lack of sufficient teaching and learning resources (Mendenhall & Falk, 2023). Lack of professional development opportunities for these teachers also impedes their capabilities to provide the much-needed academic and psychosocial support to the multifaceted needs of the learners in these contexts.

Hence, this TNA was occasioned by the need to conceptualize the diverse profiles of the refugee teachers. The profiling would allow stakeholders to come up with relevant TPD programmes to support these teachers. Dryden-Peterson (2016) observes that critical gaps exist in providing refugee teachers with specialized competencies to enhance teaching and learning in refugee contexts. Given this, strengthening TPD in these contexts is a key policy lever in ensuring that refugees get access to inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Research has shown that student learning outcomes are largely influenced by their teachers' qualifications (Mendenhall & Falk, 2023). However, language considerations are also important in shaping educational experiences in refugee contexts (Reddick & Chopra, 2023). This TNA is justified by the need to highlight critical gaps in the refugee teachers' English language competencies. Policymakers can leverage the findings to come up with specific context-relevant interventions to support the TPD of refugee teachers.

4 Research Design

An integration of mixed methods and action research, based on the notion of what works in practice was used (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the respondents, who included the teachers, head teachers, curriculum support officers, and education managers from the LWF staff. The use of this approach was based on co-participation, in which both participants and researchers collectively participate, learn, make decisions, and act (Reason, 2001).

4.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Dadaab refugee camps. These three settings represent some of the established refugee settlements in Kenya and host diverse refugee populations receiving education services supported by humanitarian agencies and policymakers. The sites provided critical contexts for examining refugee teachers' English language competencies, given their central role in delivering curriculum instruction in environments characterised by teacher shortages and limited access to professional development opportunities.

4.2 Data Collection Method

The quantitative data were collected through a teacher questionnaire. This tool collected data on the English language needs, nature of challenges with the English language, suggestions on tackling the challenges, possible areas of focus for a language enhancement programme, and any available interventions in the camps used by the key stakeholders to enhance the English language competences of these teachers. The English Language Diagnostic Tool (ELDT) was used to supplement the questionnaire by assessing teachers' proficiency levels across the four core English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The ELDT focused on identifying specific deficiencies in these critical language skill areas. The test took about one and a half hours and the test items for each of the target skill areas contained questions worth 20 marks. Data from the two tools generated quantitative information in the form of profiling these teachers' English language proficiencies based on the four English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). A representative sample was drawn from Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Dadaab refugee camps to support the development of contextually relevant recommendations for teachers across different settings.

To establish the listening skills of the teachers, a three-minute recorded audio clip was played to them. The clip contained a short conversation about, 'stay in the UK'. The clip contained a short story with moderate vocabulary relevant to the level of an average high school student. The clip was repeated only once upon request. Thereafter, the teachers were given five questions worth 20 marks from the audio clip to answer. The diagnostic test was supplemented with data from the questionnaire and the FGDs.

For the speaking skills diagnostic test, the teachers were asked questions that required oral responses. The questions were about self-description and their daily routine at their place of work. The aim was to establish how these teachers apply speaking skills in curriculum instruction while developing a level of comfort with vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm and intonation. They were also assessed on their pronunciation skills and their understanding of sounds in the English language.

For the reading skills, a diagnostic test was administered to examine teachers' reading proficiency. They were supposed to read a two-page passage and provide answers within 15 minutes. The test focused on several sub-skills and strategies used to read different texts with efficiency. It also tested the adjustment of their reading speed and style to match the purpose of reading. This involved the test of reading for an overall idea or gist, specific information and detail, and understanding the writer's attitude. The maximum score of the reading assessment was 20 marks.

For the writing skills assessment, a diagnostic test was administered to examine teachers' writing proficiency. The test focused on teachers' ability to write effectively and creatively. Teachers were given 30 minutes to write an essay of approximately 250 words on the topic of "technology." The assessment focused on the accurate use of vocabulary (words and phrases) and grammar (sentence structures).

Due to the large population of teachers across the three camps, FGDs were conducted to supplement the teacher questionnaires. This approach enabled the collection of in-depth qualitative data on teachers' qualifications, available English language enhancement support (if any), challenges related to English language proficiency, and the proposed content of the language enhancement module. In addition, FGDs provided researchers with an opportunity to assess teachers' oral English language competencies during discussions. Data collected through FGDs were coded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively. Respondents were coded as follows: teachers (Tr), head teachers (Ht), and curriculum support officers (CSO).

4.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

TNA was done in April 2024 in order to establish the English language deficiencies of the refugee teachers who handle primary and junior secondary school levels. Data were collected from a sample of 343 teachers selected by the TNA team, with assistance from LWF research assistants, from LWF-supported primary and junior secondary schools across Dadaab, Kakuma and Kalobeyei, ensuring representation by camp, age and gender. The distribution of respondents reflects the relative concentration of teachers in each station, enabling the TNA findings to capture diverse English language training needs across the refugee education context. The majority of the sampled teachers were from Dadaab (46.6%, N=160), followed by Kakuma (40.5%, N=139) and Kalobeyei (12.8%, N=44) as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Frequency of Respondents by Station

Station	Frequency	Percentage
Kakuma	139	40.52
Dadaab	160	46.65
Kalobeyei	44	12.83
Total	343	100

5 Results

This section presents the findings of the study on the English language competencies of refugee teachers in the three camps. The results draw on quantitative data from the teacher questionnaire and the ELDT, complemented by qualitative insights from FGDs. The findings are organised to first describe the demographic characteristics of the participating teachers and then examine their English language proficiency levels across the four core skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with particular attention to the implications for teacher professional development and instructional quality.

5.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Teachers

The demographic characteristics of the participating teachers are presented in the following sub-sections.

5.1.1 Sex of Respondents

The distribution of respondents by sex across the three camps is presented in Table 2 below. Out of the 343 participants who took part in the study, 83 (24 %) were female while 260 (76%) were male. The bar chart for gender distribution per camp is presented in the Table 2 below:

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents by Station

Station	Male	Female	Total
Kakuma	113	26	139
Dadaab	114	46	160
Kalobeyei	33	11	44
Total	260	83	343

5.1.2 Age of Respondents

Of the 343 participating refugee teachers, the majority (60.1%, N=207) were aged between 20 and 29 years. This was followed by those aged between 30 and 39 years (28.6%, N=98), those aged between 40 and 49 years (10.2%, N=35), and those aged over 50 years (0.9%, N=3).

5.1.3 Age, Level of Teaching and Learning Areas

Most of the sampled participants were teaching at middle school (54.8%, N=188), followed by those teaching in lower primary (28.3%, N=97), and junior secondary (16.9%, N=58) school.

Table 3: Distribution of Teachers by Age and Level of Teaching

Age Group	Lower Primary	Middle Primary	Junior Secondary	Total
20-29	51	118	38	207
30-39	33	50	15	98
40-49	10	20	5	35
Over 50	3	0	0	3
Total	97	188	58	343

5.1.4 Distribution according to the level of teaching per camp

The level of teaching from the sampled teachers was also established. The refugee teachers sampled were those teaching in lower primary, middle school and junior school, as shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Sample Distribution according to Level of Leaching

Station	Lower Primary	Middle School	Junior Secondary	Total
Kakuma	35	82	22	139
Dadaab	47	87	26	160
Kalobeyei	15	19	10	44
Total	97	188	58	343

As indicated in Table 4 above, the majority of teachers who took part in the survey were those teaching middle school/upper primary (Grades 4-6) (55%), followed by those teaching lower primary (Grades 1-3) (28%), and lastly, those teaching junior secondary (Grades 7-8) (17%).

5.2 English Language Competencies of the Teachers

The data were obtained from the teachers across the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The data were categorized per refugee camp. The results revealed significant gaps in refugee teachers' English language competencies, which may affect their capacity to effectively deliver curriculum content. Respondents also indicated that their lack of training had not adequately prepared them to enhance their English language receptive and expressive skills. School heads stated that efforts to improve the English language competencies of the teachers were uncoordinated and sporadic. The responses therefore suggested that stakeholders had an obligation to ensure continuous TPD programmes specifically targeting English language competencies in Kenya's refugee

contexts. Table 5 below shows the status of English language learning among teachers in each camp.

Table 5: Current Status of English Language Learning per Camp

Station	Current Status of English Language Learning				
	A	B	C	D	Total
Kakuma	2	126	9	2	139
Dadaab	2	149	9	0	160
Kalobeyei	2	41	0	1	44
Total	6	316	18	3	343
%	2	92	5	1	100

Key

Code	Description
A	Acquired as first language.
B	Learned in school as a second/foreign language.
C	Learned in college as a language of instruction.
D	Learned it informally from interactions with people.

As noted in Table 5, most of the teachers (92%) learned English in school as a second/foreign language. Only six teachers (2%) indicated that they had acquired English as their first language. There were 18 teachers (5%) who indicated having learned English as a language of instruction in college, while only three (1%) learned the language through interactions with other people. Given the background information in Table 2, these findings provide an indication of the teachers' basic English proficiency entry levels.

Responses from the FGDs indicated that most of the teachers did not have college education. For instance, H1 said: "I learnt English up to form four, which is all. We have very few head teachers here who have college certificates." Meanwhile, Tr2 stated: "I have never attended any course after my fourth form examination."

5.2.1 Listening Skills

Active listening is an invaluable skill in curriculum instruction. Developing appropriate active listening skills can help teachers to provide appropriate and effective curriculum support for the learners. Table 6 below shows the results from the listening diagnostic test given to the teachers in the three camps.

Table 6: Status of Listening Skills per Camp

Station		Status of Listening Skills				
	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Kakuma	8	22	52	35	22	139
	5.8%	15.8%	37.4%	25.2%	15.8%	100.0%
Dadaab	51	16	19	25	49	160
	31.9%	10.0%	11.9%	15.6%	30.6%	100.0%
Kalobeyei	1	7	18	7	11	44
	2.3%	15.9%	40.9%	15.9%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	60	45	89	67	82	343
	17.5%	13.1%	25.9%	19.5%	23.9%	100.0%

Key		
Code	Score	Description
A	0	Did not attempt.
B	1-5	Limited understanding of spoken Language with difficulty in understanding basic information and main ideas.
C	6-10	Partial understanding of spoken Language.
D	11-15	Adequate understanding of spoken language. Can grasp the gist of what has been listened to.
E	16-20	Good understanding of spoken language.

As shown in Table 6, the findings indicate substantial listening skill challenges, with many teachers recording low scores in the diagnostic assessment. The data show that the majority of teachers who experienced the most significant listening challenges were from Dadaab, where 31.9% of the teachers did not attempt the test, possibly because of difficulties with listening comprehension in English. The proportion of teachers who were unable to attempt the test indicates substantial challenges in comprehending spoken English. Kakuma had 5.8% of the teachers failing to attempt the test, while Kalobeyei had 2.3%.

In addition, the collected data indicated that 37.4% of teachers in Kakuma, 11.9% in Dadaab, and 40.9% in Kalobeyei demonstrated partial understanding of spoken English (Category C), having scored between 6 and 10 marks in the test. If Categories B and C are combined to represent teachers who scored 10 marks or below, the proportions are 53.2% in Kakuma, 21.9% in Dadaab, and 56.8% in Kalobeyei. A relatively small proportion of teachers in Kakuma and Kalobeyei demonstrated a good understanding of spoken English, at 15.8% and 25.0%, respectively, while Dadaab recorded 30.6%. This category included teachers who scored between 16 and 20 marks. The findings suggest variations in English language competencies across the camps, with Dadaab teachers recording comparatively lower performance in some aspects of listening proficiency, particularly the proportion who did not attempt the test or demonstrated only limited understanding.

Data from questionnaires and FGD responses indicate that the teachers were aware of their deficiencies in this skill area. For instance, Tr7 admitted that: "I didn't get the communication. We need more practise because we have never had such a test." However, Tr3 complained that: "The speaker was speaking through the nose, and very fast too." This indicated that some teachers had never been exposed to native English

speakers' accents. They also lacked the necessary skills for active listening, which are critical in curriculum instruction. In addition, the schools lacked resources that could support these teachers. Ht3 observed that: "We don't have enough resources that can help our teachers to improve their language skills." Hence, stakeholders in the camps should prioritise resource allocation in the schools, geared towards supporting TPD.

There is also a need for specific TPD courses that address the English language competencies of refugee teachers. One approach is for education providers to contract experts to help develop such programmes. The response from the education officer summarised the challenges: CSO 1:

"We have had several TPD programmes here. The problem is that such programs are too general and do not specifically focus on specific teaching strategies. Further, they should first ask us what the teachers need before implementing these programs."

All the responses indicated that although there were several TPD programmes, none of them was specific to improving teachers' English language competencies. This finding highlights the need for TPD programmes that directly address teachers' language-related instructional needs. Furthermore, schools lacked facilities and a conducive environment to enhance teacher professional development, especially with regard to English language competencies. Educational providers in the camps often resorted to informal in-service workshops on general curriculum instruction which, as indicated, might enhance their skills in specific areas of curriculum instruction. There is a need for stakeholders to engage expert knowledge to develop specific interventions that can reverse this trend. The success of TPD depends to a large extent on the commitment of stakeholders and policy actors to engage relevant experts in policy development.

5.2.2 Speaking Skills

The test took about 4-8 minutes, and the questions were marked out of 20 marks. Table 7 shows the teachers' results in the diagnostic test.

Table 7: Status of Speaking Skills per Camp

Station	Status of Speaking Skills					
	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Kakuma	5	29	48	39	18	139
	3.6%	20.9%	34.5%	28.1%	12.9%	100.0%
Dadaab	38	27	32	31	32	160
	23.8%	16.9%	20.0%	19.4%	20.0%	100.0%
Kalobeyi	2	9	20	8	5	44
	4.5%	20.5%	45.5%	18.2%	11.4%	100.0%
Total	45	65	100	78	55	343
	13.1%	19.0%	29.2%	22.7%	16.0%	100.0%

Key

Code	Score	Description
A	0	Did not attempt to respond.
B	1-5	Struggles to communicate effectively with frequent pauses. Stumbling over words and difficulty communicating the message.

C	6-10	Able to communicate thoughts clearly most of the time with occasional hesitation or lack of confidence.
D	11-15	Speaks confidently and articulately engaging the audience.
E	16-20	Speaks with clear articulation, confidence, charisma and connects with the audience effortlessly.

Data from the speaking test revealed considerable challenges, although the pattern differed from that observed in listening skills. In addition, just like in the listening skills area, teachers from Dadaab appeared to face more challenges in this skill area than those in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. This is because 23.8% of the teachers did not attempt the test, as compared to 3.6% in Kakuma and 4.5% in Kalobeyei. However, teachers in Kalobeyei recorded the highest proportion of respondents who were able to communicate their thoughts clearly most of the time but experienced occasional hesitation or lack of confidence (45.5%), compared with 34.5% in Kakuma and 20.0% in Dadaab. In addition, 16.0% of teachers across the three camps were able to demonstrate the highest level of speaking proficiency in English, with Dadaab recording the highest proportion (20.0%), followed by Kakuma (12.9%) and Kalobeyei (11.4%).

FGD participants associated the lower English-speaking competencies observed in Dadaab with the dominant use of Somali as the language of everyday communication and classroom interaction. For instance, HI9 said: "Here in Dadaab, most of the students and teachers are Somali. This is the preferred language both at school and at home, so we are used to it.

Results across the three camps showed different types of speaking problems, ranging from inaccurate sentence structures to pronunciation challenges. Our diagnostic test required teachers to answer a few questions orally using the correct expressions, and most of them transferred errors from their first languages in their linguistically diverse countries of origin to their English spoken forms. A few responses have been provided here. Tr3 said: "I teaches in class lower but we are used Somali for children to get", while Tr14 said: "I get the job teaching at 2020. I was teach up to now in this school of many child". Most of the teachers had challenges in pronunciation, stress, and intonation in the use of English words and spoke with considerable hesitation. This made it very difficult for the interviewers to follow what they were saying.

The majority of respondents concurred that the TPD programmes offered to the teachers had never addressed the issue of English language competencies. HI9 said: "We have never had a TPD programme that addresses the English language competencies for our teachers". There is a need for stakeholders to engage in organised English language continuing TPD programmes in the three camps to guarantee quality learning. This implies choosing the right and contextually relevant programme for the camps and selecting appropriate modes of in-service learning for the teachers.

5.2.3 Reading Skills

The results of the test are shown in Table 8 below;

Table 8: Status of Reading Skills per Camp

Station	Status of Reading Skills					
	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Kakuma	0	34	60	30	13	137
	0.0%	24.8%	43.8%	21.9%	9.5%	100.0%
Dadaab	12	54	55	37	2	160
	7.5%	33.8%	34.4%	23.1%	1.3%	100.0%
Kalobeyei	0	20	15	6	3	44
	0.0%	45.5%	34.1%	13.6%	6.8%	100.0%
Total	12	108	130	73	18	341
%	3.5%	31.7%	38.1%	21.4%	5.3%	100.0%

Key		
Code	Score	Description
A	0	Did not attempt.
B	1-5	Difficulty in understanding of main ideas and detailed information.
C	6-10	Partial understanding of main points with difficulty in understanding detailed information.
D	11-15	Adequate understanding of main ideas and some details. Can grasp the overall meaning.
E	16-20	Good understanding of the text with ability to infer meaning correctly.

The results again place Dadaab in focus, because 7.5% of the teachers failed to attempt the test. However, the results show that many teachers from Kakuma (43.8%) had a limited understanding of the reading exercise, as compared to Dadaab (34.4%) and Kalobeyei (34.1%). Based on the percentages presented in the table, 23.1% of teachers in Dadaab demonstrated adequate understanding of the main ideas and some details, compared with 21.9% in Kakuma and 13.6% in Kalobeyei.

Two respondents did not complete the reading assessment; therefore, analysis was based on 341 responses. From the results of the reading skills diagnostic test, we were able to determine some of the factors that might have contributed to these reading skill gaps. It was established that the majority of teachers had a weak background in the English language and required training to improve their competencies in the language. For instance, Tr10 admitted: "English is hard for me," Even Ht3 confided that: "Most of these teachers fear English. They struggle with using it for instruction." Thus, teachers may approach such programmes unwillingly and without much interest, as reported by Tr7: "Sometimes they call us for some seminars which can take a day. They don't even issue certificates. Most people get discouraged and hate these trainings."

In Kakuma and Kalobeyei, a majority of the refugee teachers had a partial understanding of the main points of the passage they read, with difficulty in understanding detailed information. On the other hand, a majority of teachers in Dadaab had difficulty understanding the main ideas and detailed information, although some were able to grasp

the overall meaning of the text. However, very few teachers in the study area had a good understanding of the text and the ability to infer meaning correctly.

5.2.4 Writing Skills

Writing skills is one of the most effective tools of curriculum instruction. The data in this section represents the results of the writing diagnostic test we administered to the teachers on the techniques and strategies of writing proficiency. The test focused on the teachers' ability to write effectively and creatively. We gave the teachers 30 minutes to write an essay of about 250 words on 'technology'. Our focus was correct use of vocabulary (words and phrases) and grammar (sentence structures). Table 9, below represent the results of the writing diagnostic test.

Table 9: Status of Writing Skills per Camp

Station		Status of Writing Skills				
	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Kakuma	1	25	81	31	1	139
	0.7%	18.0%	58.3%	22.3%	0.7%	100.0%
Dadaab	57	74	21	7	1	160
	35.6%	46.3%	13.1%	4.4%	0.6%	100.0%
Kalobeyi	1	5	27	11	0	44
	2.3%	11.4%	61.4%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	59	104	129	49	2	343
	17.2%	30.3%	36.7%	15.2%	0.6%	100.0%

Key		
Code	Score	Description
A	0	Did not attempt.
B	1-5	Limited abilities to express ideas in writing with poor organization and coherence with frequent errors.
C	6-10	Basic abilities to communicate ideas in writing. Some organization and coherence with noticeable errors.
D	11-15	Competent writing with clear expression of ideas. Some minor errors in grammar and vocabulary.
E	16-20	Good command of writing with clear expression of ideas. Well-structured and coherent.

The results demonstrate that the writing skills diagnostic test was the least well performed of the four skill areas in the three camps. Less than 1% of the total number of sampled teachers had a good command of English writing skills. The written test revealed that the teachers lacked basic writing organisation skills, with poor handwriting and limited adherence to punctuation rules. Most of the teachers (36.7%) wrote incomplete sentences with incorrect spelling and grammatical structures, as revealed by data from the language diagnostic tool

The curriculum officers admitted that it was very hard to receive written communication from these teachers because of such deficiencies, stating: "Very few of them can communicate with our offices through written messages. They need more coaching." Such deficiencies raise concerns about their ability to communicate effectively with education

offices and may impede the provision of quality education to refugee children in primary schools.

6 Discussion

We used supporting evidence from available literature (Mendenhall, 2017; Evans & Popova, 2016), which supports the finding of low English proficiency levels among refugee teachers hired to supplement capacity shortages in these contexts. Previous studies (World Bank, 2023) indicate that many refugee teachers recruited to address staffing shortages in these contexts have limited formal teacher training and educational qualifications. These factors may partly explain the English language competency gaps observed in this study. It should be noted that most of these teachers had no formal post-secondary training in English language-related courses and also indicated that they had not received any meaningful assistance to improve their English language skills, as has also been reported in global refugee contexts (Falk et al., 2019; Popova et al., 2022). Piper et al. (2020) observe that teachers in Kenyan refugee camps avoid using English as a language of instruction due to their incompetence in using the language. Hence, it is critical that teachers are inducted and encouraged to use English in the school environment. This should not be presented as a punishment or compulsion, but rather as an initiative supported through motivation, positive encouragement, and structured TPD programmes.

Given that some teachers and school heads did not have the required English language competencies needed to provide quality education to refugee children in Kenya's refugee camps, there is a need to provide continuous TPD programmes specifically focusing on English language enhancement for these teachers. Such programmes would allow teachers and school heads to develop appropriate English language skills for effective instruction across the curriculum. Strengthening teachers' instructional capacities through targeted English language enhancement programmes is therefore critical for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal remains out of reach for many of the world's refugee populations (UNHCR, 2017). Responses obtained from interviews indicate that most of the teachers did not have a college education.

The differences observed across the camps may reflect contextual factors such as language environments, opportunities for English exposure, and access to professional development. The data also reveal critical skill gaps in the English language communication competencies of refugee teachers across the three camps, who play a critical role in ensuring the inclusion of refugee children in the national education system. As documented in the literature (Mendenhall et al., 2015; Bellino & Dryden-Peterson, 2019; Piper et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2019), learning outcomes in Kenyan refugee camps are very poor. This can be attributed to the low quality of education offered to the children (Williams, 2017). We established similar patterns across the three camps, where a large number of teachers lacked the requisite active listening skills, reflecting the complex realities of providing schooling in a context of displacement with insufficient skilled manpower. Most of the teachers found it difficult to comprehend utterances delivered at normal conversational speed. This could have negative implications for the quality of teaching, which is much needed in these fragile contexts. These findings are consistent with studies in other refugee education contexts, which identify limited professional

development opportunities and weak language support structures as major barriers affecting teacher effectiveness (Falk et al., 2019; Popova et al., 2022).

The results reveal that whereas English as a language of instruction and assessment is critical to the educational future of refugee learners (García & Wei, 2014), the competencies of the teachers in the language are lacking. Future research could consider how the available TPD programmes are being tailored to address this specific problem. The refugee teachers were classified based on their level of speaking skills. The highest categorisation was among those who demonstrated clear articulation, confidence, and charisma and connected with the audience effortlessly, while the lowest category comprised those who struggled to communicate, with frequent pauses, stumbling over words, and difficulty communicating their messages.

These challenges may affect teachers' ability to use English as a medium of instruction and to support learners' language development. Available evidence indicates that teachers felt unsupported in dealing with the challenge of integrating refugees into education systems (Mendenhall & Falk, 2023). Further, it has been established that there is high demand for language instruction skills among teachers dealing with refugee education (Becker-Mrotzek et al., 2012). Key education stakeholders should invest purposively in language TPD programmes to enhance the competencies of teachers. As observed by Mendenhall (2017), available TPD programmes in Kenyan refugee camps are not relevant, as they are often as brief as one day and rarely result in recognised credentials.

In summary, the findings indicate that some teachers and school heads do not have the required English language competencies to facilitate effective curriculum instruction in refugee camps. Hence, their limited English language communication skills may constrain effective curriculum delivery and reduce opportunities for learners to engage fully with instruction in English.

The findings indicate that very few teachers had a good command of writing, with clear expression of ideas. This can be problematic for the delivery of the curriculum in refugee contexts. There is a need for an English language enhancement training module that is tailored to address the four skill areas discussed in this paper. The module can address some of the skill gaps identified through the TNA survey.

7 Conclusion

Although refugee teachers provide a significant pool of unskilled workforce for the thousands of school-age children in Kakuma, Kalobeyi and Dadaab Camps, the study showed that refugee teachers require additional support to strengthen the language competencies needed to effectively deliver curriculum content and support learners in multilingual classrooms. Addressing such gaps is relevant not only to refugee education but also to the global goal of providing quality education for all, including national populations in areas that host refugees. The low English language proficiencies we saw in Kakuma, Kalobeyi and Dadaab call for an urgent need to develop English language enhancement programmes that can improve the teachers' much-needed competencies. We found that teachers in Dadaab camp had lower English language proficiencies than those in Kakuma and Kalobeyi camps. These differences warrant further investigation into how contextual factors, language environments, and professional development opportunities influence teacher competencies across refugee settlements. Future

research should investigate why the teachers in these camps have varying skill gaps in terms of their English language competencies.

There is need for both the international and national actors engaged in provision of refugee education to put in place progressive and inclusive TPD programmes to support teachers in these settings in their efforts to provide quality education to the marginalized children negatively affected by conflict and displacement. This will help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to realise quality and inclusive education for all 2030 (UNHCR, 2017), and related human rights frameworks that ensures the right to education will continue to be elusive until our teachers, arguably the most important people in the education sector, are well supported.

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