

Exploring The Implementation Of Quality Teaching And Learning Of Ordinary Level English Language In Zimbabwe: A Case Of Hwange Rural Secondary Schools In Matabeleland North Province

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Abstract: *This study sought to explore the implementation of quality teaching and learning of Ordinary Level English language with reference to marginalised Hwange rural secondary schools in Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe. The major purpose of the study was, therefore, to interrogate the extent to which selected schools are implementing quality teaching and learning of 'O' Level English Language as well as establishing quality strategies which the schools, responsible Ministry and its partners can employ to improve the teaching and learning of the subject. The case study design was adopted as it was observed to be appropriate in focusing on specific schools as the cases. A target population comprising 'O' level students and a sample of 20 (N=20) was used for the study. Purposive sampling was used as it was preferred for the study. Data was generated using Questionnaires, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) as well as lesson observations. Collected data were analyzed using qualitative methods. Findings generally revealed that teachers appear to be deficient in their conceptualisation and implementation of the concept of quality in the teaching of 'O' level English Language. The study recommended that attendance of teacher training institutions and school staff development programmes should be made a mandatory part of the professional development of teachers, as a basis for promoting quality teaching and learning of 'O' Level English Language.*

Key words: *quality, teaching, learning, teacher performance, language.*

I. Background to the Study

The current study explores quality aspects of teaching Ordinary Level English Language in a classroom within a formal school environment in marginalized rural schools of Zimbabwe. The teacher who is a professional instructor provides teaching service which is expected to be of quality to the learner (Silver, 2010). Shrestha (2009) says that it is vital to understand and assess the impact of factors that affect the quality of teaching and performance of the teacher in the delivery of service. The same source also notes that resource inadequacy in poor communities and countries leads to the exodus and poor performance of teachers. However, factors on the motivation aspect also play a crucial role in the performance of teachers, in addition to personal, economic, political and technological factors on the ground (Shrestha, *ibid*).

School and national based teaching processes and outcome based measures are used to determine the quality of teaching and performance of the teachers in the teaching of 'O' English Language and other subjects. Generally, the performance of the teacher is measured in classroom activities using variety of tools such as critique forms, scheme books, quantity and quality of written work, quality and number of tests as per departmental requirements and national policy, quality of marking, moderation, corrections and remedial or extension work, written monthly, term tests and national examinations. There are also school administrative based assessments; student based assessments as well as ministry assessments on the quality of teaching and teacher performance. In Zimbabwe, one popular school based assessment is the results-based performance appraisal that is conducted at school, cluster, district, provincial and national level (Government of Zimbabwe: National Education for Sustainable Development Strategy and Action Plan for 2014 and Beyond, 2013). The knowledge and performance of the teacher is central to quality teaching and learning, hence the desire to interrogate it so as to determine its impact on the teaching-learning situation with special reference to the teaching of 'O' Level English Language.

Quality generally entails the relevance and value of an organisation's mission, purpose, goals and objectives, as well as the achievement of identified outcomes (Liston, 2009). Quality in education also implies an evaluation of the process of educating which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of the customers of the process, and at the same time, meets the accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process or the outputs from the process of educating (Hoy et al, 2000). Thus, as noted by other authorities, the quality of any education system involves examining the extent to which the:

- products or the results of the education provided meet the standards stipulated in the system's educational objectives,
- knowledge, skills, values and attitudes acquired in the learning process are relevant to human and environmental needs,
- acquired education is generally utilised by individuals and groups to solve micro and macro problems in life.

(Grisay and Mahlck, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

The teacher as the provider of the service is generally pivotal in the teaching and learning process. This situation has created a debate on the need to assess the quality of teachers, the teaching process and outcomes. The problem at stake is that, usually, the quality performance of the teacher in the classroom environment is taken for granted, yet, sometimes contributes to the low English language pass rate, especially in marginalized rural secondary schools.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the implementation of quality teaching and learning of Ordinary Level English language with reference to marginalised rural secondary schools in Hwange District in Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. Examine the teaching standards at 'O' level among English language teachers in Hwange rural schools in the context of quality
- ii. Investigate factors which negatively affect teacher performance in the teaching of English language at 'O' level in Hwange urban in the context of quality
- iii. Establish strategies to improve quality teaching and learning of 'O' level English language teaching in marginalised rural secondary schools in Hwange.

II. Review of Related Literature

Perceptions regarding the teaching of English Language in Zimbabwe, which has been taught from the colonial times, are numerous depending on different factors, including race and ethnicity, nature of school as well as the declaration of English Language as the official language of the country. Lin and Chien (2010) note that Zimbabwe is a former British colony where it was named Rhodesia, and is a multilingual and multicultural country, as English is a first language to the White community which has its roots in the United Kingdom. However, English is a second language to native Zimbabweans. In Zimbabwe, English is regarded as an official and international language, a language of wider communication and of group identification. As such, it is used as a medium of instruction in all schools by the Government and private schools, colleges and universities.

English may be viewed as a foreign language for the speakers of native or local language, hence, the constant calls to develop a vocabulary to enable teaching using indigenous languages in all subjects. Neelawan (2009) purports that teachers' use of or none use of the mother language (L1) would have a significant effect only when it came to difficult topics that are not related to students' backgrounds. English is taught as a school subject although in earlier colonial decades, the purpose of English in Zimbabwe was to give students a foreign language competence that they could use to listen to radio, to understand dialogue in the movies, to use language for communication, follow instructions at work and understand the bible.

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, English has taken a new dimension in learning institutions as courses are offered strictly in English. However, it has been a controversial issue among the educators whether English is a second or foreign language in Zimbabwe and this has a bearing on the quality of teaching of English language. To this effect, Abedi (2008) and Ballantyne et al (2008) say that the status of English Language as a global language has played a significant role in contemporary language education. Teacher professionalism has been assigned a different agenda by governments who subscribe to, quote and legitimize unqualified teachers to teach, thus, leading to unintended consequences of damaging the quality of English instruction and jeopardizing its effectiveness.

In modern times, the need for English language teaching has greatly been felt in all dimensions of learning in Zimbabwe. The purpose of teaching English in Zimbabwe can be seen as an effort to enable learners to exchange their ideas and views with those who use English and at the same time; to acquire knowledge, ideas, skills and techniques imparted formally and informally through English usage and to establish effective channels of communication with the rest of the world. The medium of instruction in all subjects except vernacular subjects in schools and institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe is exclusively English. More importantly, English is the only language of communication that is used to promote Zimbabwe's increasing

diplomatic relations with the outside world. As Cartage (2009) mentioned that English is used as a "library language to have an access to textbooks, lectures, and journals...on the one hand; as a language to express one's thoughts and ideas in written and academic exercise . Shrestha (2008 expresses the use of English for educational and occupational purposes. In a recent study, English teaching in Nepal has been viewed from the perspectives of English for specific purposes and English for academic purposes (Shrestha, *ibid*).

From an economic point of view, English has become inevitable to foster tourism and international trade. The urgent need of English learning has added a further dimension with growing numbers of English medium schools across the nation (Bhattarai & Gautam, 2005). The majority of parents like to send their children to English speaking schools. Not only high school graduates but also college graduates prefer improving their level of English language proficiency to pursue either higher studies abroad or to start a job in foreign settings and even in the Zimbabwean context.

III. Methodology

The current study adopted the qualitative research approach and the case study design was used. The qualitative research paradigm was noted to be appropriate, which according to Patton (2002) and Creswell (2009, 2014) is convenient where a social problem needed to be explored, and because the researcher needed a detailed understanding of the problem under study. Accordingly, the case study was observed to be appropriate in focusing on specific schools as the cases? A target population comprising 'O' level students from marginalised rural secondary schools in Hwange District, Matabeleland North Province was used. Two schools with typical characteristics of marginalization were used from which a sample of 5 'O' Level teachers and 10 students (N=15) was used for the study. Purposive sampling was utilised for the study and using the sampling technique, the researchers were able to identify data rich sources (Johnson and Christenson, 2014). The selection of the sample was done mindful of understanding the implementation of quality teaching within the confines of the case study.

In line with Neumen (1997) purposive sampling is considered suitable for case studies, and the researcher used expert judgment in selecting cases with the purpose of finding out about the educators' performance in the quality teaching of English Language to 'O' level students. The researcher identified case study and participants for in-depth investigation. Data was generated using questionnaires, focused group discussions as well as lesson observations as the research instruments. Collected data were presented and discussed using qualitative methods of data analysis. The findings were generalized to marginalised Hwange rural schools in Matabeleland North province of Zimbabwe.

IV. Discussion of Findings

Failure to holistically teach aspects of 'O' level syllabus, mainly Composition, continue to fail pupils in examination. In one lesson observation, more work seemingly needed to be done in the aspect of teaching composition. Rather than singing which types of compositions there are, more emphasis needs to be placed on students' attainment of how to write quality compositions, comprising of quality introductions, body and conclusions. The challenge of inadequately teaching Registers was mentioned by all schools and the pupils argued that teachers fall short and run into despair in the teaching of English language Registers. Such is a lack of quality in the teaching of 'O' level English in marginalised Hwange rural schools of which are issues that lead to low pass rate in 'O' level English language.

1. Assessment of Knowledge of Language structures

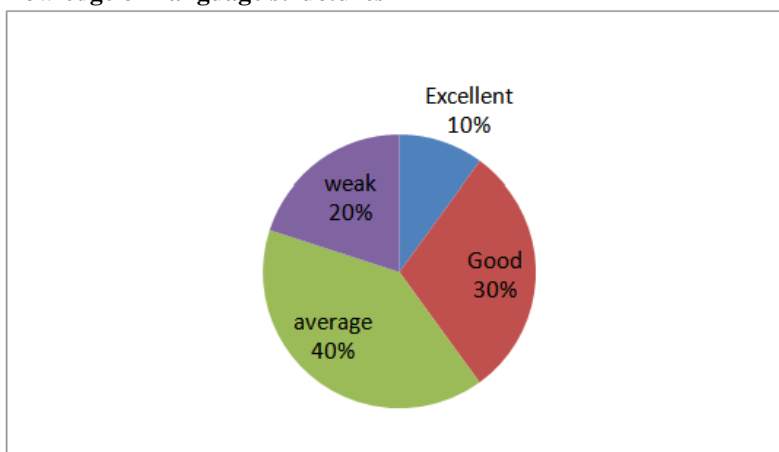


Figure 1: Knowledge of Language structures

Figure 1 above shows knowledge of language structures among ‘O’ level English language pupils. The figure shows that 10% are excellent, 30% are good, 40% are average while 20% are weak. This shows that the quality of language usage in self-expression is lacking and the major stumbling block seems to be linked to grammatical inappropriacy in conveying ideas in pupils’ written work.

2. What is pupils’ performance of comprehension?

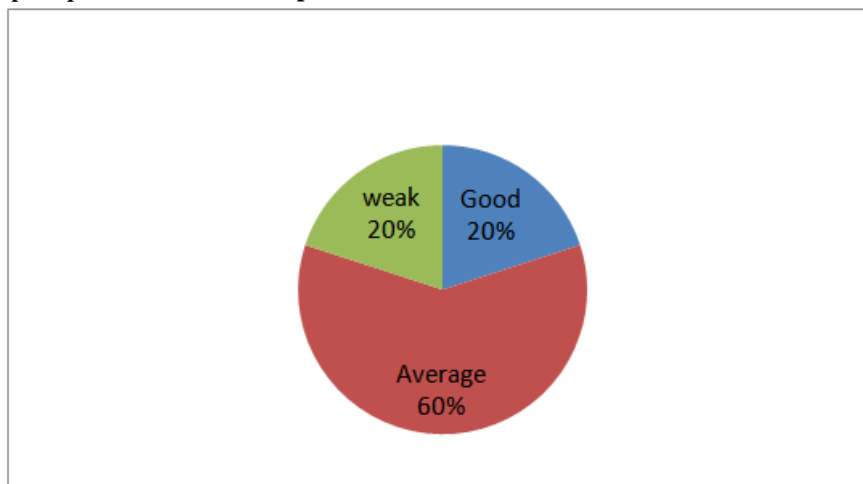


Figure 2: Comprehension performance

Figure 1 above shows comprehension performance among ‘O’ level English language pupils where 60% of respondents are average and 20% of respondents are weak and good. On the other hand, in a focused group discussion among teachers, some teachers feel they do teach Comprehension well despite having slow learners. Lack of resources and pupils’ background in English language limit teacher performance and that leads to low results among the schools under study. Teachers feel pupils perform well in comprehension because they often practice it in their weekly exercises. In spite of that outcry, Kuhl (2010) suggests teaching comprehension skills through direct instruction and modeling, identification of the procedural components, scaffold instruction, regular practice, and integration across the curriculum.

3. What is pupils’ Vocabulary performance

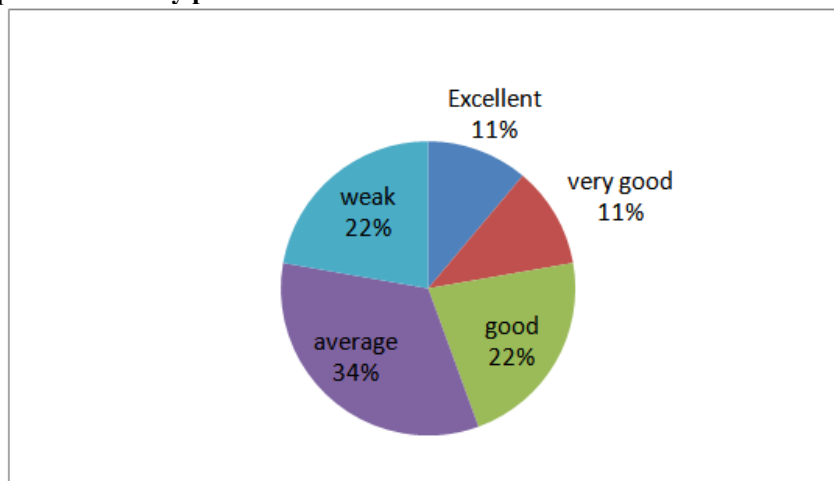


Figure 3: Vocabulary

Figure 3 above shows vocabulary performance among ‘O’ level English language pupils where 11% of respondents are very good and excellent, 22% of respondents were weak and good while 34% of respondents were average. Harley (2006) says that vocabulary mastery is fundamental to quality language learning. Of note is the fact that vocabulary acquisition research has been paid attention to (e.g. Beck, McKeown & McCaslin, 1983; Harley, 1996; Huckin, Haynes, & Coady, 1993; Zahar, Cobb & Spada, 2001). A series of methodologies have been reported, including applying learner dictionaries (Nesi, 1999; Tribble, 2003), using forms of visual glossing (Al-Seghayer, 2001) and so on

4. Is your teaching focused on syllabi completion?

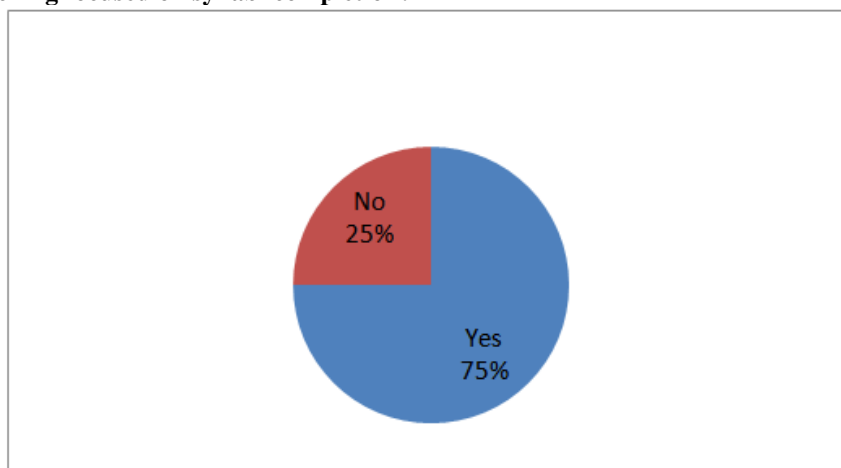


Figure 4: Syllabi completion

Figure 3 above shows teaching focused on syllabi completion among ordinary level English language teachers in Hwange urban where 75% of respondents said they focus on it and 25% of respondents said no. Statistical response contradicts document analysis where an assessment on compositions shows only one or two compositions having been written by pupils at closure of term two and this is way too substandard. This is not in line with national standards and literature where Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, (2002) state that teachers ought to focus specifically on what needs to be taught to individual students in their teaching contexts. Pre-service teachers are also mandated to seek this type of context-specific knowledge.

5. Is teaching in line with the examination demand?

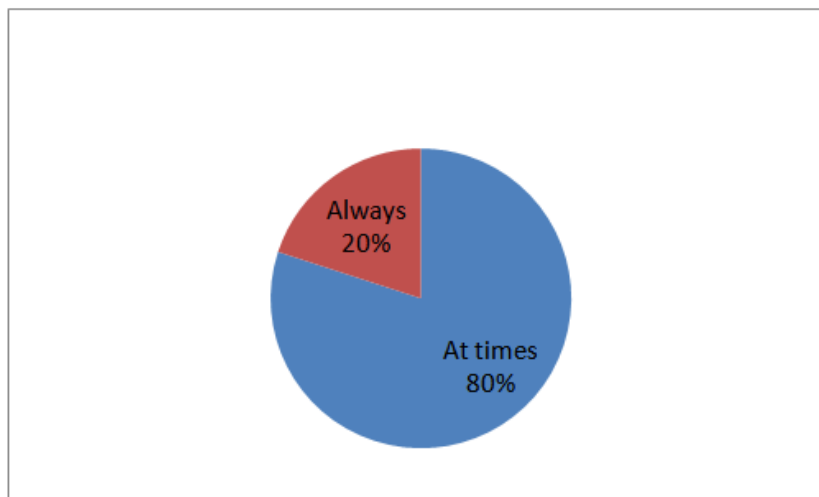


Figure 5: Teaching

Figure 5 above shows teaching in line with examination demands among 'O' level English language teachers in Hwange rural. As many as 80% of respondents indicated that their teaching was at times in line with the examination demand, while 20% of them said they always do. This shows minimal preparation of students for examination if only at times (80%) teaching is examination-focused.

6. What is your source of test questions?

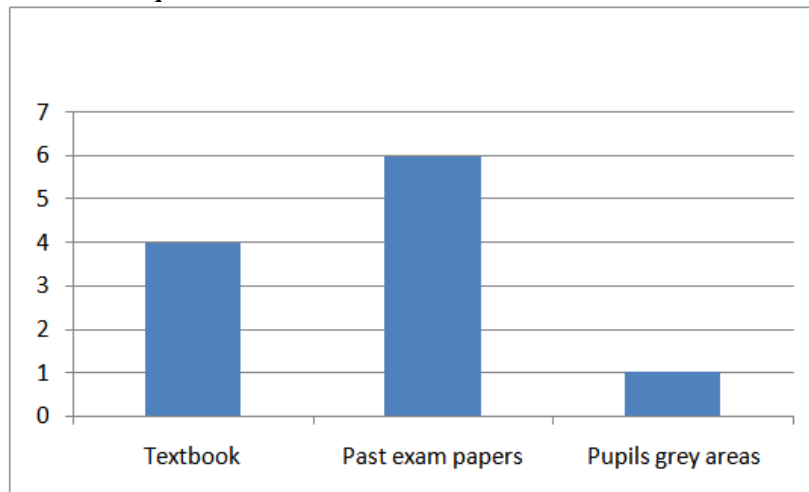


Figure 61: Source of Test questions

Figure 6 above shows source of test questions used by “O” level English language teachers. The figure shows that the majority used past examination papers, followed by text books with the least being pupils’ grey areas.

7. What guides your marking?

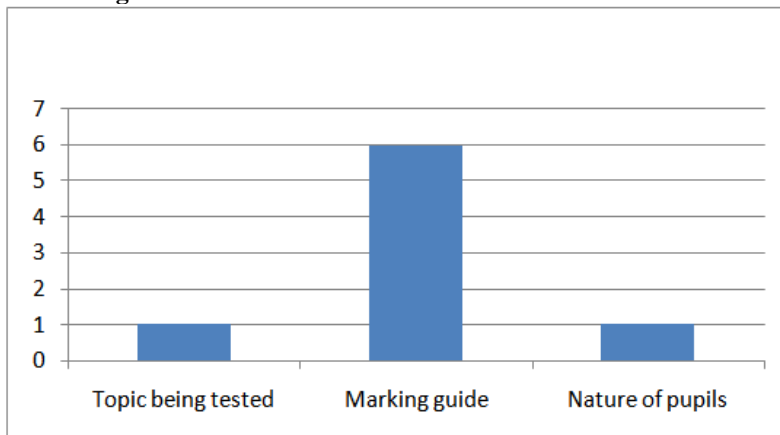


Figure 72: Marking guide

Figure 7 above shows marking guidance used by ‘O’ level English language teachers. The figure shows that the majority are guided by marking guide, and very little by topics being tested and the nature of pupils.

8. Frequency of remediation per month

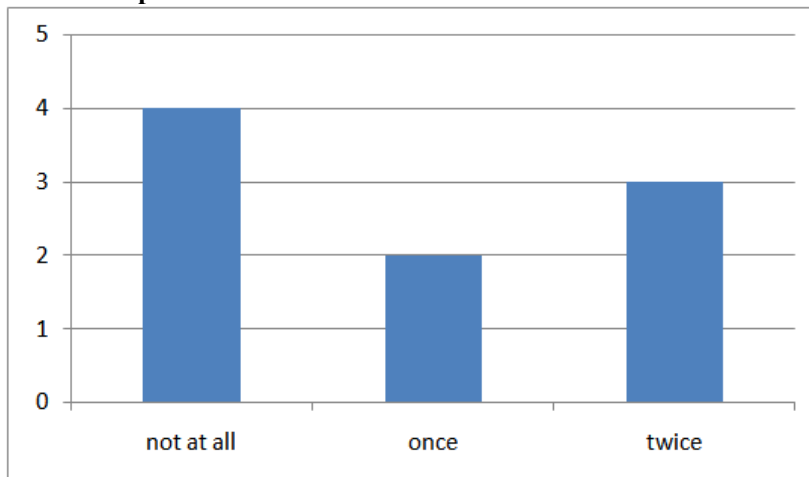


Figure 8: Frequency of remediation per month

Figure 8 above shows frequency of remediation activity per month amongst the 'O' level English language teachers. The majority of respondents indicated that do not do it at all, while others said they do it once and twice. Teachers interviewed say remedial lessons are conducted to ensure that slow learners master concepts already mastered by fast learners. Teachers' comments are given in some exercise books suggesting the way forward to the students although some of the comments do not seem useful. Some pupil's exercise books remain unmarked. This is a cause for concern in circles of quality English Language teaching. No learning aids were used except the chalkboard as summary writing strategies were posted on the chalkboard.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the study concluded that there is lack of implementation of quality teaching of 'O' level English language with regards specific language areas including language structures, vocabulary and comprehension performance as well as remediation. This is a cause for concern as lack of quality teaching and learning consequently leads to poor student performance. In this regard, the study further concludes that teachers appear to be deficient in their conceptualisation and implementation of quality teaching with special reference to the teaching of 'O' level English language in marginalised rural areas of Hwange.

On the basis of the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- Teachers should be helped to understand the concept of quality teaching as an applicable phenomenon which they can apply to the teaching and learning of 'O' level English language
- Marginalised secondary schools require that there be staff development of teachers in quality teaching in order to address the problem of poor student performance and promote general school excellence.
- A mix of experienced and less experienced teachers in schools is important so that pre-service and untrained teachers are mentored by the experienced teachers. Staffers therefore, ought to get recommendations of the type of teacher the school requires in consultation with school administrators.
- Quality teaching, therefore, should constitute the syllabus and pedagogies that enable teachers to effectively interact with pupils as they cover the syllabus adequately.
- Quality assurance and control is critical as it allows all stakeholders to check the quality of teaching and learning in a holistic and continuous process for continuous school improvement.
- As a way of complementing the current research, a similar study of a wider magnitude, such as at provincial and national levels regarding schools experiencing challenges with pass rates in 'O' level English language should be conducted. This would improve the generalisability of findings at national level.

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