Challenges Hindering Effective Communication Practices in Public Primary Schools in Mafinga Town Council, Iringa

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Publication Date: 2025/08/19

Abstract: This study investigated the challenges hindering effective communication practices among Head teachers, teachers and pupils in public primary schools in Mafinga Town Council, Iringa. The study used a constructivism research philosophy and employed a qualitative research approach to collect qualitative data. The target population were Head teachers, teachers and pupils with the sample of 50 respondents selected through purposive and simple random sampling. Data collection tool was focus group discussions for teachers and pupils. Trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were considered. Qualitative data from interview and FGD were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis identified the most significant challenges hindering effective communication in schools are; lack of effective feedback, lack of transparency and trust, inconsistent communication practices, lack of opportunities for pupils' voice and approachability and language and cultural differences. To improve the communication practices, Head teachers should foster a culture of transparency by ensuring open and honest communication regarding school policies, decisions, and challenges.

Keywords: Effective Communication, Communication Practices, Public Primary Schools, Pupils.

How to Cite: Secilia Mbedule; Dr. Noah Mtana (2025) Challenges Hindering Effective Communication Practices in Public Primary Schools in Mafinga Town Council, Iringa. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(7), 3628-3635. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, effective communication practices by Head teachers are crucial in promoting school culture, teacher performance and positive outcomes of students. Head teachers with good communication practices, contribute to good management, stronger working relationships and a sense of determination in school (Leithwood, 2020). Head teachers have to communicate with staff (e.g. teachers), students, parents and other stakeholders. Effective communication practices support the Head teachers to attain school goals and duties effectively (Parveen and Nawaz, 2020).

Head teachers use different means to communicate in schools which can be verbal or non-verbal. Zorlu and Korkmaz (2021) explained that Head teachers use regular dialogue with staff, which builds a culture of trust and collaboration, encouraging teachers to share their ideas and concerns. Ingsih et al. (2021) found that communication practices such as feedback and transparency positively influence employee motivation by creating a supportive environment where employees feel valued and heard. Salamondra (2021) highlights that Head teachers place in

order openness about decisions and challenges to foster trust with staff, students, and parents through communication.

In African countries, Head teachers of schools practice different communication practices to interact with students and teachers (Manafa et al, 2021). Some of the practices are face to face interactions, emails, memos and non verbal communication. Head teachers also practice active listening, feedback mechanisms and the use of various different communication channels (Chike et al, 2024).

However, Head teachers face some barriers when implementing communication in schools such as linguistic differences, psychological factors, and the use of jargon which lead to misunderstandings and create a fragmented culture where staff feel isolated (Das et al., 2024). These obstacles undermine teaching and learning efforts. Therefore, Headteachers must commit to transparent communication to strengthen the academic culture and foster a sense of belonging among staff.

Bahrain et al (2023) explained that barriers of communication hinder innovation and generate an environment of misunderstanding and conflict. Miscommunication has broad impact on employee productivity,

can create misunderstanding among employees, contribute to low employee morale, ineffective teamwork and also trigger client dissatisfaction.

Bratchuk and Smith (2023) suggested that successful means of overcoming barriers of effective organizational communication is by forming an optimistic approach within the workplace and it is regarded as mandatory to develop politeness, good manners and respect within one's approaches and attitude. A study by Spillane et al. (2021) also suggests that schools with strong collaborative cultures are more likely to adopt innovative teaching strategies and adapt effectively to changing educational demands.

In Tanzania, as in any other African country, challenges such as domains of language, environment, psychology, and teacher-related issues persist. To have a deep knowledge on the specific communication challenges among Head teachers, teachers and student in Tanzania mostly in Mafinga Town Council is important for mounting several suggestions that can enrich effective communication practices and advance student academic achievement.

> Statement at the Problem

Head teachers' effective communication is a vital characteristic of school leadership that fosters positive school academic culture. Role of effective communication has been demonstrated in different studies such as enhancement of trust, shared goals and collaboration (Okello and Mugambi, 2023; Balama and Ambakisye, 2023; Koskei et al, 2020). These roles are crucial in uplifting satisfaction among teachers, student engagement and academic performance. Nonetheless, inadequate communication practices have an effect on morale and resistance to teachers that leads to the decline of education quality (Chilongola, 2024).

Various research on communication practices has been carried out, however few have been conducted in Mafinga hindering Council. Challenges communication practices in public primary schools do exist in Mafinga Town Council. (Koskei et al, 2020; Mbirua et al, 2020; Alabi, 2022; Monafa et al, 2021; Gideon, 2023). This unlikeness highlights the importance of conducting this study in Mafinga public primary schools on how to enhance effective communication practices.

> Research Objective

To analyse the challenges hindering effective communication practices among Head teachers, teachers, teachers and pupils in public primary schools.

> Research Questions

What are the challenges hindering effective communication practices among Head teachers, teachers and students in pubic primary schools?

> Theoretical Framework

The following study applied Social Constructivist Theory, this theory is rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky who highlighted that knowledge is constructed through cultural context and social interaction. Social Constructivist https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

Theory emphasize learners to actively create meaning by interacting with others and engaging in shared activity instead of passively receiving information (Akpan et al, 2020).

According to this theory, deeper knowledge is promoted through exploration, discussion and collaboration, it also encourages active learning than passive memorization (Wibowo et al ,2025). The process of learning consists of interpreting engaging in discussion and collaborating to create shared understanding also the theory nurtures a sense of ownership in learners over their own learning process (Nithideechaiwarachok and Chano, 2025).

In spite of this theory strength, it can lead to difficult to cover all content in a fixed curriculum due to time consuming and less structure. Also, the social constructivist theory is suitable for people who struggle with group interaction like nervous people or introverts. Further, the theory requires the facilitators (teachers) to have strong facilitations kills to monitor speaking dialogue and to guarantee all people are participating fully. Lastly, in group settings in can be challenging to assess individual learning.

This study preferred social constructivist theory as it plays a role of emphasizing that communication do not only transfer information but also co-constructing meaning, understanding, and shared realities. This theory affect how messages are created, transferred, interpreted and negotiated in different settings such as organisations, interpersonal skills, media and cultural settings. Head teachers apply communication to transfer information and sharing understanding. Social constructivist theory communication as a two-way process where meaning is developed collaboratively instead of transferred from one person to another.

Education and their solutions from perspectives as well as to determine the demographic factors associated with these barriers. Students identified several communication barriers, primarily in the domains of language, environment, psychology, and teacher-related issues. Key barriers in theory classes included the use of medical jargon, overcrowding, faulty microphones, absentmindedness, peer pressure, fast-paced teaching, monotonous sessions, and information overload. In practical classes, barriers were overcrowding, absent-mindedness, and fastpaced teaching, and for clinical case discussions, barriers included difficulty understanding the local language, overcrowding, and leg pain.

II. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Gokalp et al (2021) determine the communication barriers, the reasons and results of these barriers, and solution proposals for communication barriers faced in the context of school-parents' cooperation. The case study was used in this study. According to the research results, the participants think that communication barriers in the context of school-parents' cooperation are related to parents and to teachers. Participants think that the results of communication barriers faced in the context of school and parents' cooperation are related to

students, school administrators, parents and teachers. Most of the participants think that results of communication barriers in the context of school and parents' cooperation are related to students while the other participants think that results of communication barriers in the context of school-parents' cooperation are related to school administrators, parents and teachers.

Anjum et al. (2020) explore the communication barriers faced by learner in distance education. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 380 M.Ed students from the five main regions of Allama Iqbal Open University. Four questionnaires based on five-point Likert scale were used for data collection. Data were analysed through mean score and standard deviation. The study revealed that distance learners face challenges in communication. These challenges are due to the social barriers, the cultural barriers, the temporal barriers, the technical barriers, psychological barriers, the contextual barriers and the collaboration barriers in distance education.

Bahrain et al (2023) in their study on Communication Barriers in Work Environment: Understanding Impact and Challenges found that language barriers, cultural barriers as well as physical barriers were identified as the barriers to successful communication in the workplace. These barriers hinder innovation and generate an environment of misunderstanding and conflict. It has broad impact on employee productivity, create misunderstanding among employees, contribute to low employee morale, ineffective teamwork and also trigger client dissatisfaction.

Kapur (2018) in his study on barriers to effective communication found that there are different kinds and possess of barriers to effective communication, these are; environmental and physical barriers such as time, space, place, medium; semantic barriers, cultural barriers, psychological barriers and perception of reality. These reviewed literatures highlight several challenges hindering effective communication. Nevertheless, there was a research gap in examining the challenges hindering effective communication in Mafinga Town Council public primary schools.

III. **METHODOLOGY**

This section outlines the methodology that was adopted during the study that investigated the challenges facing effective communication practices in primary schools. Applying a constructivist research philosophy, the study employed a qualitative research approach to collect qualitative data from public primary schools in Mafinga Town Council. The target communication included Head teachers, teachers and pupils. The sample size was 50 respondents selected using simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Data from respondents were collected using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for both teachers and

https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

pupils. The study considered trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study observed the ethical considerations by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical clearance from Jordan College and Mafinga Town Council.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY

The following section presents the challenges hindering effective communication practices among Head teachers, teachers, and pupils in public primary schools in Mafinga Town Council. Data collected from FGD were analysed to highlight main understandings of several challenges hindering effective communication practices. These findings show a deep knowledge of the effective communication practices and its challenges in public primary schools.

A. Challenges of Communication Practices between Head Teachers and Teachers

This section identified and discussed challenges hindering communication practices between Head teachers and teachers. Understanding these challenges is crucial for formulating strategies to enhance effective communication practices. The following are the communication practices challenges between Head teachers and teachers;

➤ Hierarchical Barriers and Authoritarian Leadership

The data collected highlighted this as one of the challenges between Head teachers and teachers in schools. Rigid hierarchical structures create communication gaps when teachers feel hesitant to voice concerns or suggestions due to fear of negative repercussions. In reaction to this, the following was said during focus group discussion;

"There is no room for discussion or contribution, instructions comedown without any explanations or room for discussion" (T1¹.Pt².Fgd³.March 28, 2025)

"On other situations the Head teacher makes decisions without consulting us. It's like our opinions don't matter at all" (T5¹.Mf².Fgd³.March 20, 2025)

➤ Lack of Effective Feedback

The data revealed that lack of effective feedback is one among the challenges hindering communication between Head teachers and teachers. The absence of constructive feedback not only hinders teachers' growth but can also convey a lack of attention from school leadership. When Head teachers do not provide clear and actionable feedback, teachers may feel undervalued and uncertain about their professional standing and areas for improvement, potentially leading to decreased motivation and even attrition. This is supported by the following quotes quoted during focus group discussion;

¹ T is teachers

² School names (Pareto (PT), Mufindi (MF), Kinanambo (KN), Sokoni (SK))

³ Fgd is Focus group discussion

"We rarely get feedback unless something goes wrong or done incorrectly. No one tells us what we are doing right or how to improve in a constructive way. (T4¹.Kn².Fgd³.April 4, 2025)

"Sometimes I try new teaching methods, but there is never any warming message from the Head teacher. (T3¹.Sk².Fgd³.April4.2025)

➤ Lack of Transparency and Trust

Some of respondents identified this as one of the challenges hindering communication among Head teachers and teachers. When Head teachers do not consistently follow through on their responsibilities or are not open about schoolrelated matters, it can erode the trust that is essential for effective communication. A lack of transparency can foster an atmosphere of suspicion, making teachers hesitant to share their concerns or engage in open discussions about school issues. To address this, the following respondents said;

"Some of the important decisions of the school are made without informing the staff teachers and mostly we are often left behind or sometimes being the last to be informed." (T2¹.Kn².Fgd³. April 9, 2025)

"I have seen things happen behind us with no explanations given to staff teachers and we hear rumors more than facts." (T4¹.Pt².Fgd³. March 28, 2025)

> Inconsistent and Insufficient Communication Practices

Some of the respondent identified this as one of the challenge hindering communication practice between Head teachers and teachers. In order to achieve effective communication, necessitates a consistent and multifaceted approach, utilizing various channels to ensure that all staff members are well-informed and feel connected to the school community. To that end, the following respondents were quoted saying during focus group discussion;

"At times we are informed about changes at the last minute or not at all. Thus makes planning and preparation very difficult to us." (T5⁴.Kn⁵.Fgd⁶.April 9, 2025)

"There is no consistent way of passing important information-sometimes it is through phone calls or WhatsApp message, and other times through a word of mouth. (T1¹.Mz². Fgd³ March 28, 2025)

➤ Lack of Empathy and Understanding

Respondents mentioned this as one of the challenge hindering communication. When Head teachers fail to communicate an understanding of the demands and limitations of teachers' workloads, it can lead to resentment and a breakdown in open dialogue. Teachers may feel overwhelmed and unwilling to communicate their challenges if they perceive that their Head teacher does not grasp the realities of their daily responsibilities. Regarding to that, some of respondents were quoted as follows during focus group discussion;

https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

"Expectations are often not realistic given the challenges we face and instead of encouragement sometimes we are being told we have not reached the target" (T3¹.Kn².Fgd³.April 9, 2025)

"We regular teachers are expected to meet high performance (especially on standard seven results) without being given enough tools or support needed." (T5¹.Mz².Fgd³. March 24, 2025)

➤ Poor Interpersonal Communication Skills

Some of respondents said that some Head teachers also hinder effective interaction with their staff. The ability to listen actively, empathize with teachers' situations, and articulate thoughts clearly are essential components of successful communication. When Head teachers lack these skills, it can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, impeding the smooth functioning of the school. To address that, the following respondents said during focus group discussion;

"Some Head teachers talk down to teachers rather than with them. It is hard to open up when the tone is always harsh and dismissive" (T4¹.Mz².Fgd³. March 24, 2025)

"Lack of empathy really shows in how some of the Head teachers talk to teachers. There is not effort to understand or connect with us on a human level. (T21.Pt2.Fgd3.March 28, 2025)

Fear of Not Being Heard and Valued by Head Teachers

Respondents said that they fear not being heard and valued by Head teachers. Teachers express a strong desire for a reciprocal communication process where their voices are not only heard but also considered in decision-making. School leaders who are active listeners and who genuinely value the input of their staff are more likely to foster an environment of open and honest communication. In reaction to that, the following were said during focus group discussion;

"Even when we are given a chance to speak, it feels like no one is really listening. Sharing a concern can be risk; it might lead to conflict or being labeled as problematic." (T2⁷.Kn⁸.Fgd⁹. April 4, 2025)

"Sometimes I have ideas or suggestions, but I keep them to myself because I don't feel safe speaking up because it might not be received well." (T1¹.Sk².Fgd³, April 4, 2025)

⁴ T is teachers

⁵ School names (Kinanambo (KN), Mizani (MZ), Pareto

⁶ Fgd is Focus group discussion

⁷ T is teacher, S is student

⁸ School names (Kinanambo (KN), Sokoni (SK), Mizani

⁹ Fgd is Focus group discussion

https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

ISSN No:-2456-2165

B. Communication Barriers between Head Teachers and **Pupils**

The study presents and discusses the communication barriers between Head teachers and pupils. The pupils identified the following challenges:

Lack of Opportunities for Pupil Voice and Input

Respondents identified this as one of the challenge hindering communication between Head teachers and pupils. When pupils perceive that their opinions and concerns are either ignored or dismissed by Head teachers, they can become disengaged from the school community. Some Head teachers may not establish sufficient channels for pupils to express their views, or pupil voice initiatives may be merely symbolic without leading to tangible changes. This can leave pupils feeling powerless and disconnected from school leadership. To support the following were said by respondents during focus group discussion;

"Sometimes we (pupils) have ideas that could help improving school activities, but there's no place to share them. "(S3¹.Kn².Fgd³, April 9, 2025)

"We have never had a meeting where pupils are allowed to speak freely or give suggestions. "(S2¹.Mz².Fgd³.March 24, 2025)

➤ Lack of Trust and Approachability

Respondents identified some of Head teachers can also prevent pupils from communicating effectively. If pupils perceive Head teachers as unreceptive, unsympathetic, or overly punitive, they will be less likely to seek their guidance or share their problems. Harsh communication from Head teachers can erode pupils' confidence and further widen the communication gap. This can be supported by the following quote from a pupil during a focus group discussion meeting;

"The Head teacher is always busy, so I have never talked to him. I am afraid even to approach him. (S4¹.Sk².Fgd³.April 4, 2025)

➤ Lack of Regular Positive Interaction and Visibility

Respondents identified this as one of the challenge hindering communication between Head teachers and pupils. When Head teachers are not present in the daily lives of pupils, beyond disciplinary actions, it can foster a sense of distance and make pupils less inclined to approach them with their concerns. Head teachers who actively engage with pupils in various school settings are more likely to build rapport and encourage open lines of communication. To address this, the following respondent said;

"Our Head teacher mostly comes to our class if there are visitors from Education Offices or top leaders and there make.' important announcement to (S1¹⁰.Mf¹¹.Fgd¹².March 20, 2025)

C. Communication Challenges between Teachers and Pupils The respondents identified the challenges can impede this crucial interaction include language and cultural differences, psychological and emotional factors, physical environment, linguistic clarity, trust, and differing communication styles.

➤ Language and Cultural Differences

The data revealed that language and cultural differences hinder communication between teachers and pupils. Pupils varied backgrounds may possess communication styles, expectations, and levels of proficiency in the language of instruction. Teachers need to be intensely aware of these differences and adapt their communication strategies to ensure that all pupils can understand and participate effectively. To address this, the following were said during focus group discussion;

"At home, mostly we speak our tribal language, so when I came to school, it was hard to understand some Kiswahili words." (S5¹.Kn².Fgd³.April 9, 2025)

➤ Physical Environment of the Classroom

The study data revealed that physical environment in the classroom is a challenge hindering communication between teachers and pupils. This can either facilitate or impede communication between teachers and pupils. Noise, poor lighting, uncomfortable temperatures, and inadequate seating arrangements can create distractions and make it difficult for pupils to hear and focus on the teacher's messages. Addressing these physical barriers is a necessary step towards fostering a more conducive communication environment. To refer this, the following respondents said during focus group discussion:

"Our classroom is too crowded, and sometimes I can't even see the board clearly and when many pupils talk at once, I can't hear the teacher well." (S4¹.Pt².Fgd³. March 28, 2025)

"We don't have enough desks, so we share small desks. (S1¹.Kn².Fgd³.April 29, 2025)

Lack of Trust and Rapport between Teachers and Pupils

Respondents identified lack of trust and rapport between teachers and pupils in Tanzanian primary schools as significant challenge to communication. Trust forms the foundation of any productive relationship, and without it, communication becomes strained and limited. When pupils perceive their teachers as unapproachable or untrustworthy, they are less likely to engage openly in discussions, ask for clarification, or express concerns. This can be supported by the following statement from the student during a focus group discussion:

"Sometimes we are afraid to express our thoughts because we feel like out teachers don't trust us." (S3¹.Sk².Fgd³.April 4, 2025)

¹⁰ S is students

¹¹ School names (Mufindi (MF), Kinanambo (KN), Pareto (PT), Sokoni (SK))

¹² Fgd is Focus group discussion

D. Discussion on the Challenges that Hinder Effective Communication Practices Among Head Teachers, Teachers, and Pupils in the Selected Primary Schools

The study presents the results on the challenges that hinder effective communication practices among Head teachers, teachers and pupils in selected primary schools.

> Communication Practices Challenges between Head Teachers and Teachers

The results underlined the challenges hindering effective communication practices among Head teachers and teachers in primary school. The results suggested poor communication practices contribute to a school environment where teachers feel excluded from decision-making processes. Also the results revealed lack of diversified communication strategies contribute to a sense of disconnection among teachers, who were often left unaware of important decisions and school priorities. The top-down structure of school leadership supress teacher initiative and discourage feedback in a lot of Tanzania primary school, hence limiting teachers' professional growth and morale (Mtani and Komba, 2022). Similarly, lack of feedback obstructs teachers' growth, engagement and support from school management (Mgaiwa, 2023).

Furthermore, the study results highlighted that Head teachers' communication styles discourage teachers from reporting and expressing their views on certain matter which weaken the communication channels. These situations create fear and suspicion, making teachers hesitate to engage in open conversations on matters related to school (Kalolo and Mwandaji, 2023). Additionally, poor understanding and empathy of Head teachers leads to teachers to feel undervalued and hinder their freedom of expression. Mbwambo et al., (2023) discovered that Head teachers in Tanzania primary schools set high demands on teachers without providing time and resources to teachers. These cause teachers to be stressed and unwillingness to participate in transparent communication. To enhance effective communication practices in schools, the communication practices should be consistent, inclusive to ensure all teachers are informed, valued and engaged in vision and goals of school.

> Communication Practices Challenges between Head Teachers and Pupils

Study results discovered that lack of students' platforms for expressing their views creates a communication gap between them and Head teachers. A lot of pupils abstain to engage with Head teachers due to emotional and social gap that limits open channels communication development. Ngassa (2022) found that students lack self-confidence when engaging with Head teachers, leading them to hesitate to share their concerns.

Failure of pupils to intersect with Head teachers outside the school have negative effect of trust and openness (Mwinuka and Tibaijuka, 2023). Kisaka (2022) found that Head teachers fail to establish routine and friendly engagement like informal classroom visits, playground interaction and regular student forums. Agreeing to Mboya

https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

and Nsubili (2023), students are rarely consulted on matters affecting their welfare and learning environment, causing feelings of downgrading and disengagement. Therefore, communication gap between teachers and pupils limits students' participation and undermine their efforts in fostering inclusive and learner-centred school environment.

➤ Communication Challenges between Teachers and Pupils

The study results highlighted that overcrowded classrooms leads to poor communication process where teachers fail to address pupils' individual needs. The study also found some pupils struggle to understand classroom instructions and hesitate to participate in discussions due to language barriers. A study by Mshote (2022) found that pupil's language barrier limit development of learner-centred environment. Similarly, lack of boards in classrooms and teaching aids leads to unconducive environment and ineffective communication (Mbele and Simwimba, 2022).

Pupils in schools with low teacher trust are likely to be disengaged from school, leading to poor classroom interaction and low participation (Mfinanga and Mbogo, 2023). Teachers fail to build consistent positive interactions to pupils due to heavy workloads, emotional distance and lack This challenge hinders the inclusive and of training. supportive classroom environment where students feel free to express their view and feedback.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

➤ Summary of Major Findings

This study identified challenges that hinder communication practices among teachers, Head teachers and pupils. These identified challenges are not limited to lack of effective feedback, transparency and communication skills, students fear of being heard, poor physical environment and language barriers.

➤ Conclusion

The identified challenges underscore the urge of different efforts to address and combat them. To overcome these challenges does not only improve interpersonal interactions but also, enhance pupil achievement, foster teacher satisfaction and elevate school performance. These can be achieved by prioritizing clear and consistent communication practices at all levels.

➤ Recommendation

The study recommended the following to improve communication school practices in primary schools

- The Head teachers should introduce clear communication channels to teachers and pupils in schools so that enhance feedback, trust and transparency.
- Head teachers should foster a culture of transparency by ensuring open and honest communication regarding school policies, decisions and challenges.
- The government should allocate good budget to schools to improve communication channels in schools and to

https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1714

provide communication training to Head teachers and teachers.

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