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Disadvantaged children's social characteristics: Fostering their social development through interactive reading aloud

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Abstract

Education of the disadvantaged children is a global issue. To date, several programmes are in place to cater for them. The context of this study on social issues of language learning was a programme namely Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET). The purpose was to explore teachers' experience of the disadvantaged children's social characteristics and assess the potential of the Interactive Reading Aloud (IRA) language teaching strategy in fostering social development of those children. The study used the qualitative case study design, using face-to-face individual interviews supplemented by a review of documents. It involved a total of twelve participants namely four head teachers, four discipline teachers and four language teachers in two regions in Tanzania. Findings established that the COBET learners were characterized by insufficient social skills due to their lack of proper socialization hence affecting their social relationships with the schoolchildren and teachers in their initial stages of schooling, but improved with time. Findings also established that the IRA strategy was essential as it played the dual role, which is, nurturing the social development while at the same time useful in teaching the second language. The study concludes that teachers' use of IRA for disadvantaged children serves as a tool not only for language skills but also for nurturing their social development. The study is significant considering the fact that disadvantaged children's second-chance education remains their only hope for attaining their future aspirations, as they do not see alternative means to resort to other than schooling.

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INTRODUCTION

The present study focused on the social issues of language learning. It explored teachers' experience of disadvantaged children's social characteristics and the potential of the Interactive Reading Aloud (IRA) language teaching and learning strategy in fostering social development of those children in the Complementary Basic Education (COBE) programme in Tanzania. COBE refers to an education programme initiated by some African governments to serve millions of their disadvantaged children with second-chance education after they had missed the opportunity to enroll in schools in the early years due to various misfortunes. In some African countries, such as Tanzania, the programme was supported by the United Nations Childrens Fund [UNICEF] (2006). As such, the beginning of the new millenium had witnessed a new agenda in education namely Education For All (EFA) which called for greater governments commitment towards education for all, including the disadvantaged children. Currently, several education programmes that cater for the disadvantaged children exist globally. These include, for example, Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) and Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs) in the United States of America [USA] (Longden, 2013); 'speedy schools' in Ethiopia (Akyeampong et al., 2018; Pryor et al. 2018); and Complementary Basic Education (COBE) in Ghana and Malawi respectively (Casely-Hayford & Hartwell, 2010; Moleni & Nampota, 2006. In Tanzania, the programme refers to Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET) (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2021). Children served by these programmes come from harsh backgrounds, such as broken families, those from urban slums dubbed 'street children', and children of the nomadic pastoralists. Others come from families with no parents or guardians at all, while there are those from ethnic wars, children of refugees, etc. Programmes for those vulnerable children offer different curricula that help to encourage them to stay focused with schooling.

One of the important educational aspects for those vulnerable children is that of nurturing their social development, considering their backgrounds. It is unfortunate that there seems to be little research on the social issues in language teaching and learning as teachers' language teaching tends to focus on the literacy skills such as listening, writing, reading, and speaking which involve more cognition but little social dimensions (Panhwar & Ansari, 2016). Actually, there are social aspects that cannot be sidelined during the teaching of any language, such as cooperative learning, self-regulation, respecting and supporting others (Munawaroh et al, 2019; Panhwar & Ansari, 2016; Tjāru, 2023). However, little is known how language teachers construct the social characteristics of the disadvantaged children in COBET programme when they interact with them through the IRA language teaching strategy. The current study is significant as it seeks to establish the best practices for nurturing students' social development in the course of language teaching and learning thus making it possible to attain both social and intellectual goals of education. Hence, the purposes of the study were twofold: First, it explored the study participants' experience of the social characteristics of the disadvantaged children enrolled into the COBET programme, and secondly, it assessed participants' perspectives on the potential of the IRA language teaching strategy in fostering social development in the course of teaching the second language to those learners.

The COBE programmes in Africa form an example of the global commitments initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) through Education For All (EFA), which emphasized increased participation in education as stated in the Dakar Framework of Action (UNESCO, 2015). In Tanzania, the COBET programme was initiated to cater for about 2.5 million children and adolescents who were out of the school system and was projected to be temporal (URT, 2005). However, the programme still exists virtually in every region of the country as those disadvantaged groups of children keep emerging due to various factors. Hence, the government through its ministry of education has been issuing directives and curriculum documents to guide the education of those COBET children (URT, 2005, 2011, 2021). The programme is categorized into two cohorts; one consisting of children ages 5-13, while the second involves adolescents' ages 14-18 years. While the former cohort

transits to the ordinary classes after three years and sitting the Standard Four examination before transiting to Standard Five where they join peers from the conventional school system, the latter attends primary education for three years and sits for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) upon completion of Standard Seven content (UNICEF, 2006; URT, 2005). Whereas the second cohort spends only three years learning in their own classes, they are allowed to mingle with other peers in the school environment and are subjected to all school routines and treated in the same manner as other pupils in the school. It is apparent that since the COBET learners join with the ordinary students irregularly, their social development has to be well monitored and nurtured, considering the life hardships that they have passed through. Hence, teachers and school administrators need to utilize whatever opportunity at their disposal to bring them back to normalcy. Children's social development has become a topical educational issue in the recent decades. Those issues are viewed to be as important as academic learning (Alzahran et al. 2019; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). The cognitive-affective learning approach requires teachers to integrate both academic and social roles in children's learning (Chen et al. 2020; Nakamichi et al. 2022; Sospeter et al. 2021; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021; Wang, 2021). In the teaching of language, Interactive Reading Aloud (IRA) extends beyond cognition to include nurturing of social development. It involves a teacher reading a text while children listen, after which discussions of the text read, questions and reflections follow (Deshmukh et al. 2019; Fara & Na'imah, 2023). The IRA strategy is preferred particularly in the teaching of the second as well as foreign language (Gao, 2021; Wang, 2021), and is useful in promotion of the communication skills (Hulme et al. 2020; Munawaroh et al. 2022; Vani & Naik, 2023). Among the language skills where IRA is beneficial is listening (Vani & Naik, 2023; Giang, 2022), where children learn to critically pay attention to the story or text that the adult person reads, and reading comprehension (Ceyhan & Yildiz, 2021; Spies, 2023). IRA pays attention to aspects of intonation, tone, rhythm and tempo with stimulating questions and answers that inspire children's critical thinking (Deshmukh et al. 2019; Giang, 2022).

During the teaching of second or even foreign language through IRA, students need to be good listeners, to have readiness and motivation towards the process (Deshmukh et al. 2019; Kim & Hachey, 2021; Spies, 2023). As for teachers, the effectiveness of IRA is determined by their expertise and professional skills in fostering interpersonal relationships with their students. The cognitive-affective paradigm requires teachers to have a thorough understanding of their students, the learning environment, and to have readiness to foster social development (Dinges & Wilt, 2020). The use of IRA cannot simply attain the goal of supporting children's language skills unless teachers adopt some professional and social mechanisms that stimulate participation in the conversations. Teacher immediacy, a notion developed by Mehrabian (1971) serves as one of the means for facilitating learning. It denotes an affective expression of emotional attachment that teachers present to their students as a means to build trust and motivation in them. Some scholars view teacher immediacy as a means for demonstrating warmth and friendly behaviour to students as well as creating the learning environment to be supportive thus motivating students to develop a sense of belonging to the group (Frymier et al. 2019; Lee, 2020; Liu, 2021; Pishghadam et al. 2019; Pishghadam et al. 2021; Sheybani, 2019). It is apparent, therefore, that IRA strategy calls for teachers' possession of social and professional attributes beyond language expertise.

A few studies have linked children's learning of language with the social aspects such as interpersonal communication behaviours (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021), positive psychology in foreign language teaching and learning (Wang et al. 2021); and teachers' self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological well-being (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019; Greenier et al. 2021). While studies on teaching of the second language establish insights for language acquisition, only a limited number have linked with the social dimensions through IRA. The study by Vani and Naik (2023) provides six tips for developing social skills through IRA, including practicing active learning, paying attention to body language, showing empathy, mindfulness to tone and language,

practicing assertiveness and developing emotional intelligence. Further, Tjāru's (2023) study establishes that teachers' purposes for reading aloud lessons include providing opportunities for children to practice social skills such as cooperative learning, self-regulation and positive interactions. Equally, the social dimensions of read-aloud involve selection of the topics that model positive behaviour and consisting of social values during the reading aloud sessions (Atalato & Westlund, 2021; Cates, 2021). Overall, the processes of nurturing young students' social skills are viewed as one of the teachers' core functions, as is the case with the teaching of academics (Chen et al. 2020; Nakamichi et al. 2022; OECD, 2021; Sospeter et al. 2021). The study was guided by two research questions; i.e. first, how do participants perceive the COBET children's social characteristics; and second, how can the IRA strategy be used to nurture those children's social development?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design, which was deemed appropriate for investigating the COBET programme as a bounded system in which marginalized children were enrolled. The study context (the COBET programme) and teaching and learning processes acquired the characteristics of the intrinsic case study design (Yin 2011) as the programme caters for a specific group of students. Investigators in case studies explore a case or cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2011). Qualitative research is basically informed by the interpretivist philosophical view which is concerned with the interpretation, understanding, experiencing and constructing the social world (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). Yin (2011) specifies the uses of case study when the focus is on seeking answers to 'why' and 'how' questions. Correspondingly, this study explored the 'how' of teaching of language through IRA to nurture social development among the disadvantaged children. Within the COBET programme as an intrinsic case, the study was undertaken in multiple cases in terms of more than one geographical area. A multiple case study design includes more than one case and the analysis is performed within each case and across the cases. Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) maintain that the more cases are involved in a study, and the greater the variation across cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be. Since the COBET programme enrolled learners from diverse geographical zones in the country, the choice of this design was thought imperative.

Participants

The study utilized primary sources of data that provided first-hand information on COBET learners' social development through IRA. Such data were generated through participants' own witnesses as they interacted with the researchers in the contexts where the problem was investigated (Mutch, 2013). The study included four primary school head teachers, four discipline teachers and four COBET teachers (also referred to as COBET facilitators) who were purposively drawn from four schools in two regions in Tanzania; two in the Lake zone and two in the Central zone. The involvement of two distant geographical regions was for discerning the variability of the COBE programme in the country.

The research participants were purposively selected on the basis of their roles of teaching and caring for the COBET learners. Since the programme was run within the normal school environment, head teachers, discipline teachers and COBET facilitators were selected as they had the experience of the programme, having attended training on it. The teachers who taught COBET classes were those who had adequate experience in caring for disadvantaged children from streets and had long working experience in schools (URT, 2005). The study, therefore, involved four male head teachers, three male and one female discipline teachers and four subject teachers (three female and one male). This small sample provided rich and in-depth insights (Yin,

2011) on the uses of IRA in nurturing social development among the children enrolled in the COBET programme.

Data collection instruments

Data were mainly generated through face-to-face, in-depth interviews among each of the twelve participants, complemented by a review of curriculum documents. The preliminary study preceded data collection for this study. The purpose was to familiarize the researchers with the programme and to determine the research procedures, i.e., convenient time for interviews and duration (Creswell et al. 2007). It was during this stage that the interview questions were revised to track for in-depth information from participants. The interview guide consisted of few questions which were intended to guide the conversation. Examples of the questions on the teachers' experience of COBET learners' social characteristics included: 'how do COBE learners feel about schooling when joining the programme'; 'how do they respond to the school social atmosphere'; 'how are they motivated to participate in the discussions during the interactive reading aloud sessions'; 'how do their social skills develop in the course of read-aloud interactions' etc. The researchers prepared reflection notes ensuing from interviews and organized member-checking for ensuring credibility of the data (Candela, 2019; McKim, 2023). Member checking serves as a qualitative research means to ensure that the researchers understood the information given by the research participants in the same way they meant (Carlson, 2010, Thomas, 2017). It refers to the process of taking the analysed data back to the study participants so that they add, discard or correct the interpretations made by the researchers when they interacted with them earlier (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016). The review of documents helped in augmenting the findings from the interviews. The review of documents helped in augmenting the findings from the interviews. Documents such as the COBET guidelines URT (2005) and syllabi URT, 2011, 2021) were useful sources of information on the COBET programme, as they provided directives for the establishment of the programmes by both Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and government institutions. They also provided content such as life skills and communication skills. Other literature (Akyeampong et al. 2018; Casely-Hayford & Hartwell, 2010; Moleni & Nampota, 2006) were useful in indicating the diversity of the COBET programme in Africa.

Data collection and analysis

The procedures for ensuring reliability and validity of the generated data, which alternatively refer to as trustworthiness of data in qualitative research (Kornbluh, 2015; Nyathi, 2018; Shenton, 2004) included efforts to enhance credibility and dependability. Credibility was established through triangulation in the form of method, data, investigator and environmental triangulation (Stahl & King, 2020). It also involved member checking, prolonged engagement and reflective self-analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Dependability was ensured by means of peer scrutiny that involved members from the researchers' proximity. The data generated were analyzed through thematic analysis by adopting the approach developed by Archer (2018), involving identifying codes in the data, which are used to generate the themes. After the researchers had familiarized themselves with the transcribed data, they kept on checking them now and then and shared meanings with the participants so they could confirm what they had said and add or remove some notions. The use of small sample enabled the researchers to read and re-read the data set (Cohen et al. 2011). The coding process was done inductively as it relied on the transcribed data where the key emerging ideas were noted down. Coding was done through reading critically words, phrases and paragraphs that were repeatedly emerging in the data set. For instance, the codes for participants' narratives on COBET children's social characteristics affecting their social development included 'age and social development'; 'life hardships factor'; 'relational aspect'; 'teachers as parent figures'; 'social harmony in the class'; 'determination to succeed'. Other codes related to the uses of the IRA strategy included 'IRA as

an innovation'; 'advancing listening skills' 'pronunciation affected by vernacular'; 'second language learning', 'teacher's verbal language'. The researchers constructed, reviewed and named themes by means of combining, comparing and mapping how codes related to one another (Varpio & Kiger, 2020). Examples of the themes generated included 'social characteristics', 'the centrality of teachers'; 'language acquisition'; and 'teacher voice and motivation'.

FINDINGS

The results of the study were classified into two parts namely first, teachers' experience of disadvantaged children's social characteristics, and second, the uses of IRA in nurturing COBET children's social development as Table 1 summarises.

Table 1. Findings

S/N	Research Question	Interview data	Documentary Review data
1.	How do participants perceive COBET children's social characteristics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. <i>Upon joining schooling:</i> they tend to be unfriendly, fearful, insecure, and unstable, isolating themselves from other children. ii. <i>After early socialization by school-based adults:</i> they build trust in the caregivers close to them iii. <i>After transitioning into regular classes:</i> they tend to be socially stable, solve classroom disputes among younger peers, tend to command classroom discipline; assume classroom leadership roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. COBET guidelines: Criteria for establishing COBET for public institutions and NGOs. ii. How COBET rescues disadvantaged children
2.	How can the IRA strategy be used to nurture those children's social development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. As an innovation useful in engaging students in active discussions for improving their social outlooks and life ii. As a means to deduce the moral of the story read by teachers iii. As a tool for advancing listening skills iv. A means towards self-reflection and adjustment among learners v. A tool for social development and cooperative learning 	Literature on application of the IRA strategy in teaching of language lessons

Source: Field Data

Social characteristics of disadvantaged COBET children

The researchers, in the first place, sought study participants' construction of the disadvantage children's social characteristics. Using the experience of interacting with the disadvantaged children in the school environment as well as in classrooms, the study participants, that is, both administrative and teaching staff made their revelations on social characteristics of the disadvantaged children. Results established when joining school, the disadvantaged children had insufficient social characteristics due to the vulnerability of the environment from which they hailed. Hence, it was important to nurture their social development because they lacked appropriate upbringing of the attachment figures as would be the case for other children who were in schools. The study participants narrated aspects that affected disadvantaged children's social characteristics to include insecure attachment during the early years, abject poverty, and lack of follow up by relatives and neighbours that could guide them in a proper manner. Participants, particularly teachers, claimed that disadvantaged children required substantial

teacher professional handling so that they would proceed with schooling, as it was easier for them to dropout due to unfavorable circumstances they were facing. They also emphasized an understanding of children's inner feelings and concerns as a factor towards a successful handling of vulnerable children rather than just perceiving them as learners.

The participants' experience of COBET learners' social characteristics indicated that the class age level and subject content for those learners were far beyond those students from normal school, such that it was common to have the 8-13 ages learning the content that was learnt in pre-primary and early primary classes of ages 5-6. This, however, was claimed to be advantageous in that COBET learners did not take longer to grasp the content. It was observed that the learners' age was an added advantage as they were faster in social regulation compared to younger peers in the ordinary school system. COBET teachers claimed that it was easier to win the hearts of their learners because what they needed most was teachers' social support so that they could feel as members of the school community. It was further established that the social climate built by COBET teachers made learners to believe in themselves and motivated them to learn. Participants, particularly those in administrative position claimed that the initial orientation and socialization of the COBET learners was an essential aspect that determined COBET learners' staying in the school as they were viewed by other students as strangers. However, following the COBET teachers' socialization, those learners stayed focused. One of the head teachers claimed that since COBET learners were matured than their peers in the school, they empowered and assigned them school leadership roles after they were integrated into the normal classes. The head teacher remarked:

For me, age is an advantage for the COBET learners. Being older than other peers means that they are able to self-adjust themselves faster. They are able to lead younger peers and to make the class calm all the time. We always assign them leadership roles which draws them closer to the teachers and increases their self-confidence. They are also cooperative with other students, play with them and make friends well (BRD, 15th September, 2022).

It was also revealed that COBET learners' experience of life before joining school was a factor for their hard work in school as they had a greater understanding of what schooling could do for them. Both administrative and teaching participants claimed that COBET learners had higher levels of perseverance and would not settle up until they understood the lessons taught by teachers. Participants, particularly teachers, stated that to avoid apprehension with the COBET learners, they had to adopt interactive teaching strategies not simply because they learned them during training, but because the COBET learners were so inquisitive that a teacher needed to be well prepared. Hence, cooperative learning strategy was a common feature of the COBET classes, which suggests that the social development was valued in the class. Besides, it was revealed that the COBET classes were relatively smaller than those of the mainstream classes, which made it easier to manage and engage during teaching. This suggests that within the teaching and learning processes, the chances for nurturing social development were also availed.

Results of the study further revealed that the social aspect in the COBET classes were emphasized as participants played the role of parent figures as a means to offset the family inadequacies that COBET learners faced. Both categories of participants perceived COBET learners as having lacked adequate parental care and believed that through them, they built their trust. One female discipline teacher defined teachers' role as the guardians, noting that:

According to the guidelines for the teaching profession in Tanzania, the first and foremost role of a teacher is towards the children placed under their care. A teacher is not expected to simply provide the academic content to students and think that is all; they have to nurture students' intellectual, physical and more so, students' social development. There is no way teachers can deny this as their role (MSW, 8th September, 2022).

The aforesaid views were echoed by those of a female teacher who narrated the social-relational aspect, saying:

I always draw those children nearer such that they have turned me into their quasi parent. They come to my office often, whether in the morning or after classes to greet me and to share a few issues or to present their concerns to me. They are friendly, loving and caring. It is important to understand them and be on their side when they face learning or any social difficulties (BRD, 22nd September, 2022).

The use of IRA strategy in nurturing COBET children's social development

In seeking the study participants' experience of IRA in relation to disadvantaged children's social development, researchers obtained data from the language teachers who interacted with the disadvantaged children. Teachers provided evidence of the potential of the IRA strategy in language teaching and in nurturing social development altogether. They posited that although they taught Kiswahili as the second language and English as foreign language, they only used IRA in teaching the second language (Kiswahili) to which there was greater learner familiarity than the English language. Essentially, IRA requires learners to be able to make sense of the text read by teachers so that they are able to participate freely and cooperatively in discussions. This was the case considering that in Tanzania, English language is taught as a foreign language in primary schools and as medium of instruction in post primary school (URT, 2014). Hence, it would not have been possible to teach English as foreign language through IRA strategy as COBET learners were ignorant of it to be able to participate in conversations. Teachers provided startling revelations on IRA in nurturing social values of the COBET learners. One teacher remarked that:

This (IRA) is an innovation in education which is meant to engage learners from the beginning to the end of the lesson. COBET students like and enjoy stories that I read, and I am so selective of the stories that I draw their attention well. In the course of reading, I ask what messages arise and they are able to respond correctly. After reading, the important and interesting part comes when I ask what lessons we can draw from the story. It is from here that I always see the social development of the COBET learners emerging (KND, 21st June, 2022).

It was further revealed that the IRA strategy was useful in advancing the listening skills among COBET learners. The interviewed teachers revealed that IRA, by its very nature, requires learners to pay attention to what is read, without which they might fail to make connections and thus failing to participate in the discussions. They further claimed that the teacher's voice and intonation as well as verbal language are important for students to make meaning of the message a teacher reads. It was further established that the strategy requires the use of clear vocabulary because the purpose is to enhance discussion, which necessitates a teacher to pause from time to time to warrant that students are not stuck. Hence, participants underscored the need for motivational aspect of the reading aloud sessions as a means for effective learner participation.

One of the aspects that participants experienced when using IRA in second language teaching and learning was the use of pronunciation in relation to vernacular language. Participants, particularly teachers noticed that some local languages misused some letters thus causing confusion in conversations by distracting the intended meaning. One female teacher clarified:

Some of the local tongues tend to confuse words as they misplace letters such as 'R' for 'L' and vice-versa. In Kiswahili, a word such as 'mahari' (bride price) is pronounced as 'mahali' (place). This may confuse the intended meaning in the read aloud sessions (BRD, 22nd September, 2022).

The study participants' experience of COBET learners' social development through IRA strategy showed that the strategy had the possibility of promoting both language competences and social development. Nonetheless, it was revealed that the social aspect was not as

emphasized as the knowledge or academic part because teacher's accountability was determined by the examination results, which is a common feature in Tanzania and widely. Hence, teachers' use of IRA relied on their personal ingenuity, which suggests that not every teacher used it. Since the COBET teachers had long working experience and committed to the caring role, they claimed to have emphasized the use of IRA with the view to foster social development during interactions with the COBET learners. It was stated that whether one liked or not, the IRA strategy essentially obliges the use of cooperative learning strategy, which fostered social development. One male teacher claimed that:

Once you teach language through IRA, then it is natural you will nurture social development. You may or may not claim in the self-reflection part of the lesson plan about this achievement but actually, the way you adjust the class environment to suit to the needs of IRA; the way you organize learners into groups; and the way you organize the conversations – all those have the social dimension of cooperative learning. The cooperative strategies are naturally what IRA is all about (MSW, 8th September, 2022).

Overall, participating teachers' experience of teaching the disadvantaged children through IRA established that during teaching of a language, there is a potential of transmitting the social values. This suggests that IRA forms one of the most appropriate strategies that language teachers can adopt in the efforts to achieve broader goals of education.

The review of documents indicated that the COBET programme was not only introduced to rescue at risk children from the life insecurity facing them but was also a means to help them with education for a better future. The government guidelines on procedures for initiating those institutions provided conditions necessary to be met to enable the disadvantaged children feel valued as other children. The syllabi for communication skills was introduced specifically to enable COBET children to develop both communication and life skills to enable them cope with the realities of the school and society generally. The other literature established the application of IRA in the teaching and learning for disadvantaged children's social development.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the results showed that COBET learners' social characteristics had positive relationship with the social goals of education in the curriculum documents. Regarding social development, the final draft of the adult and non-formal education development plan for 2012-2017, for instance, claims that the acquired life skills in the COBET programme helped to rehabilitate children with deviant behaviours (URT, 2012). As for language learning, the Kiswahili language subject syllabus emphasizes competence-based teaching of basic language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing (URT, 2019a). Moreover, the primary education curriculum, among other things, underscores the development of literacy and social skills (URT, 2019b).

Results of this study provided some important insights on the social issues of language learning among the disadvantaged children in the COBET programme. Participants' understanding of COBET learners as children at risk formed a basis for social interactions with them. Teachers are claimed to be central force in the social development of the marginalized and at-risk children under their care (McGovern & Nichol, 2022; Persdotter et al. 2023). For learning of vulnerable children to be meaningful, teachers have to ensure there is positive learning climate, positive relationships with them and teacher self-determination towards the lives of those children (Cooke et al. 2021; Feeney et al. 2019; Heib, 2020; Herndon, 2021; Roffey & Quinlan, 2021). With such considerations, the possibility of teachers' nurturing disadvantaged children's social development in schools is enlarged. However, it is unfortunate that teachers in schools tend to focus more on academics without integrating the social aspects (Alzahrani et al. 2019; OECD, 2021).

Participants, particularly head teachers and discipline teachers linked the social development of the COBET learners with the guidelines for teachers' professional conduct. The code of professional conduct for teachers in Tanzania, for instance, directs teachers to foster the children's social, intellectual, physical and spiritual development (URT, 2023). This suggests that the teaching processes have to take on board both the intellectual and social development of the learners. Likewise, COBET teachers' experience of teaching language matched with the aforementioned code. It was also stated that the bridging of the social bond between the teachers and the COBET learners was instrumental in enabling them to stay in schools and learning before transiting to the ordinary classes. Teachers have the role of engaging learners in the elements of positive education, such as well-being, happiness, flourishing, strengths and capabilities (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021).

The aforesaid participant's revelations suggest that there is symbiotic relationship between the IRA strategy and the nurturing of the students' social development. These findings suggest that there are several social learning outcomes that emerge in the course of read-aloud sessions which teachers committed to fostering learners' social development may capitalize on. As such, the competence-based education paradigm can be organized in a manner where learners can acquire knowledge, skills and virtues as opposed to the traditional content-based curricula that give an upper hand to cognitive processes. Participants understanding of the IRA strategy resonated those in the literature. Teachers' voices, for example, echoed findings of Munawaroh et al, (2022) on cooperative learning strategy; Spies (2023) on the importance of listening skills; Ceyhan and Yildiz, (2021) on promotion of reading comprehension; Kim and Hachey (2021) on storytelling, etc. Moreover, scholars (Atalato & Westlunds; 2021; Hulme et. al. 2020; Panhwar & Ansari 2016, Tjāru, 2023), associate language learning with social development of learners.

Participants claimed that IRA was suitable in teaching Kiswahili as a second language but not English language. This follows that Tanzania is a multilingual country with at least 150 local languages spoken all over, such that Kiswahili serves as the second language while English is taught as foreign language (Amaka, 2021; Roemer, 2023; Tibategeza & Plessis, 2018). Furthermore, the application of IRA in teaching and learning processes in the COBET programme aligns with the tenets of the competence-based curriculum. The curriculum documents such as the National Curriculum Framework for Basic and Teacher Education (URT, 2019c), and curriculum for primary education (URT, 2019b) underscore the need for learner engagement in teaching and learning processes. The Kiswahili subject syllabus (URT, 2019a) stresses learners' acquisition of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Hence, IRA strategy tends to be suitable in teaching language in competence-based teaching and learning environment as it is interactive and activity-based.

Generally, results of the study noted that the COBET programme caters for the marginalized children who are at risk, hence requiring some form of education to salvage them from life full of uncertainties. The experience of Bowlby's (1947) attachment theory indicates that children who missed their primary caregivers, particularly mothers, ended up in delinquent behaviours. Research (Hopkins, 2021; James, 2023) enlighten that children's lack of proper attachment figures has close link with the adult social relationships deficiencies such as drug use and failed relationships. In fact, Mkombozi Centre (2005), an institution serving the COBET learners and the Education Sector Development Committee (URT, 2012) demonstrate the potential of COBET programme in responding to the social development and learning needs of the COBET learners.

The findings of this study have revealed that teaching of the second language for disadvantaged children through IRA can serve multiple goals such as fostering language skills as well as social development. This, however, depends on the frequency of IRA application and purposes of the teachers towards social alongside cognitive processes. Since most of the educational processes are geared towards the academic excellence, the social aspects tend to be

sidelined. Overall, the findings have made some implications for intended and implemented curriculum stakeholders to ensure the integration of the cognitive and social roles in education.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study used a small sample as a characteristic of qualitative case study, but opens an avenue for quantitative-based studies that involve large samples in researching the same topic. This might help providing a broader portrayal of the COBET programme. It is also recommended that more studies could be undertaken in various regions countrywide to establish the realities of the disadvantaged children with a view to engage more stakeholders in addressing those children's educational needs. More importantly, this study recommends that other studies be conducted to trace the COBET programme graduates to be able to determine how the programme has transformed lives of the marginalized children. It is also suggested that another study be conducted to assess the gender aspect of the COBET programme with the view to establish variations in the level of educational success attained by both female and male COBE graduates. This could serve as a point of departure in addressing the gender equity issues in the COBET programme.

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