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## Chapter

# Rethinking the Role of Research in Pre-service Training of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language: Case of the University Teacher-Training College in Burundi

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## Abstract

Teachers of EFL in under-resourced countries often find themselves confronted with teaching and learning issues that cannot always find timely and sustainable solutions within the wealth of language knowledge acquired through academic lectures, or in the kind of responses offered by means of in-service training programs. In Burundi, the tradition has long been for teachers to look to the Ministry of Education for answers to curriculum implementation challenges, especially in the case of new reforms. This paper argues that such an attitude can be transformed among teachers of English at secondary school level if initial teacher-training courses promote reflective teaching and equip them with classroom research skills as part of the training process. The authors take a critical look at the pre-service teacher education practice in the university teacher-training college “Ecole Normale Supérieure” in Burundi. They suggest improvements that can help the College bridge the gaps in the current training practices in order to better prepare teachers for active participation in their professional development.

**Keywords:** Burundi, EFL teachers, pre-service training practices, research and reflective skills, professional development

## 1. Introduction

Over time, countries around the world have continuously taken steps to adjust their national English language teaching (ELT) policies to the growing status of English as a world language. Depending on the setting, the trend has generally shifted between English becoming one among the instructional mediums, upgrading ELT through an integration of communicative language teaching and increased diplomatic ties with countries and organizations within the English speaking zones. These characteristics have all marked the Burundi English language policy of the last decade, especially subsequently to Burundi’s entry into the East African Community (EAC) in 2007. With English being voted one of the Community’s official languages (in parallel to French and Swahili), not only has the English language gained momentum, but also ELT has become an even greater curricular priority in

the country, challenging material designers and teachers to regularly adjust content selection and classroom practices to the new communication-in-English perspectives. These developments require that teachers be enabled to rely on research skills and reflective thinking, if they are to cope with their changing situation.

In the immediacy of the situation, the Government's action was directed toward promoting the English language through various mechanisms. The salient ones to mention here were an expansion of ELT in the formal system of education (Law No/121/100, Nov. 30, 2005); a deliberate reference in the political discourse to the importance of learning English for Burundians (e.g., the President's speech in Ngozi, April 2009); and an introduction in the country of native-speaker broadcasting media such as the BBC or VOA.

On the side of the population, the response was equally positive, as this can be evidenced through the emergence of all-English schools in the country (*Kings, Montessori International School, Gitega International Academy*, etc.) as well as the growing number of informal English language institutions (*English Language Centre, English Language Solutions, Burundi English Teachers' Forum*, etc.). Increased enrolments in university English language departments are a further sign of the renewed interest in the English language. A quick look at the student enrolments at the University College from 2016/17 to 2018/19 can illustrate this phenomenon.

**Table 1** shows regular higher numbers of students (around 400 per year) in the entire bachelor level of the English Studies Unit over (the last) 3 consecutive academic years, when compared to the French Studies Unit (around 320) and the History Unit (around 280). The same trend is observed at the master's level, since in the respective Units for English, French, and Swahili-Kirundi, there are 40, 22, and 14 students (2018/19) and 30, 27, and 26 students (2019/20) in total. This is suggestive of the priority given to English as the admissions here are made in strict adherence with institutional policy regarding intake size. Under the understanding that student orientation is flexible, the contents of this table can confirm the rising interest in

|                              | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Study unit 1: English</b> |         |         |         |
| BA1 (BA = bachelor, year 1)  | 148     | 127     | 136     |
| BA2 (BA = bachelor, year 2)  | 129     | 139     | 121     |
| BA3 (BA = bachelor, year 3)  | 138     | 128     | 146     |
| Total                        | 415     | 394     | 403     |
| <b>Study unit 2: French</b>  |         |         |         |
| BA1                          | 140     | 109     | 121     |
| BA2                          | 100     | 122     | 122     |
| BA3                          | 69      | 98      | 109     |
| Total                        | 309     | 329     | 352     |
| <b>Study unit 3: History</b> |         |         |         |
| BA1                          | 123     | 73      | 97      |
| BA2                          | 93      | 115     | 72      |
| BA3                          | 70      | 89      | 109     |
| Total                        | 286     | 277     | 278     |

Source: The College Admissions Office (June 2019).

**Table 1.**  
Recent student enrolments in the Department of Languages and Human Sciences at the College.

English as a subject of study in the College. This evolution of the status of English has imposed new reforms in the education system in order to provide for the changes they required, both in terms of teaching/learning materials and ELT pedagogies.

Considering that previous reforms have generally come with new demands on teachers and learners, it is important that the pace (of reform) be matched with adequate actions to enable their successful implementation. A few things, however, point to limited success in the execution of these particular reforms. For example, the training of teachers has remained constrained both qualitatively and quantitatively [1, 2]. Equally, the subsequent changes, which were needed at the teacher-training institution level to accompany the reforms, have, if not been neglected, then taken time to be achieved.

Although the Ministry of Education has organized a set of teacher training sessions, the results are still mitigated, in the light of ongoing internal adjustments to the system (e.g., the latest decision to space out the learning of foreign languages at the basic level: Decree No. 100/078, May 22, 2019). Problems related to funding have, in turn, impeded full coverage of all teachers in need of in-service training and full supply of school materials, especially as the 2015 disputed elections developed into a prolonged political crisis, leading to the International Community withdrawing their financial aid (52% until 2015) to the Government.

Against this background, ELT teachers are generally not self-reliant in front of teaching problems, even when they have a university level education. Although no significant studies have sought to understand the underpinnings of such behavior in the country, the gaps observed in classroom research skills in the local teacher education programs may be used to offer a tentative explanation. Overall, the courses at the pre-service level continue to be geared toward helping the prospective secondary school teachers acquire as much competence as possible in various English language components and teaching methodologies. Despite some innovative move to insert new courses designed to provide student teachers with some life general skills (entrepreneurship, computing, study skills, and civic education), little is done to equip them with the awareness and skills necessary to investigate problems that arise during program implementation. As such, they are poorly equipped for professional development. While this may appear to be the phenomenon in many other countries around the world [3, 4], it is more a feature of centrally run systems of education where “content uniformity” is emphasized in connection with national examination purposes.

On the other hand, trainers need to convince themselves that secondary school teaching does not have to be divorced from the inherent need to understand better one’s own teaching through structured investigations. Without this, flexibility can hardly find its way in lesson planning. It is true that the professional context in Burundi secondary education does not require from teachers a demonstration of research abilities for their professional advancement; but this situation cannot possibly be used to overlook the role that research literacy can play in their teaching efficiency. Just as we, as teacher trainers, believe that second language learning is a more successful process when it is organized and principled, we should equally engage ourselves in promoting training models that can offer those we train options in the ways to understand better, hence improve their own teaching. The idea commonly held in Burundi that secondary school teachers are expected to execute the program is one that may be “softly” challenged through the teachers’ engagement in reflective teaching.

A rethinking of the role of research calls for attention in Burundi because teachers of English develop in a context where, as students, they are prone to gaps in research and reflective teaching; yet these weaknesses from initial teacher training have limited opportunity of being tackled through prospects of professional development programs like in-service teacher-training (INSET). Teacher trainers have also shown their limitations in their contribution to the professional needs of teachers [5, 6].

The authors' own experiences as both former curriculum developers and secondary school teachers can provide witness of that: first, quality wise, INSET is solely based on short-time training sessions in the form of seminars and workshops initiated and run by curriculum designers—pedagogic advisers as they are labeled in Burundi. These advisers themselves have no solid background training either in curriculum design and material evaluation or in advanced research skills. This is because there is no university department specializing in curriculum development in the country. Pedagogic advisers are thus recruited from among the teachers, including novice ones. Since there is no plan for their professional development, their expertise in understanding the complexity of foreign language classroom processes and finding genuine ways of addressing the numerous questions they pose is then arguably flawed [2, 5]. It should also be noted that INSET is generally limited in its teacher coverage capacity [7] due to financial constraints.

Second, and with regard to planning, INSET in Burundi is a mechanism totally monitored by central decision making, with the pedagogic advisers and other education officials (from Directorates and Inspectorates) taking the upper hand in setting the agendas of the trainings. The activities—also pre-determined by the pedagogic advisers—have been known to revolve around the presentation of new materials or instructional approaches, as this continues to be observed in the induction of basic education teachers focused on the spacing out of foreign languages in primary education (which began with September 2019).

Such a situation, therefore, imposes a reorientation of the teaching models within the teacher-training institutions, as a potentially promising avenue for medium- and long-term solutions to the lack of both interest and research initiatives among EFL teachers in Burundi in general. The goal would be to enable prospective teachers to become more inquisitive, perhaps even critical about their teaching, hence take a more active part in addressing the issues and challenges faced in their own teaching environments. That is the essence of reflection in the present context.

This paper proposes to examine the benefits to EFL teachers in the secondary schools of Burundi when pre-service training programs care to balance the provision of language and pedagogical preparation with reasonable exposure to classroom research and reflection that are consciously teacher-initiated. It contends that the research component is not sufficiently valued at the undergraduate level. It is, if not ignored in the course schemes and content delivery, then minimized in the trainers' general teaching discourse, including during the teaching practicum. The discussion draws on the training practices at the university teacher-training college "*Ecole Normale Supérieure*"—hereafter labeled "The College"—more specifically within the English Studies Unit where the authors work as teacher trainers.

Through a reflexive approach, they draw on their own experiences, observations, and interpretations of the provisions available for teacher research skills in the College training model to advocate for a deliberate and consensual integration of this component in the English Studies Unit's course schemes. The reflections are focused on the students and trainers in the Language Department at the College, knowing that they have a bearing on the secondary school teachers of English and the curriculum designers at the bureau for secondary (*basic* and *post-basic* in the new terminology) school material development.

After a summary presentation of the recent developments in the Burundi education system and their impact on ELT, the chapter discusses the rationale for teacher-trainers at the authors' college to equip EFL teachers with reflective and research skills. It closes with suggestions for improvements that engage the institution, the teacher trainers, as well as the student trainees in a change of attitudes likely to revive the research component at the College.

## **2. Recent developments in the education system and implications for ELT and teacher training**

### **2.1 New developments**

It is not easy to identify and describe the wealth of recent developments in the education sector in Burundi within the scope of this chapter, considering both their depth and width, and that the changes and initiatives have been ongoing since 2006. This situation can be attributed to the regular shifts in political decisions (e.g., Decree-Law100/251, Oct. 3, 2011; Decree-Law 100/38, February 16, 2016) about either having one ministry (which regroups primary, secondary and tertiary education) or two ministries (through a separation between the ministry of basic and post-basic education and the ministry of Tertiary Education and Scientific Research—currently the case in Burundi). We propose to summarize the major developments in the ELT area along the pedagogical, structural, and social levels.

#### *2.1.1 Pedagogical level*

##### *2.1.1.1 ELT extension and volume revision*

Under this component, it is worth pointing out the revision of the weekly allocated teaching periods of English as a school subject and the mandated measure to teach this language through the entire education system. As illustration, the ministry authority's measure (Decision No. 610/1187, 25 Aug. 2005) to increase its weight in the curriculum led to the time for English in the language section of upper secondary school rising from 6 to 10 weekly sessions. There followed a progressive replacement of all the existing textbooks with new ones that advocate contents presumed to be more relevant to the learners' (contemporary) needs and using innovative teaching techniques (Decree No. 100/130, May 23, 2014). Topics of current interest such as those related to the environment, human rights, HIV/AIDS, entrepreneurial activities, gender issues, and inclusive education were subsequently given a place of choice in the new materials and used as a base for designing classroom learning activities.

A similar trend observed in non-English departments at tertiary education level resulted in a systematic increase in the volumes of area-specific English courses, coupled with an extension of ELT in these departments from the first year to the entire bachelor level. In the English-catering units, the efforts were essentially orientated toward revising the course schemes with a view to consolidating student knowledge of English (at the time, ELT began at secondary level schooling) through more provision for competence in the areas of language structure, pronunciation, and macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Such a decision might have been partly influenced by the communication-in-English goal that underlies much of the new country policy on English. It may also derive from the failure of teacher-training programs to achieve two things: (1) realize the critical relationship between teaching and research (2) highlight through course planning and pedagogic reflections/events (such as workshops) the role of deliberately motivated inquiry into one's instructional practices in the betterment of communication competence at any teaching level.

##### *2.1.1.2 Recent adjustments in initial teacher-training course schemes*

The first adjustments, focusing on improving the quality of teacher education programs at the tertiary level, had to wait until late 2019 to be initiated. A 5-day workshop was organized (from September 23 to 27, 2019) to this end, which

regrouped three trainers (in the case of English) of whom two were from the university of Burundi's Institute for Applied Pedagogy and one from the author's own College—who was one of us. The purpose was to harmonize all course schemes, based on the idea that both these public institutions are endowed with the responsibility to train secondary school teachers.

The official instruction to immediately launch their implementation with the new academic year (October 14, 2019), even though the schemes were not yet adopted, is however likely to not only impact their effectiveness, but also cause frustration among teacher trainers who depend on genuine consultation and coherence of the reforms for their efficient support to them. Changes in secondary school education reverberate to teacher education programs. Therefore, it is necessary that trainers and reformers are in agreement about the process of change. This plays on our understanding of how to shape and adjust our multifaceted roles as instructors of the specific disciplines (EFL here), teacher trainers, practicum supervisors, and mentors of the same.

### *2.1.1.3 Changes in methodology*

A new pedagogy was introduced in secondary school ELT programs, which was described as focused on the learner's integration of language and content resources through active participatory and group work techniques. The guiding principle was to organize the teaching along the competency-based model of education, at least in theory. In addition, a strong recommendation was made to apply communicative language teaching in ELT, even though it was a new approach for a great number of teachers, and despite its poor illustration in the teaching manuals [7].

The authors' view is twofold: first, this methodology—which seems very close to the task-based approach—has not been translated into comprehensive teaching guidelines for the teachers, leading to implementation difficulties likely to require optional solutions to be sought either by the individual teachers or then through INSET. Second, an important change was the step to move away from teaching practice that lays emphasis on the transmission of highly theoretically oriented input. In addition, group work was highlighted as an innovation which may arguably be seen as the critical technique for promoting the learners' active participation.

A barrier in the way of the expected changes may be expected: unless teachers' initial training incorporated reflection and classroom research elements, it is most likely that these changes will not be satisfactorily implemented. Thus, the risk of teachers reproducing the same teaching models that were used prior to the reforms is likely. The point being made here is that regardless of the study level where rote teaching/learning occurs, it develops anti-reflective and anti-analytical attitudes that may for a long time affect teachers' performance in the exercise of their profession. Some aspects of this practice appear to be still haunting teacher trainers and student teachers, and it is imperative that the issue be brought to the forefront of educational reform, if reflective teaching and research skills are to be achieved in the College training model.

### *2.1.1.4 Considerations from curriculum development*

In efforts geared toward presenting the new secondary education reforms to the 3rd-year students and the teaching staff at the College, the curriculum development team, through a question-answer forum (April 2016 and January 2018), recognized lags between the launch of the new teaching materials and a set of provisions necessary for the qualitative implementation of the innovative ideas underpinning them. These included the shortage of textbooks, insufficiency of qualified teachers, and

the scarcity of resources for INSET. It was further indicated that the government was working hard to address the issues still at stake. Reference here was made to the process whereby teacher-training institutions aimed at secondary education would be obliged to adapt their training curricula to the teachers' needs created by the reforms under discussion.

#### *2.1.1.5 Considerations from secondary school practicing teachers*

In an evaluative school visit organized and steered by the College Quality Assurance Directorate in February 2019, we (the authors) together with trainer colleagues from all College departments collected very similar complaints from teachers in relation to problems concerning the implementation of the new secondary school curricula. The schools visited were selected based on a number of criteria such as “urban” versus “rural,” “ordinary school” versus “excellence school,” and “public” versus “private,” and they were differently located (Ngozi Province in the North, Gitega Province in the Centre, and Muramvya Province in the West). A later visit in April 2019 to schools with the same characteristics in the capital city Bujumbura yielded similar negative feelings from the teachers about the implementation of the reforms.

Specifically concerning the teaching of English, recurrent concerns were expressed about the nonavailability of textbooks, lack of audio materials and equipment, some texts being linguistically sophisticated, the learning points being shallow, and the teaching procedures being superficially explained. They also reported lack of clarity over the implementation of the communicative approach in their classrooms. Much of the reported information corroborates the issues raised by primary school teachers about their new English teaching materials gradually released and revised between 2006 and 2013 [5, 7].

The gaps between the reforms and their implementation were blamed by the teachers interviewed for resulting in low English proficiency of secondary school leavers. It has to be pointed out that tertiary institutions generally have to confront the very low language proficiencies of newly recruited student teachers. This is especially frustrating for teacher trainers within the English Studies Unit at the College who complain about encountering communication difficulties with their learners upon entry into Standard 7. According to these teacher trainers, the difficulties are due to the prevailing use of audiolingual teaching methods in Standards 1–7 [7].

Perhaps even more critical were the teachers' apprehension about the added value of the new materials in improving the teaching and learning of English, if compared with their previous materials. In the end, all these findings were shared with different stakeholders in a 2-day workshop organized by the College (May 2019) in collaboration with the ministries in charge of education.

Overall, the above teachers' considerations are a sign that secondary school teachers of English experience teaching difficulties some of which could be tackled through a recourse to a problem-solving process that encourages research and reflection by the teachers themselves, both individually and collaboratively. It is necessary that such a process be part of their pre-service preparation.

#### *2.1.1.6 Opportunity for the acquisition and practice of research and reflection*

An important lesson from the workshop proceedings in the context of the present chapter is that the situation of secondary school English teachers in 2019 does not seem any better than it was up until mid-2017. They do not feel confident about the reforms. Having “voiced” their queries to those in authority—namely



their former trainers—and having limited reflective skills, there is little incentive for teachers to search for answers to implementation problems. Their preference may be to rely on outside sources, which does not promote reform ideas. The teacher trainers, on their part, may be tempted to perpetuate the same old training model, for two possible reasons. They may argue that (1) they are not concerned with the issues raised and (2) they were not properly informed about the expected changes and outcomes. Further influence may come from the fact that the new training scheme lays no solid emphasis on the research component. It is the authors' wish that the proposal made to include a 45-hour course, that is, “teacher research in the EFL classroom” in the bachelor 3 course scheme will be accepted at the adoption stage.

A quick presentation of its details in the scheme may give the reader some idea about its underlying intentions (**Table 2**).

A close look at the goals and contents still suggests a dominantly theory-oriented course, even if there can be optimism that the course instructor will draw on personal ingenuity to add a practical component.

### 2.1.2 Structural level

In connection to the restructuring of the educational system, there has been a reorganization of the primary and secondary education stages into what came to be known as the basic and post-basic levels with respective durations of 9 years and 3–4 years (the 4-year length applies to pupils preparing to teach from Standard 1 to Standard 6 of the basic level—ex primary education level). At the end of basic education (Standard 9), pupils are generally aged 13–14 years. Those who pass the national examination for this stage move up to the post-basic level, which itself

| Processes | Parameters          | Description  |
|-----------|---------------------|--|
| Design    | Course title        | Teacher research in the ELT classroom (45 hours)   |
|           | General goal        | To understand the contribution of teacher-initiated classroom research in the context of TEFL  |
|           | Specific objectives | Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and define the types of classroom research available for the EFL teacher</li> <li>• discuss the rationale and processes of teacher-led classroom research in the EFL context</li> <li>• appraise the potential contributions and challenges of each form of research</li> <li>• suggest potential teacher-classroom research areas and work out related relevant research approach and tool(s)</li> </ul>  |
|           | Prerequisites       | Introduction to study skills, pedagogy, and educational psychology courses   |
|           | Course organization | Lecturing: 30 hours; practical work: 15 hours  |
|           | Course contents     | The course introduces students to the field of teacher research in the EFL classroom. It explores the rationale and importance of research skills in the (pre-service) training of EFL teachers. It provides insights about the central role of teacher self-initiated research in understanding and improving his/her teaching performance. It creates an opportunity to discuss the status of research in the EFL teaching practice in Burundi and to have a first experience in thinking out an overall approach to investigate an identified teaching/learning issue, using a relevant instrument constructed to that end. |

**Table 2.**  
Summary details of the newly proposed course on research.

closes with another national examination. At the end of post-basic education, such an examination determines who proceeds into tertiary education or may go into active life in jobs presumably related to their study areas.

Tertiary education, for its part, has been enhanced through an extension from the bachelor level followed by the master level, then up to the doctorate level (hence the acronym BMD) since 2015 along the Bologna framework (Decree-Law No. 100/05-06 January, 2015). Practically, however, most university faculties are still grappling with sustaining the master level courses, due to the shortage of resources and qualified teachers in most study fields in the country, including at the College. The master level program with an EFL specialization was launched in April 2018. The first generation is into their first month of the second year, having encountered practical difficulties, as mentioned above.

### *2.1.3 Social level*

Under this component, it is worth mentioning the efforts made by the government to provide free primary education, a measure that triggered unprecedented efforts to expand the existing school infrastructures. The impact has seen increasingly crowded classes at all stages of education [6], with teachers unprepared to work in the new conditions. The lack of textbooks that followed led to learners fighting hard to benefit from their lessons.

At the higher learning level, the government decision to issue contracted scholarships in the form of refundable credits did not satisfy the students and parents in particular. In a context of tough living conditions driven by almost 5 years of international economic sanctions, the measure entails that students find it hard to cope with school attendance and day-long concentration. As the College has no student accommodation service, this adds to hardship during their studies. It should be pointed out that the general work trend is for all departments to ensure that the timetable is fully filled from Monday to Friday, with the possibility for an extension to Saturday. All this suggests difficulty for both teachers and students to find free time that they could use to read extensively in order to supplement their lectures or work efficiently on any assignments or projects that may demand some research element.

## **2.2 Impact on the profession**

Although many of the developments can be commended for their renewed impetus for ELT in Burundi, their negative impact on the provision of quality education cannot be ignored. At the basic and post-basic levels, some of the adverse effects are (1) a relentless shortage in the provision of textbooks and other teaching/learning materials; (2) class management issues; (3) the recruitment of untrained teachers; (4) increased workload for teachers (up to 30 sessions at pre-tertiary levels especially those of English and French); and (5) increased competitiveness (within the EAC subregion, e.g.), the local contexts in Burundi schools are presently not conducive to learner and teacher efficiency in their respective endeavors.

Together with the policy of free primary education, the expansion of schooling has resulted in unqualified teachers being recruited, some practicing teachers being relocated, and the classrooms being overcrowded. It can be hypothesized that the facilities and teachers within higher education institutions will increasingly be impacted, which will not be without consequences on the already waning quality of teacher training. This makes it necessary for teacher-training institutions to provide for prospective teachers' reflective and classroom research knowledge and skills alongside other pedagogic concerns. It will help them better cope with the challenges faced at secondary school level.

## **2.3 Institutional responsibility**

The above picture depicts a working environment in which the English language teacher in Burundi can expect to confront many problems in the daily exercise of his/her profession, whether at secondary or at tertiary education level. With a focus on the situation at the College, for example, it has to be recognized that the inadequate support to the implementation of the BMD system itself constitutes an additional hindering factor. The institution continues to encounter a poor provision of important resources for advanced learning, such as certified teachers (especially in the English Studies Unit), modern reference materials, internet connectivity on campuses, and laboratory facilities. This makes it uneasy to break away from theory-oriented teaching. In turn, the heavy workloads for teachers and departmental heads since 2016 (Decision No. 100/38, February 2016) do not favor the feasibility of sustainable curricular and methodological reviews.

However, the students' will to improve their own learning strategies and the trainers' initiatives to push for more reflective teaching and learning of their assigned teaching subjects are also affected. With students so constrained physically and psychologically, teachers are prone to professional strain with an impact on the promotion of reflective skills. Notably, organizing successful collaborative and cooperative forms of learning for students becomes a challenge. This then limits their ability to assess the intellectual and academic contributions of assignments that require students to work on their own away from the lecture room, even if the task involves some research skills.

More and more, there is a feeling that the ministries in charge of education need to appraise the implementation of the reforms in consultation with teacher trainers who are not only knowledgeable about what constitutes quality education, but also aware of the efficacy of teacher research. This move could help the relevant stakeholders take informed decisions on the way forward in tackling the diversity of issues affecting the Burundi education system at present time. In this way, ELT as an educational area of importance would find a voice that speaks for it, hopefully with the prospect of a serious consideration to rethink the place that the research component should have in our teacher-training practices. This would prevent a risk of the government's efforts achieving what some may call an impact too often evaluated by the counting of classrooms and heads, rather than by appraising curricula, instructional materials, teacher efficiency, assessment practices, and improvements outcomes [8]. It cannot be ruled out that this reference is likely to have resonance in much of the public discourse around education in Burundi today.

## **3. Rationale for the research element in an EFL pre-service training program**

### **3.1 Research relevance**

It is believed that teachers who are active in doing research at their school are likely to show greater ability to study, evaluate, and assess their teaching pedagogies and practices (e.g., see [9]). As such, they are often in a better position to change and improve their ways of teaching, based on its critical understanding. Research then, in its both narrow and wide form, is thought to be a significant contribution toward the professional development of teachers, which in return can have a positive impact on students' learning and success. Decision makers and educational institutions should then work in tandem to provide adequate backing for the

research component by allocating specific budgets to this area, especially if the Ministry of Education or the teacher education institution has a research component officially attached to them.

But teachers often wish to see that there are practical steps being taken to encourage them into doing research. Teacher training institutions, like the College in this paper, need to show that necessary research facilities are put in place, and that sound resources, project funding, teaching practicum questions, management, and leadership are true institutional concerns. At country level, policies and funding must exist, which support and enable institutions to be competitive and individuals to advance in their careers.

Actions can start from something as simple as looking into the educational needs of teachers, and using the teachers' own inputs in planning how to provide for the identified needs (e.g., see [10]). The next step would be modernizing their knowledge, which can be done by offering teachers further training and other professional development programs. Currently, language teaching is enriched in a number of ways, for example, through the use of ICTs; and teachers of EFL need to be further equipped with ICT skills so that they can explore this avenue as an additional learning mechanism for improving both their teaching and research skills.

Another step worth taking should be awareness raising about optional ways of researching one's teaching. Nowadays, the research activity is conceived of as more effective the more it is done collaboratively [11]. EFL teachers should then be trained, and their school managers immersed in how to constructively work with their counterparts on projects that involve conducting research, regardless of how big or small their projects may be. They should also be encouraged to build up partnerships both within their schools and in their educational zones so that they can rely on one another to boost their development as professionals.

At the authors' College, for example, teachers are working toward constructing partnerships with English-speaking universities in the subregion as well as in Europe and America. The East African Community Inter-university Council and the Department Heads at the College have been called upon to engage more actively in university networking. There is hope that the initiative will bring new insights into the institution's vision of its educational mission. This demands that concrete actions be taken to encourage research projects through the provision of moral, academic, and financial support to those who initiate them. A general wish for many teachers is to reach a stage whereby they are able to share their experiential knowledge, concerns training practices, skills, and perceptions about teacher training; networking seems to offer itself as an important avenue on the way to achieving this goal. If there may be scrutiny in the present chapter about the training practices at the College, there is also an underlying intention on the part of the authors to share their experiences with the world outside Burundi in the hope for constructive feedback in the wider literature.

## **3.2 The status of research at the College**

### *3.2.1 The mission*

In principle, research is an important component of the threefold mission of the College (Law Nr 1/22; December 2011). Namely, it is academic, scientific, and pedagogic. Details about the scientific dimension hold that "[...] the institution has the duty of promoting research in line with providing quality education. It is the duty of the institutional Research Department to coordinate and facilitate all research initiatives undertaken in relation to education and teacher-training." In alignment with its inherent mission, the department also facilitates and organizes library use and access.

According to the Research Department Head, the lack of a proper budget from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research constitutes a serious handicap to the achievement of the goal of modernizing the library as promised in line with BMD requirements. This affects negatively the possibility of [post-graduate] students and teachers accessing input from the wide literature on scientific and educational research approaches and connected results and findings. These could well be about studies of interest to their own profession. Lack of funding then impedes the realization by full-time teachers of important research projects from which they and their students could further their learning—including formal research in general. It is perhaps needless to point out that these conditions hamper the educational status of the College, the visibility of its senior teacher researchers, and the teachers' own interest in promoting the research component in their teaching.

In spite of these restraints, however, and in compliance with the College's research mission, a few research-oriented activities may be tried out profitably by both students and trainers in an effort to offer students' opportunities to enhance their reflective skills or familiarize with the practice of research. What we suggest is to devise simple tasks around problems or situations that have been described in the students' practicum reports, or in particular courses (ELT methodology; language testing, etc.), or still, in works available in the College library. Student trainees could then explore the range of options proposed in tackling the problems through different techniques, activities, class management, teacher/learner roles, and so on.

The next step would be to assess the relevance of the options proposed if they were applied to varying teaching situations found in Burundi including their own classes at the College (large classes, early morning or afternoon classes, low level classes such as Bachelor level year 1, basic level year 1, etc.). Care should be taken by the teacher trainer to emphasize more the expression of optional views than the reaching of a consensus, so as to encourage more analytical interactions among the student trainees. With time, these kinds of analyses and the discussions they generate could possibly increase students' awareness of and sensitivity to teaching as a worth researching and a researchable activity. Alternatively, they can do the same tasks, based on the content (problem statements, literature reviews, findings, and recommendations) of dissertations written by the College's own students in the system that preceded the BMD change, since these works are all stored in the library, and mostly unused.

### *3.2.2 Education enhancement of College full-time teachers*

The rationale in the literature [3] for continuing teacher development is powerfully inspiring about its positive impact on the nurturing of reflective practices in the teachers. It may get even more powerful if the idea is added and stressed that teacher trainers of secondary school teachers, in their turn, need to encounter worthwhile experiences of research that they can transmit or draw on for the practical training component. This is said because until recently, teachers of English were "the poor relation" of the government's further-education scheme, despite the country's move to promote ELT. Although the situation can be said to be improving, the slowness in reversing the situation is jeopardizing both the inherent institution's plan to ensure the professionalism of its full-time teachers and the operationalization of the master and doctorate components of the BMD reform. Only when full-time teachers are skilled as teacher researchers will they be able to deliver reflective teaching and feel at ease in disseminating knowledge related to classroom and teacher research [12].

### 3.3 An overview of teacher education structure and content at the College

Students who join the College have a range of backgrounds from their basic schools. For example, those oriented in the English Studies Unit may have graduated in different study streams such as the scientific section, the literary, the economic, and the pedagogic ones. Once at the College, students in the different College departments (there are five of them, including our own: the Department of Languages and Human Sciences) start to be considered prospective teachers of their respective subjects in secondary education. In the 3-year Bachelor degree program, students are mostly trained in knowing how to teach various subjects (including English) at lower and upper secondary school levels—basic and post-basic levels nowadays.

It is worth recalling that the structure and content of their education program follow the concept of pedagogical content knowledge [12], which integrates the content knowledge of a specific subject and the pedagogical knowledge for teaching that particular subject. At present, this is done along the BMD Bologna model (3–2–3 years of study).

More specifically for EFL prospective teachers, pedagogical content knowledge essentially draws on a blend of English language content and English language teaching pedagogy. The aim is to offer student trainees an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction. This also includes a 1-month-period teaching practicum in the first semester of the third year as well as the design of a teacher training report in which trainees give a brief account of their training experiences, including their achievements, encountered challenges, and the attempted solutions. The following summary offers a brief overview of the situation at present:

**Table 3** shows competence-building subjects as having the highest priority, and that there is hardly any course title with a connection to classroom research. If research skills are to be acquired and practiced then, either the teachers have to

| Teaching/learning block  | Location at bachelor (bac) level | Estimated volume in hours |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Linguistic description of English (grammar, morphology, general and English linguistics, syntax, etc.)                            | Bac 1, Bac 2, Bac 3              | 350, 235, 90              |
| Language skills (listening, speaking, etc.)  | Bac 1, Bac 2, Bac 3              | 180, 180, 150             |
| 2. Literatures (Anglo-American literary genres, etc.)  | Bac 1, Bac 2                     | 180,195                   |
| 3. Educational psychology (general pedagogy, learning psychology, etc.)  | Bac 3                            | 120                       |
| 4. EFL classroom methodology   | Bac 2, Bac 3                     | 60, 45                    |
| ELT theories   | Bac 2                            | 90                        |
| 5. ELT classroom application (lesson simulations/microteaching and practicum)  | Bac 3                            | 105                       |
| 6. Professional skills (course design and materials evaluation, EFL testing)   | Bac 3                            | 90                        |
| 7. Teacher ethics and school management  | Bac 3                            | 60                        |
| 8. General life skills [entrepreneurship, computing, library skills (introduction to research), sociology, Swahili and French, etc.] | Bac 1, Bac 2                     | 90, 90                    |

**Table 3.**  
 Key components of the current bachelor level study schemes.

reinvent the course with the risk of not fitting into the students' expectations or they will have to wait until the new course scheme for Bachelor 3 is adopted with its "teacher research in the EFL classroom" component.

It may be necessary to clarify that prior to the practicum, students go through a preparatory period in which they do teaching simulations. These practical training activities are all planned to begin after the full coverage of courses that offer pre-requisite knowledge applicable to teaching practice in local secondary schools, for example, Learning Psychology, Child and Adolescent Psychology and Formulation of Pedagogical Objectives.

In an assessment meeting focused on the 2019 teaching practicum (mid-January to mid February 2019), trainers in the English Studies Unit agreed that an urgent update of such knowledge was required for Burundi teacher training institutions. This should include not only strong training in knowing what to teach, but also a critical research component about the contents taught in such institutions. This preoccupation must have partly inspired the review of the course schemes held in late September 2019 (Section 2.1.1).

### *3.3.1 Theoretical induction of student trainees*

At pre-service level, student trainees are introduced to research through a 30-hour introductory course on research (*Introduction to Research*), usually offered as soon as they begin the first semester of their three-year bachelor's degree course. This timing is intended to help them get familiar with library use, for it may be their first real and guided encounter with this kind of facility as learners. In the main, what the course offers is theoretical exposure to basic resources within a university library, how to find them and search information from them, and how to use them for either purposes of supplementing their lectures or doing their practical assignments. With the recent review of curriculum schemes, it was proposed to include "study skills" and "the value of research in academic success" to the contents proposed for this course.

A few observations may be made, which are of interest to the reader. First, this course is limited in scope (30 hours), making it impossible to engage learners in real, and meaningful practice work. Second, the learners are freshmen who are newly recruited from secondary school graduates, thus struggling to adjust to the new system of teaching and evaluating at the tertiary level. Those in the English Studies Unit have the additional challenge of adjusting to the all-English instruction being encountered for the first time. Looked at closely, these are all elements that may run counter to the learners' effective understanding of the importance of the course. But there is also the tendency to view this course as a low priority subject, in the light of the habit to allocate its teaching to junior teachers, even as the department has more highly qualified teachers who can take better care of it.

On the whole, while the course is both necessary and important to them as freshmen, it can be scrutinized for being theory-dominated, most probably due to the insufficient time that it is allotted (30 hours). How much it contributes to their overall understanding of how to conduct structured research may be questionable, especially given somewhat demeaning perceptions around it from all sides. It should be boosted with a practical component that is aimed at implementing some of the ideas learned in kinds of tasks suggested above (Section 3.2.1) and administered in coherence with the goals of the BMD framework.

### *3.3.2 Practical preparation through teaching simulations and practicum*

The descriptions hereafter of the processes involved in the practical preparation of student trainees are given in order to help the reader assess the limited space

given to the research and reflection-oriented interactions in the achievement of the activities surrounding the practicum.

Students in their last year of study (third year in current system and fifth year in the previous system) are provided with classroom teaching preparation, which begins with them delivering two lesson simulations to a group of peers. Each lesson takes place under the guidance of a different full-time lecturer. The process gradually brings the trainees to view themselves as teachers through both their own teaching and that of their peers, which they are invited to observe and critique afterward, with expectations of objective enriching feedback on aspects of interest.

As the lesson progresses, the trainer also checks the written plan for features that may additionally need addressing during the plenary session. Officially, this session is planned to last 30–45 min at the most, whereas it covers all lessons of the day (5–6 lessons), leading to some aspects of the trainees' performances being either superficially addressed or just ignored. This points to the little importance it holds in the training scheme. Some trainers choose to tactfully cut short the individual simulations in order to increase the time for plenary discussions. A further organizational weakness is the lack of a formal guide document for trainees to use in their roles as observers and inspire their focus in favor of shaping their lessons and formulating their queries. The time span for simulations is estimated at 45 hours, after which the trainees start their full-month practicum, with a weekly load of 8–10 sessions in secondary schools.

A recent improvement to this activity was to reduce the number of trainees assigned to a single supervisor from as many as possible previously to between 10 and 12 at present for the simulations and to between 5 and 6 for the practicum. It was thought that observing a trainee's performance intensively should give trainers a chance to appraise his/her work more objectively. The trainee on his/her part would have a chance to learn more extensively about the profession. The general wish among teachers to have even smaller groups is hampered by the large number of trainees (e.g., 148 in 2017–2018 and 136 in 2018–2019). Whereas objectivity in student assessment may indeed be facilitated, the extent to which trainees are taught to be introspective remains hampered by the difficulty to organize reasonable analytical interactions after a set of simulations is covered. The timetable, together with normal teaching that trainers have to continue delivering in the other class levels (Bachelors 1 and 2, Master), does not offer conducive timing for such provision.

A step to finding a solution has been to extend the practicum to schools far away from the College and to recruit outside trainers from among the teachers within the host schools. The follow up of individual trainees, when the training takes place away from Bujumbura (the capital city), usually happens through an interaction of the visiting team with the school administration, with a focus on whether the trainees are being facilitated in their job, and if they are behaving responsibly. There is some anxiety here over possible flaws in the quality of supervision being offered, especially with regard to the risk of outside trainers not actually reporting regularly.

On the whole, it can be argued that these simulations are necessary for the prospective teachers to practice teaching lessons from textbooks that they are very likely to use after their graduation. What they do not equip the students with presently, however, is preparedness and sufficient opportunities to explain certain teaching decisions or strategies observed, while they were delivering their lesson to their peers or to the real learners in real basic education classrooms. This would increase their abilities to monitor not just their learners' behaviors, but also their own while at the same time comparing their own understanding with the opinions and perceptions of their peers and trainer(s). Because trainees do not expect to go through this additional aspect of the exercise, it has been observed that they are



generally reluctant to clarify their actions off hand. In a way, it is a missed opportunity in their acquisition of reflective teaching. When they are informed about such an expectation prior to their lessons, however, many have attempted to offer explanations. This should be encouraged.

The question, therefore, remains as to the way in which these two critical activities can contribute to trainee awareness and practice of teacher research, and there is a need for suggestions. On the understanding that there is a void in the College training model about the provision for skills in teacher research and critical understanding of classroom situations, the teaching practicum and other related activities must be exploited not only in the sense of developing students' competences in teaching particular types of lessons—for this seems the major goal so far—but also in a manner that creates a sense of research, that is, willingness to inquire what happens and deal with it professionally.

With the help of their trainers, students must be led to carry out deliberate and purposeful reflection about their experiences in both the preparatory and closing stages of the practicum. Such reflections need a formal framework in the study scheme, so that there is time and a venue planned for their organization; they have two advantages: (1) they have the potential of adding meaning to their practicum in that trainees can, at the end of the practicum, compare what they did as individuals with what their counterparts did in their situations (e.g., in terms of classroom procedures) and (2) they can form a point of departure for the contents of their prospective (practicum) written report. Without them, there is a risk of the practical component of teacher training being confined to the mechanical completion of an assigned teaching period (on the student's part) and an evaluation of the lessons observed for grading purposes (on the part of the trainers). Implicitly, this means that students and trainers become inadvertent accomplices in a process that somewhat strays off the goal of the pre-service training College mission.

### *3.3.3 Practicum evaluative views from the trainers at the College*

It is the custom for College trainers in each study Unit (Languages, Natural Sciences, Humanities, etc.) to meet and discuss the progress of the practicum half way through its running. Another meeting may follow at the completion of the practicum. Usually, the meetings offer a time to share on the trainers' own feedbacks, as well as feedbacks from school Heads and class Masters in the visited schools, and to discuss the management of special trainee cases when the need arises (e.g., tardiness, absenteeism, no or casual lesson planning, etc.).

So far, trainers in the College English Studies Unit have expressed optimistic views about the trainees' acquisition of requisite competences to teach English in secondary schools in Burundi. They, however, recognize that trainees require greater opportunities for developing reflective skills.

In an evaluative workshop headed by the Office of Quality Assurance at the College (April 2019) and involving all College Departments, the participants recognized the advantages of discourse during simulations and practicum, which is focused on real teaching actions and facts, claiming that it supports the development of subject-related language and reflection [9]. In other words, there has been acknowledgment of trainees' communication skills integrating a research element. One cannot fail to note here that, like in the study Units' meetings, the current narrative is one that emphasizes achievements based on pedagogical and content-knowledge, but with little or no reference to the research and reflection dimensions.

The implication for any review of the teaching-training schemes should be for trainers to rethink their roles in dealing with the practicum-based teaching activities in an effort to bring the research element to the fore. In this light, there is need

to gather consensus around task design/selection, adjusting both time allocation and use, as well as developing handy mechanisms of sharing some important insights between the trainers and the trainees before, during, and even after completion of the activities. Tutorial is an avenue that may offer a mechanism; but we [the trainers] must guard against “monopolizing” the talk under the assumption that the trainees are there “to learn how to teach.” There is, of course, some truth in it but we need to perceive that such an attitude infringes upon their reflective abilities. There is need to allow trainees to *voice* their analyses because without it, neither the supervisors nor the trainees’ peers can appreciate their understanding of (ELT) teaching options and develop as potential teacher researchers.

### **3.4 Trainers’ suggestions for institutional improvement**

#### *3.4.1 Time allocation*

When research-oriented tasks are assigned, it is important to give students adequate time to both work on the tasks and do presentations on them. In this light, the 8-hour nonstop teaching (from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm) and continuous evaluation systems need rethinking as well. With regard to the pre-teaching simulations, the time problem is finding a solution in the decision taken by individual lecturers to dedicate themselves and prolong the plenary discussion until matters of interest get covered. However, it is important that the desired time increase be triggered by clear understanding and guidelines about how it can be profitably be used to cater for cultivating interest for the research component during the plenary session. This would not only facilitate, but also benefit learning to trainers with less experience of teacher research. As a step in the recognition that time matters to achieve the research-related objective, all new time allocations should be integrated into the general activity programming and influence the design of the academic calendar.

#### *3.4.2 Interpreting what happens in a lesson*

*What*, in this context, should naturally trigger reflective skills on the part of student trainees as they try to label the skills and the nature of issues raised in plenary sessions. Examples may involve aspects such as clarity and achievability of the lesson objective; mastery of presented item(s); comprehensibility of input (techniques for presentation and practice); opportunities for and quality of learner output/language use; speed of delivery; distribution of learner participation; teacher communication ability; language model; teacher facilitation of learning; variety in activities; and time and discipline/classroom management.

The point needs to be made here that these features should essentially be used by the trainers at the College to assess the lessons observed and draw attention to trainees who may not be able to grasp their existence, quality, and effect in particular lessons. The suggestion here may be to introduce them comprehensively to the trainees and follow them up with authentic observation in real classes in expectancy of a presentation or discussion forum such as the tutorials referred to above. This awareness should form the base for their introspection and reflection once they are engaged in a process of self-evaluation. The importance of getting the message across that student trainees should concentrate their attention on the lesson features, rather than on the particular teacher cannot be overstated. Because past experience has revealed that secondary school teachers are apprehensive about being observed while in action, they could be observed at the College itself and at the University of Burundi, since the two institutions work in close partnership.

### *3.4.3 A guide document with focus features*

Focus features would comprise some of the elements mentioned in the previous section, and they would be entered into a comprehensive document to guide the trainees' observation and focus. Having clarified those features, and possibly illustrated them (e.g., with reference to trainer's own teaching as much as possible), the point is to be emphasized that trainees must, while observing, keep alert to *what* happens during the lessons and complete their grid discretely so as not to interfere with the lesson.

Trainees must further be encouraged to gear their thinking toward understanding and commenting on why they think something happens. In this way, the tendency to only ask questions and expect "the answer" may slowly change. Together with the trainer(s), they can be directed to avenues in terms of strategies, techniques, and so on that were used (or not used; or could have been used) in addressing some of the instructional issues that arose in the lessons observed. Shaping the trainees' behavior as observers and completing a simple observation grid are an important step on the way to bringing the research and reflective elements closer to pre-service training practice. Implicitly, trainees are acquiring the skills that will serve their lesson investigation purposes, whether in relation to themselves' or to someone else's teaching.

### *3.4.4 Consultation initiatives*

In the process of the trainer-trainee collaboration, guidance seems to always occur following the teacher's observation of the lessons. The trainees almost never take the initiative to elicit it, even when they feel unconfident. It is an attitude that must be discouraged as well. Trainers should explain to their trainees the shortcomings of taking unnecessary risks in "isolating" themselves, in their blind hope that the trainer will not turn up that day.

Most of all, the trainers should "invite" their trainees and avail themselves for consultations—which should be two-sided. An occasional reminder that they are "apprentices" in a complex job could reverse their isolationist behavior. How this relates to developing research and reflective skills in the trainees is through the trainees being deliberately made aware of the benefits of collaboration. It is difficult to think of effective teacher research that does not rest on the participation and contribution of a third party; even in action research, teachers often rely on colleagues who may observe or participate in the research process. What this means is that as we may train our students for research, we will do them better service if we work on other aspects (social, ethical, etc.) that influence its success.

### *3.4.5 Diary keeping*

An idea being implemented successfully is a weekly requirement for trainees to keep a diary of one most "comfortable" lesson and one most "difficult" lesson, with an outline of their tentative reasons and prospective solutions. The intention is to push for more trainee efforts toward self-observation and comprehension of classroom happenings in terms of interactions, reactions, mood, processes, and so on. This can serve as a starting point for the kind of teaching discourse oriented toward action research in the language classroom. The approach equally teaches them about the crucial importance of recording information, an important procedure in the process of research, even when it applies to the self. It therefore constitutes a relevant exercise for reflexive evaluation that should find its right place in the pre-service training of EFL teachers at the College.

### *3.4.6 A shift of emphasis to teacher reflection and teacher research*

Reading, thinking, and commenting about EFL teaching practices should acquaint trainees with lesson appraisal while also developing their reflective skills. For the trainer on the other hand, the implication will be a need to provide relevant input on the communication skills appropriate in such a context. How to approach the meanings of appraisal comments in the perspective of gaining deeper understanding of EFL teaching should also be entered into the discourse. It should facilitate their understanding of the same discourse when it is encountered in any readings or discussions accessed for professional development purposes. If trainees realize that reflective teaching is possible and that it is contributing positive results, there can be optimism that they will start their teaching career better equipped to put this awareness to the service of their own teaching.

### *3.4.7 TEFL-related readings integrated with oral presentations*

With regard to long-term professional development, the idea is much supported that trainees should be encouraged to read and discuss more about TEFL to supplement their lecture inputs [11]. It is the trainers' duty to also ensure that they give them assignments that require classroom presentations—related to TEFL practice in the Burundi context in as much as possible.

Trainees (and trainers) at the College also need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the BMD instructional organization scheme (in its practical work component) and the university libraries in Bujumbura to widen their practical understanding of the EFL field. The commitment to involve oneself in research begins with an introspection in own approaches, thus creating the desire to learn how else to proceed in an effort to improve one's classroom teaching performance [9]. While still at the College, we both must espouse the ideal of promoting research through reflective instructional models in our institution before we can export it beyond.

## **4. Ingredients for a revival of research in pre-service training of EFL teachers at the College**

### **4.1 Trainer morale**

The situation is well known that, in many educational settings involving EFL, successful teaching of English is hampered by the very unfavorable conditions in which the teaching and learning take place [4]. While finger pointing generally targets “untrained” teachers, it is worth noting that such conditions have the capacity to demoralize the “trained” teachers and the teacher trainers into giving up any efforts to take initiatives in the sense of enhancing their instructional systems.

With reference to the context in Burundi, constraining measures taken against the civil servants in the fallout of the 2015 sociopolitical turmoil have generally created an unprecedented mood of disbelief, especially in the work category of teachers. Added to the teacher trainers in higher education institutions struggling to access the desired level of education (Master, then Doctorate), the consequence may be a vicious circle in which problems of quality in formal training may filter down into the system, producing “qualified” teachers, but who are not resourceful once in their schools [5].

Drawing on the situation at the College, it is a fact that the lack of library resources and recurrent failures in the Internet connection and long working days

are seriously impeding the efficiency of teachers in relation to their own research plans. If this should be prolonged, it may be expected that their commitment to research will subside, thereby weakening their research abilities.

## 4.2 Highlighting professional development

This paper shares the definition of *professional development* as “The sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one’s career from pre-service teacher education to retirement” [13]. Under this understanding, it is important for pre-service teacher trainers to make it clear to their student trainees that completing a course of study does not imply knowing all that there is to know about the craft. The teaching discourse must clarify for them the advantages associated with sharing one’s own knowledge on one hand, and morally subscribing to ongoing learning. Rational guidance would care to indicate to the trainees some channels through which the said advantages can be encountered, for example, in both formal instructional opportunities (short courses, seminars, and workshops) and informal encounters (interactions with teacher colleagues, conferences, readings, English teaching clubs, the Internet [11], to name but a few).

No matter how necessary pre-service training for teachers is, it cannot be expected to prepare teachers for all the challenges that they will possibly face throughout their careers. Within the field of ELT, *teacher professional development* has become a central topic because it is in the interest of the profession to ensure that those who are involved in its practice should act according to the highest standards.

Traditionally, professional development has been focused on offering training, practice, and feedback, without adequate time and follow-up support. Keeping in mind that the classroom is a versatile, hence dynamic environment, it makes sense for teacher-training institutions to integrate in their programs a component that prepares future teachers to deal with classroom eventualities and unfolding events with professionalism. In the College context, for example, notions of classroom and teacher research should be of great help, especially if they are presented and developed in a framework, which seeks to promote the rationale for professional development.

One of the roles of teacher professional development is to provide a context through which teachers can continue to make improvements and to assist in “maintaining the interest, creativity, and enthusiasm in their profession” [14]. Although there can be reasons to justify lack or limited provision of professional developments to teachers [6], there should equally be rational understanding of teachers’ dissatisfaction when they are deprived of opportunities to grow in their jobs as professionals. In cultural settings such as in Burundi, changing attitudes and addressing the needs of the teaching profession are government priorities.

There are three commonly proposed approaches to ELT professional development: (1) a top-down approach where a school or an institution determines the professional development needs and then provides training to take care of those needs—which is the one prevailing in Burundi; (2) a bottom-up approach that is driven completely by a teacher him/herself; and (3) an interactive approach where the institution and the teachers collaborate with each other in identifying needs of both and then provide professional development opportunities to meet the identified needs. All three approaches have of course their strengths and weaknesses; but in contexts where administration departments encourage consultations, cooperation, and initiative, an approach of the third type is both convenient and possible. It has strong assets as a mechanism that can be fruitful in driving new ideas and innovation forward in addition to encouraging cooperation and initiative within teachers and learners. It can serve as a source of inspiration for the College.

It is acknowledged that teaching is a life-long learning activity in which professional practitioners expect to share with others on their teaching strategies as well as on their possible difficulties as a source of learning [15]. It is only logical that teachers should be given the time to engage with life-long learning, as this provides them with regular improvement, which will extend its benefits to their learners.

The practice at the College in Burundi is to propose INSET for teachers in the form of semester courses, workshops, or seminars focusing on pedagogical or methodological issues, though these are not always specifically tailored to the needs of ELT teachers in basic and post-basic schools. These most generally fall into the first category, i.e., the top-down approach in the sense that it is the College or its donors (foreign cooperation usually) who sponsor such trainings and determine the professional needs, rather than teachers themselves.

Beside these gaps in the INSET programs for EFL teachers, there is the paucity of funding of professional development programs. In fact, such professional development plans are generally sponsored by external donors rather than the institution itself. With the withdrawal of the international donors' financial support following the 2015 political crisis, most professional programs have stopped or are under-funded.

### **4.3 Need for improved perceptions of research**

Teachers' and students' perceptions of research and reflective skills can improve if the importance of research in pre-service training is deliberately stated and made clear to them. First, it is a process that equips teachers and other education practitioners with the skills necessary for identifying what the problem is in a given school, a class, a textbook, a course, and then knowing how to address that problem systematically [16]. Second, it serves as an opportunity for teachers as educators to self-evaluate their own teaching practices [15]. Third, involvement in personal research allows teachers to make a change in their pedagogical practices that will have a positive impact upon teaching and learning [12]. Lastly, research is a great form of improving teachers' life-long learning and of continuing professional development [17].

Despite these positive effects upon classroom teaching and learning, however, a number of studies have reported some factors that prevent teachers from doing research [17]. The most frequently cited include crowded teaching timetables, heavy teaching workloads, insufficient research training and lack of research skills [15], lack of financial support, and limited time to do research [18]. The authors agree that the majority of the factors cited often constitute the primary challenges and concerns faced by teacher trainers at the College who aspire to undertake research, be it for quality teaching-related purposes, or their own professional advancement.

Beside factors like the lack of research knowledge, insufficient research training programs for teachers to enhance and develop their research skills, together with lack of quality reference materials may prevent teachers (and teacher trainers themselves) from doing research. It is then only logical that these challenges faced by teachers in general and EFL teachers, in particular, should be heard and addressed by education authorities so as to increase teacher participation in research.

### **4.4 Stating the importance of research in pre-service training**

Although there is a ministry of higher education and scientific research, research-oriented programs related to pre-service teacher education are almost nonexistent in Burundi despite stakeholders' awareness of the importance of

research in the professional development of teachers. The general sentiment among student teachers and teacher trainers is that research seems to be the “lost mission” of the College, since teaching has almost become its only *de facto* mission. Developing reflective skills also seems to be an undervalued aspect of learning in the education system. If perceptions around training in research methodology may be low, it is chiefly due to the negative influence of (1) teaching programs being mostly focused on examinations, (2) acute shortages of teaching and learning materials, and (3) lack of trained and experienced teachers. Because of these limitations, students graduate ignorant of any sound research techniques to apply to their own teaching situations in case of need. This hampers the College mission to produce competent and resourceful teachers.

#### 4.5 Changing attitudes

Traditionally, teacher training has prepared future teachers for the role of imparting knowledge during their teaching career. Although communicative language teaching has revolutionized beliefs around the roles of the teacher [19, 20], there are contexts with still strongly held beliefs in the role of the teacher as an “instructor and knowledge controller,” and Burundi may be cited as an example. This mentality is also frequently known to be favorable to the use of centrally produced curricula, usually also cultivating a “fidelity” attitude toward their implementation [20]. Such mentalities are binding and anti-reflective for the teachers who feel that they must implement the curriculum to the letter for their professional security. In essence, this is an attitude most likely to constitute a psychological barrier to the teachers’ will and need for change, as curriculum coverage and success in examinations may be their accountability standards. As such, the situation leaves them little or no place for research and self-reflection about their teaching.

This then poses a problem of acceptance of the role of *teacher-as-researcher* by the teachers themselves, and it seems to spring from conservative educational systems, which may unconsciously nurture teachers’ own resistance to educational change and innovation [21]. Such a tendency is not remote to many among Burundi teachers, including in tertiary education, as was observed through the set of sit-ins and strikes, which followed the BMD proclamation (2013/2014).

*Teacher as researcher* should be another role that the teacher plays, as it is obvious that research skills may broaden a teacher’s perspectives in his/her teaching and learning context. The authors hold that it takes teachers to be trained in both reflective teaching and research skills to understand the benefits to their professional growth. They also claim that research skills integrated with content knowledge-based instruction can offer a system of preparing teachers for research without necessarily viewing themselves as researchers at that stage of their training process. It should be when they are engaged in real teaching and encounter teaching problems that they may make recourse to their professional knowledge and reflective abilities, and if they succeed in solving the problems, they will feel motivated to continue to look into themselves for solutions to new arising teaching matters. In the process, they may take steps to share their strategies with other teachers in their schools. This is likely to have an influence on them.

### 5. Conclusion

In their efforts to put up with requirements from readjustments in EFL policies around the world, teachers aspire to access professional development in addition to

acquiring basic competencies and language proficiencies that go with their profession. This paper has argued in favor of equipping teachers of English in secondary schools in Burundi with reflective and research skills. These skills should be used to help them understand and evaluate their teaching practices, as a contribution to both their classroom efficiency and professional growth, especially when they are confronted with changes created by new educational reforms. The authors have taken a position that supports the search for a more sustainable mechanism to achieve this goal in the Burundi setting. The suggestion made covers two dimensions: one is to provide exposure to those skills at the pre-service training stage. The other dimension is a call for the trainers in higher teacher education institutions to emphasize the research component both in the practical activities attached to their practical training schemes as well as in their everyday teaching discourse. The College is invited to rethink the place of the research component in the course schemes with a view to accomplishing its mandate of preparing future teachers of English who have relevant abilities to enhance ELT in the country. Practical suggestions based on how to induce reflection and research have been made to guide the College trainers to this end.

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