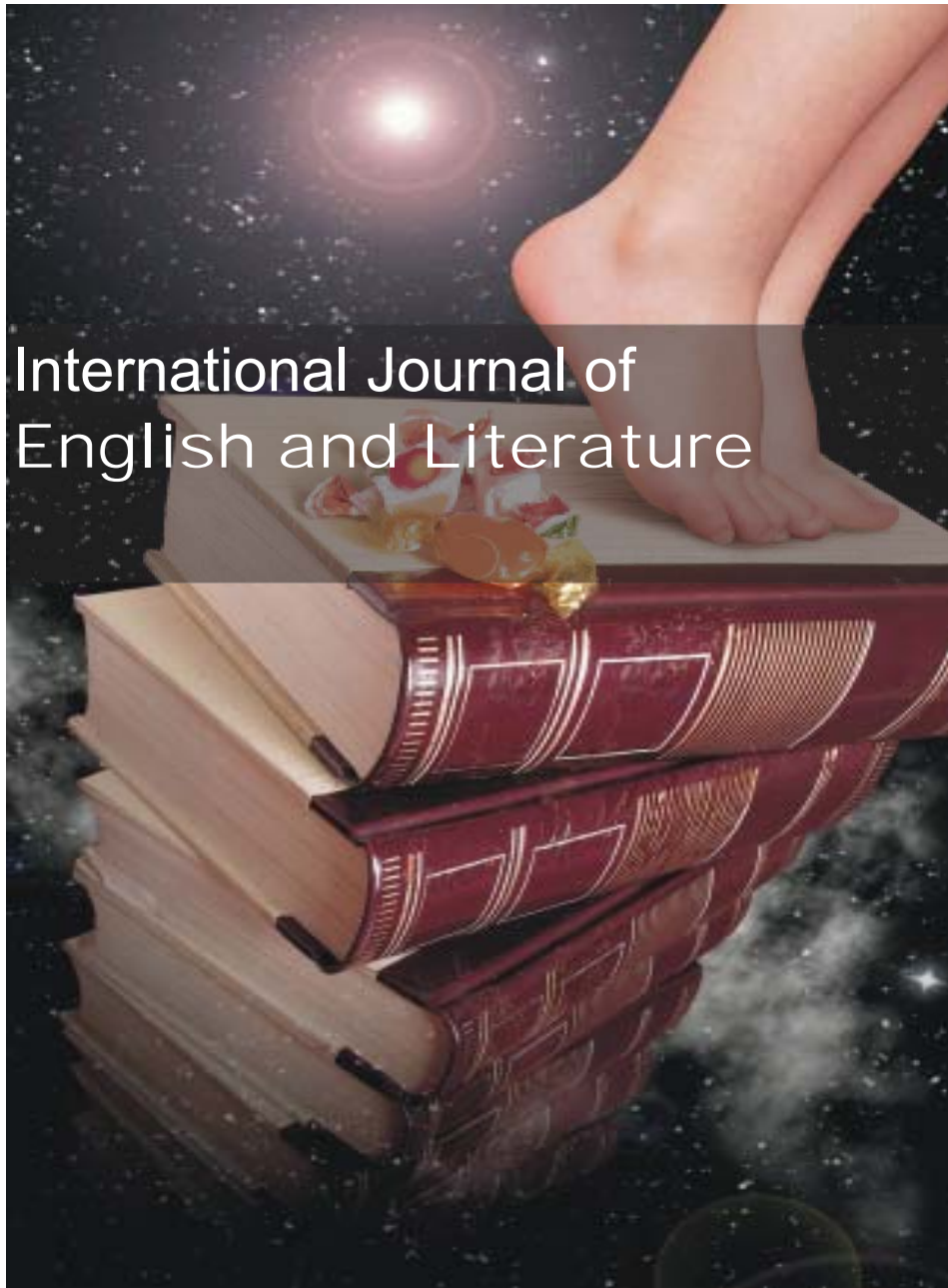


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Ibrahimu Kadau

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Behaviourism theory in teaching and learning English as a second language in primary schools**

**Ibrahimu Kadau**

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Received 18 March, 2022; Accepted 7 September, 2022

**The English Language is widely used in nearly all countries around the world, and Tanzania is not an exception. Learning theories such as humanism, cognitivism, constructivism, and behaviourism are applied as a way to achieve the expected aims of English learning and teaching in Tanzania. This study aims to understand the challenges of using behaviourism theory in English language learning and teaching. This will be important for everyone involved in education, particularly English language teaching: Teachers, parents, textbook and/or supplementary book writers, syllabus designers, policymakers, education planners, and other educational stakeholders. This study opts to use a qualitative approach based on case study design to guide the study. The study used two instruments; a documentary review and an interview. The interview involved six primary teachers from different primary schools in Tanzania. The documentary review entailed reading various academic articles that contained information about behaviourism theory in English teaching. The finding indicates that challenges to using behaviourism theory in teaching English can be categorised into learner-based, teacher-based, and environmental-based. Learner-based challenges include such psychological problems as anxiety, which limit the application of key principles of behaviourism theory in teaching English. Teacher-based challenges include the ability of teachers, especially in the application of key principles of behaviourism theory in teaching English to primary school students in Tanzania. In conclusion, among other things, regular in-service training for primary school teachers, curriculum revision, and improvement of teaching and learning will be critical in minimising the challenges of using behaviourism theory in teaching English in Tanzanian primary schools.**

**Key words:** Behaviorism, second language, English teaching.

## **INTRODUCTION**

English has various statuses in Tanzania, including official language, second language, and international language, making it an essential language in all spheres of life (Asheli, 2020). In this regard, the English language is taught at different levels of education in various schools all over the country. In their positions, individual writers, teachers, NGOs, and schools are making various

efforts to ensure English is learned all over the country at the expected competence.

The government's position on this matter has been clear as stipulated in the Education and Training Policy of 1995; "At primary school level, full development of language skills is vital for a fuller understanding and mastery of knowledge and skills implied in the primary

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school curriculum. Children at this level of education will continue to be taught in a language that is commonly used in Tanzania. Therefore, the medium of instruction in primary schools shall be Kiswahili, and English shall be a compulsory subject "(URT, 1995:39).

The history of English teaching and learning commenced as early as the time the British took control of Tanganyika (current Tanzania). During that time, the Swahili language was preserved as the language of instruction in the first five years of primary schools, but the medium in the last three years of primary and all of secondary school was switched to English (Rubagumya, 1990).

According to Lodico et al. (2006), in the field of education all over the world, the centrality of teaching and learning theories cannot be gained. It must be said, theories are crucial since they help teachers recognise the trends in the world of learning. It includes a framework of concepts and principles as well. Various theories are used to facilitate the English learning process. Fauziati (2016) mentioned theories suitable for foreign or second language learning, namely: behaviourism, cognitive, humanism, and constructivism.

Fauziati (2016), in Teaching English Language, behaviourism theory is meaningful in the presences of learner, the behaviour (verbal behaviour), the stimulus, and the response. In respect to this, learners here are all primary school English takers, the stimulus involves English language content presented by teachers to students, and the response, are the reaction of students towards English contents presented by teachers. In addition to that, Skinner (1976), stipulated that "in this theory, a lot of teachers do not lecture, but brief instructions are followed".

Skinner (1976) uses repetition and training so that the desired behaviour can become a habit. Evaluation or assessment is based on observed behaviour. Desired behaviour gets positive reinforcement, and behaviour that is less fit is awarded negative reinforcement. Rubagumya (2010) asserts that it is difficult to force pupils to speak English and punish them for not doing it. In this regard, behaviourism theory is among the most widely used theories in Tanzania since repetition and punishment and/or reinforcement are the key approaches used by most teachers. Furthermore, teachers are concentrating on the class performance of students as an assessment.

Brock-Utne et al. (2010) stated that the issues of language in education in Tanzania have been described as "confusing, contradictory, and ambiguous. Ismail (2007) complained about the difficulties she faced in language use (English) while she was at university level. These difficulties are likely to be true for the majority of Tanzanian students.

This indicates that although behaviourism is widely used in teaching and learning processes, the majority of students at different levels in Tanzania face difficulties in using the English language.

In respect to that, various studies have been conducted to find out the challenges facing the field of teaching, particularly English language teaching. Among the studies is that of Elibariki (2017), who conducted a study on the challenges of the English language in primary schools and mentioned the large size of class size, excess use of the mother tongue in the teaching and learning process, and poor background in the English language for teachers as the major challenges facing primary school pupils in learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, the current study is necessary as it is intended to provide an understanding of the challenges of using behaviourism theory in teaching English in primary schools in Tanzania. The researcher confined his study to this content because it seems that there is no other researcher who has conducted the same study in the same country.

This study, which seeks to understand the challenges of using behaviourism theory in teaching English in primary schools in Tanzania, is significant to all those who are involved in the field of education, specifically English language teaching: teachers, parents, textbook and/or supplementary book writers, syllabus designers, policy makers, education planners, and other educational stakeholders.

### The investigation's goal

In this study, objectives are classified into specific objectives and general objectives. Generally, this paper intends to understand the challenges of using behaviourism theory in teaching English in primary schools in Tanzania.

Specifically, this paper is intended to examine the extent to which primary school teachers understand behaviourism theory in terms of its meaning and its principles to look into the difficulties of using behaviourism theory to teach English to primary school students.

### METHODOLOGY

This article opts to use a qualitative approach based on case study design to guide the study. This is done on purpose because the data obtained for the study was solely in the form of words, opinions, and ideas, which did not necessitate the study's necessary quantification but demanded qualitative analysis that they could deem fit to address the study's demands. The said data have been obtained through reviewing, analyzing, and synthesising ideas from the previous studies relevant to the study under concern. These include electronic journal articles, dissertations, and books from various websites, including ERIC and Science Direct. The interview employed six English teachers from both government and private schools and six pupils from different primary schools in Tanzania. The data sources were evaluated using two criteria: those that had information and/or sufficient experience teaching English in Tanzania, and those that had data on the behaviourist theory of learning. On top of that, it has been the researcher's

personal choice to pick some of the sources from two criteria. This is from the sense that there are ample sources which meet the mentioned qualifications and that they could not be all referred to in this study, and therefore just some were taken. The content analysis technique was specifically for document analysis, while Kiswahili audio recordings were translated into English and then transcribed, coded, classified, and analyzed.

The data were drawn from 6 primary school English teachers (of either sex) selected from different primary schools in Tanzania. Because the study focused on understanding the challenges of using behaviourism in English language teaching, a sample of six primary schools was used. Teachers were exposed to an interview from which answers and explanations of these teachers were randomly selected. The decision was made because these teachers have sufficient experience teaching English as a second language. In this regard, they were assumed to have experience of using behaviourism theory in teaching English, particularly in primary schools.

The information gathered in response to the research questions was thoroughly described. At this stage, the researcher gave place to direct quotations to support his findings. Therefore, each teacher in the interview was given a code number (T1), (T2), and (T3), few in mentioning, hence their opinions were given as (T1) and (T2), respectively.

## FINDINGS

During data analysis, no distinction was made based on sex, age, linguistic competence, or linguistic background. This is due to the fact that age, sex, linguistic competence, and linguistic background of teachers were not the focus of this study. The collected recorded, textual data and students' answers were analyzed. Critical issues in motivation to complete second language acquisition were identified in this regard.

The interview with teachers showed that most of them have a sufficient understanding of the concept of behaviourism theory, especially in teaching English as a second language to primary school students. This is clearly shown by the response of the teachers obtained during the interview, as follows:

*(T1) "In my view, having a concept of behaviourism theory is an important step toward the application of the theory in teaching. Therefore, I know the meaning of behaviorism, which is a reason I easily use behaviourism theory in teaching English in my classes.*

*(T2) I learned theories about teaching when I was taking my first degree. Behaviourism was among the theories. Therefore, simply, I can say that I have at least got an idea about behaviourism theory.*

*(T4) behaviourism theory is among my favourite theories. Of course, theories exist. Of course, in my opinion, it is difficult to teach English without behaviourism theory.*

*(T4) Comments from my students show that most students are attracted to my speaking styles and word choices when I speak English. This indicates, to a certain degree, that words and styles used by teachers to clarify a certain concept increase the desire of students to acquire language as they put effort into imitating their*

*teachers and finding the meaning of the words. In this way, students are motivated to acquire a second language in this way.*

*(T3) To a certain degree, words and styles used by teachers to clarify a certain concept increase the desire of students to acquire language as they put in an effort to imitate their teachers and find the meaning of the words. In this way, students are motivated to acquire a second language in this way.*

*(T2) The students are not able to comprehend all words. Some students deny words used by teachers, and they do not like the speaking styles of their teachers.*

*(T6) Speech disorders like stuttering, apraxia, and dysarthria make using behaviourism difficult and difficult, particularly in teaching speaking skills. Students with speech disorders, especially stuttering, take a long time to repeat words in the correct pronunciation as provided by teachers, resulting in difficulty articulating the sound or words as articulated by the teacher.*

*(T5) The desire of students to learn English can be slowed down by the way teachers use language.*

*To some extent, other students feel shy as others laugh at them when they mispronounce words. They found it. They find it difficult to repeat verbatim what the teachers teach. They found it. They find it difficult to comprehend the meaning. Hence, they consider it to be hard to learn. In this way, language acquisition goes slowly.*

*(T1) Students' lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and anxiety are impediments to the application of behaviourism theory in English teaching. Due to psychological problems that many students face, teachers encounter difficulties. Due to psychological problems that many students face, teachers encounter difficulties in using behaviourism for teaching and learning processes in their classes. Behaviourism requires drills and repetition. Some. Some students are shy about repeating the sounds provided by teachers, which obstructs the learning process. Hence, it is. Hence, it is difficult to use behaviourism learning theory.*

*(T6) Having a large number of students in a single class limits effective learning practices. (T6) Having a large number of students in a single class limits effective learning practices. In both behaviourism and behaviorism, students should have many opportunities to show positive changes in behaviour. The result showed that due to the large number of students in a single class, teachers suffer from the practise of initiating more practises and only a few students manage to attempt the practises initiated by the teacher.*

Because of the time constraints, the result from the interview revealed that the teacher must minimise what is expected to be taught in class. The interview revealed that due to time constraints, the teacher must minimise what is expected to be taught in class. Three sessions per week are not enough to enable the students to learn a language in an effective way. The teacher teaches them how to organise their responsibilities.



The result from the interview also shows that teachers offer maximum repetition of English vocabulary during class hours and they are satisfied with the response of the students. The problem comes with the time span to practise the vocabulary. The subsequent sessions are inconsistent with the preceding session.

Language policy is among the hindrances to English learning. Primary schools in Tanzania act as a foundation for further learning and learning, but the language policy guides English to be taught as a subject in primary schools and Kiswahili to be the language of instruction for all subjects except English. "At primary school level, full development of language skills is vital for a fuller understanding and mastery of the knowledge and skills implied in the primary school curriculum. Children at this level of education will continue to be taught in a language that is commonly used in Tanzania. Therefore, the medium of instruction in primary schools shall be Kiswahili, and English shall be a compulsory subject (URT, 1995:11995:1).

A scarcity of teaching materials is a hindrance toward effective utilisation of behaviourism theory in teaching English. "We need recorded units for presence when I teach my students via the audio-lingual method.

(T4) Attendance of students is among the factors that may influence language learning. Therefore, behaviourism insists on observable behavior. Therefore, it is easy to observe behaviour changes in the students who are attending the classes and difficult to observe them in the truant students. Students who do not attend class demonstrate a lower level of language acquisition. Students who do not attend class demonstrate a lower level of language acquisition.

Students are taught through trial and error. Since students are closer to their teacher during class hours, it is difficult to detect all the mistakes they commit when they try to practise after school hours, and they are not competent enough to either detect the mistakes they commit or correct the mistakes.

## DISCUSSION

Challenges facing the use of behaviourism theory in teaching and learning English: The challenges facing the use of behaviourism theory in teaching and learning English can be categorised into learner-based, teacher-based, teacher-based, and environment-based.

### Learner-based challenges

Psychological-based challenges include anxiety, shyness, and fear of fear. Students are reluctant to repeat sounds in front of class because of psychological challenges that have to some extent affected their capability to learn. Immediate measures should be taken

to reduce or cure psychological challenges for students.

The truant students face difficulties learning English. Then, because the subject is taught from simple to complex, they find it difficult to learn. Parents and teachers should cooperate to reduce truancy in school. According to Skinner (1976), learning is a process of adjustment to adaptation through simulation and accommodation between the basic units of cognition stimulation. In the view of psychology, behaviour is due to the interaction between stimulus and response. A person is considered to have learned something if she or he can show changes in behavior. A student is A student is considered to have mastered a certain concept in a language if he or she is able to pronounce it correctly.

Biologically based challenges, which include speech, disorders like stuttering, apraxia, and dysarthria, make learning difficult. The difficulty may be seen in articulating the sounds or words as articulated by the teacher. Alexander (1967) stated that nothing will be spoken before it has been heard, and nothing will be written before it has been read. This indicates that among the challenges in using behaviourism theory in teaching English are biological challenges that some students face. As the case according to According to Bloom (1974), constant repetition and consideration are necessary for the effective reinforcement of responses and to reproduce the whole. To some students, behaviour theory is a lack of student constant repetition, which is mostly limited by biological problems.

Teachers and students cannot ignore motivational factors when it comes to learning English using behaviourism theory. The findings revealed that students are unmotivated to learn English as a second or foreign language.

The Languages of Tanzania Project (2009), the most recent survey of Tanzania's linguistic situation, lists 164 languages as student language backgrounds. Students transfer some features of their mother tongue when they speak English. As a result, they make many mistakes in pronunciation, using appropriate vocabulary, and grammar in general.

### Environmental challenges

In class size, many students study in a single class. From the interview, some students mentioned 100, others 70, and others 50 (Elibariki, 2017). Therefore, this limits the regular application of such key principles of behaviourism as repetition (repeating utterances aloud as soon as they are sounded) and restatement (delivering utterances to students, and asking students to address them to someone else) (Brooks, as cited in Fauziati, 2014). With respect to that, teachers cannot deal with all students in a session of 40 or 80 min during school hours only.

According to Genesee et al. (2006), a positive school environment allows students to perform well in the

subject. Teachers fail to follow up with all students, regardless of whether their pronunciation is good or bad. Then, the result showed that the syllabus comprises of many topics which should be covered at a particular given time, so it does not favour competence in students.

Furthermore, according to Hedge (2005), the learning environment is more important for students to learn not only English but all subjects. It includes learning materials and infrastructure, among others. The results show that teachers suffer when using behaviourism learning theory in teaching and learning English due to some challenges in the learning environment. These include the large number of students in the class, the availability of enough learning and teaching materials, and the number of topics to be taught. This leads to the theory that the formation of habits is related to the environment in which the learning process actually takes place.

According to Powell and Anderson (2002), teaching and learning resources comprise of textbooks, teachers' guides, and other supporting equipment used in schools designed to facilitate instructional goals. Learning is difficult if there is a scarcity of teaching and learning resources. The necessary inputs for teaching and learning as a second language include books, both textual and supplementary, videos, and audio recordings. Gross (1971), and other materials which are essential in language teaching and learning (Gross, 1971). The audio For example, the audio lingual method requires students to listen to and pronounce the words. Then, the only source the student uses to listen to is the teacher.

There must be other sources of English audio in which students can listen and gain more practise for the successful application of behaviourism theory in teaching English. There must be other sources of English audio in which students can listen and gain more practise for the successful application of behaviourism theory in teaching English.

### Challenges for teachers

Difficult words are used during the teaching and learning process. Students fail to comprehend and repeat the words as pronounced by the teachers. This discourages the students from learning from experience. Gass and Selinker (2008) stated that a learner who is exposed to comprehensible input is more likely to be successful in second language learning environments. This implies that for effective motivation in second language acquisition, students should start learning simple vocabulary before complex ones.

Kambuga and Dadi (2015) state that teaching and achievement have not yet improved. This has been the case as the majority of the candidates passed but with weak marks. Implying that teachers' capacity is teachers is also a barrier to using behaviourism theory in English teaching. Teachers, particularly in primary schools,

English teachers involved in programme implementation should receive adequate curriculum training to enable them to effectively teach English as a second language because they are the implementers. Teachers should be aware of and adequately trained in the curriculum reform that is taking place, as well as have the necessary knowledge and skills to impart the knowledge to students.

According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2016), primary school students spend a lot of time outside school as compared with the amount of time they spend in school. This implies that, while teachers are performing their duties of teaching English, including maximum repetition, there is less correction, owing to the fact that teachers provide less correction to students, which is greatly exacerbated by the school timetable. This, to some extent, limits the learning process.

### Conclusion

Apart from observed shortfalls in the use of behaviourism in teaching and learning the English language, behaviourism theory is genuine and has been used since then in various English classes. What matters is that behaviourism theory alone is insufficient to enable students to learn and practise English effectively. Therefore, teachers have to integrate various theories to perfect their classes and students' capabilities in learning and practising the language.

Lastly, the study recommends the best ways to follow to reduce or combat the problems hindering the use of behaviourism theory as follows:

1. Recruitment of teachers should be considered to simplify teaching loads for teachers if the number of students in a single class is considered to offer teachers the chance to manage the class in terms of follow-up, correction, making, and a few other things to mention.
2. In-service training, which will include specific psychological training and best ways to use behaviourism theory, particularly for students who are suffering from different psychological problems, should be provided to the teachers so that they can have the ability to deal with all psychological problems shown by students during the teaching and learning process.
3. To ensure effective use of behaviourism theory in learning English, immediate measures should be taken to reform the syllabus used in the competence-based curriculum era, particularly in teaching and learning languages, especially English.
4. Learning materials should be provided in all schools all over the country to motivate the efforts made by students to learn a language.
5. School time tables should consider the English learning classes with a third eye, either to extend the time, adding sessions required per week or introducing remedial classes specifically for English learning.

**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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