

Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Teaching of English as a Second Language at Ordinary Level in Kadoma Urban Schools of Zimbabwe

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***Abstract:** This study sought to find out challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) at Ordinary Level in Kadoma urban schools of Sanyati District in Mashonaland West Province. The descriptive survey design which utilised mixed methods approach was used. Five schools were purposively selected using the cluster sampling technique. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Five school heads were interviewed and twenty five teachers of English as a second language responded to a questionnaire. Data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results revealed that teachers experience numerous challenges ranging from lack of in-service training, unavailability of resources, large classes, ministerial policies which emphasise written work at the expense of the other skills and also most pupils' backgrounds which do not create a platform for the use of English outside the school premises. The implication is that due to these challenges, most learners continue to perform poorly in English. The study recommends that professional development for teachers of English and all other challenges should be intensely and consistently addressed if the situation is to improve.*

***Key Words:** Challenges; English; Second language; Professional Development.*

Background to the study

The study focuses on challenges faced by teachers in teaching English as a second language at Ordinary Level in Kadoma urban schools of Zimbabwe and strategies which can be used to minimize them. The importance of learning English as a second language cannot be underestimated since it is the language of instruction in Zimbabwe. English is highly regarded since Ordinary level and Advanced level certificates are not recognised unless one passes five subjects including English at O level as indicated by Kadenge and Nkomo (2011:248 who state, "Those who are incompetent in it are disadvantaged because the language is the main medium of instruction throughout the education system, a measure of educational achievement and an important qualification for higher education and employment.". Seidlhofer (2013) observes that English is the first existing global language and the mostly widely written and spoken language on the planet due to developments in electronic communication and enhanced mobility. Many

countries have adopted English as a medium of communication through newspapers, televisions, radios, businesses and legal laws. English language is being used in all sections of life, politically, economically and socially as the predominant international language or *Lingua Franca*. Plonski, Teferra, and Brady (2013) observes that The African Union, which once used French in carrying out its mandate, has now adopted English as a means of communication. In the Lusophone and Francophone countries and in Ethiopia, none of which were British colonies the status of English is very high.

Native speakers of English are mainly found in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States of America. According to Zhou (1999), native speakers are the best models for the students to learn a language as an aspect of a particular culture. Many native English speakers who have taught in Chinese schools have been successful teachers in oral English. Zhou (1999) goes on to state that, apart from fluency and accuracy, a good oral English teacher must have a good grasp of the requirements of a syllabus, have a good understanding of learners' behaviours, and a good mastery of teaching methods. Jin and Cortazzi (2002) contend that for many individuals in China and for the country as a whole, English remains a bridge for the future.

Kruizenga (2010), points out that many language problems faced by Somali children in school stem from cultural differences between them and other migrant populations. Asif (2013) says that although English language is introduced at a very early stage to non-English speakers, few individuals manage to communicate fluently in it. Reddy (2012) emphasises the importance of the English language to the education sector due to the fact that many countries have made English an official language. Thus, English language teaching has become one of the major growth industries around the world. However, Tsui cited in Rodriguez and McKay (2010) observes that learners of English are in most cases a diverse group which offer challenges to teachers and the education system.

According to Asif (2013), in Pakistan English language plays an important role as the official language. English language is used as the medium of instruction for Sciences and Mathematics from class IV onwards. As a result, English language proficiency is used as a vehicle to acquire new jobs and scholarships. Those who speak English in Pakistan are given a high status. However, Asif (2013) observes that even after spending a lot of time learning English, most of the students at college level are unable to write grammatically correct English. Pakistan teachers

use the Grammar Translation Method which relies heavily on the use of the native language. It therefore means that teachers have to be proficient in Urdu, which is the mother tongue in Pakistan. However, Urdu and English have different patterns of sentence structure and this results in gross grammatical errors. It is in light of such challenges that the present study sought to find out the type of challenges encountered by teachers in the teaching of English in Zimbabwe.

Teachers in the Arabic speaking countries encounter various challenges which emanate from variations between the Arabic and English Language. According to Ansari (2012), teachers of English face a lot of problems while teaching English to Arab students especially in Saudi Arabia, because of the social and cultural backgrounds students. Although they are taught English in schools, Arab students have no knowledge of basic structures of English. The problems get even worse as students enroll with universities where they are required to address all issues in English. Gao (2006) says that, language learning is culture learning hence in some cases pupils are afraid of losing their own identity and this hinders the learning of the new language.

According to Reddy (2012), the teaching of English in India has always been done under difficult circumstances. This is so because of the large population of the country, bleak economic conditions, the cultural and social diversities and insufficient teaching materials. The classes have over 60 heterogeneous students, resulting in the teachers' inability to pay attention to the students' individual needs. Reddy (2012) indicates that the standard of English in India is deplorably low, hence a lot of responsibility is thrown on the shoulders of the teachers to make their classes interesting and fruitful.

In his research, Alkhaldeh (2010) points out that Jordanian teachers of English as a second language have large class sizes and they are required to cover the English curriculum within the allotted span of time irrespective of students' level of English proficiency and absence of educational preparation on the part of teachers of English second language. Storm (2007), cited in Asif (2013) adds that, students who consider themselves poor learners and find studying a foreign language difficult often have negative attitudes towards learning that language. He goes

on to say that positive attitudes towards language learning can raise learners' motivation and help in language learning.

Mustapha (2012), in his study on the effects of teacher behavior on the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria indicates that some of the challenges which teachers encountered were insufficient training, inadequate facilities, poor teaching techniques and inappropriate language for communication. Awobuluyi (2014) says that English is affected by the problem of quality and functionality and the competence of the language resources and teachers in the schools. The teachers are L2 speakers as well, hence they lack the confidence and linguistic competence needed to teach L2 classes. Another challenge faced by teachers is that of failure to adjust to the new teaching methods. Mmela (2006) says that many teachers lack expertise in the communicative approach, hence they fail to deliver.

Ali and Ali (2010) studied Oman students and noted that the problem of low proficiency levels of the students in English were exacerbated by large and mixed ability classes, heavy teaching loads, product teaching at the expense of process teaching, teacher centered as opposed to learner centered learning, examination based systems, short school year, teachers' varied cultural and professional backgrounds and a rigid bureaucratic- governed system.

In Kenya English is the medium of instruction and many problems faced by teachers of English as a second language emanate from an unresolved national language policy, interference from regional linguistic heritage languages and an examination oriented education system (Wamalwa and Wamalwa, 2014). In South Africa the use of English has overtaken the use of Afrikaans in many circles. English is now the official language. However, lack of resources and size of classes and the pupils' home life are some of the challenges faced by teachers. Most of the teachers use their local languages as a language of instruction in delivering English lessons. Their lack of skill and content results in them being uncomfortable in teaching the subject. Mmela (2006) says that in Malawi pupils experience English in schools only and the teaching approaches used by teachers are a limiting factor. In most of these countries discussed, the teachers of English as a second language are not native speakers of the language, neither are they proficient in the language. This causes an insurmountable problem in teaching the target language.

English is an official language in Zimbabwe. From the fourth grade teachers are required to use English as the medium of instruction. (Education Act, 1987). Mashiri (2009), reiterates that English enjoys a higher status than any of the indigenous languages because it is the only official language. However, Ngwaru (2013:312), indicates “the use of English, a language not spoken by students more often presented cognitive and pedagogical challenges as it restricted the interactive and communicative learning process for meaningful learning.” The language relegated the learner to the periphery.

In Zimbabwe most of the teachers of English are non-native speakers. Kadenge et. al. (2009), said that most Zimbabwe L1 speakers lack technical expertise in the teaching of English. Mareva and Nyota (2013), in a study they carried out in Masvingo, observed that most of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English result from using traditional teaching methods which do not correspond with the current Ordinary Level syllabus requirements. Thondlana (2000) argues that teachers face problems because of the limited time allocated to the subject, bearing in mind that most of the students learn English as one of the subjects included in the syllabus, but they lack proficiency in the language of instruction. This means that students are learning the language and at the same time trying to understand what is taught in English, thereby posing a great challenge for the teacher and for the students. Secondary school teachers have raised concern that most students who enroll for form one classes are not proficient in English and this poses a lot of challenges on the teacher. Parents and other stakeholders are also equally concerned by challenges which teachers encounter in the teaching of English as a second language and what could be done to counter these challenges. These are grey areas which need to be investigated. It is against this background that this study seeks to find out challenges which are faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language suggesting mitigating strategies.

Research questions

The paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language?
2. What are the factor which affect the teaching of English as a second language?

3. How can challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language be minimised?

Research Methodology

In this study descriptive survey design which utilised the mixed methods approach was used. Walliman (2015), defines a research design as something which provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data eventually indicating which methods are appropriate. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The descriptive survey design was chosen since the main thrust of the study was on identifying, describing and analyzing the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English as second language According to Leedy (2001), a descriptive survey design is designed to provide a picture of a situation as it naturally happens.

The population of the study was comprised of twenty eight secondary schools, twenty eight school heads and seven hundred and ninety six teachers in Sanyati District. Walliman (2015), defines population as the total number of individuals who fits the criteria the researcher has laid out for research participants. The sample of the study was made up of five secondary schools in Kadoma urban district. Twenty five teachers who responded to closed and open- ended questionnaires and five school heads who participated in face-to-face interviews were selected using the purposive sampling technique. According to Palys (2008), purposive sampling involves the researcher's judgment in selecting respondents that will best answer the research questions. Data were presented thematically. Quantitative data were presented in tables and graphs while qualitative data were presented verbatim. Ethical issues were observed.

Findings and Discussion

This section focuses on data presentation, analysis and discussion. Data and findings were presented and discussed under the following themes: Theme 1: Challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language; Theme 2: Strategies to minimize the challenges encountered by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language.

Theme 1: Challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language.

In this study the researchers wanted to establish if the teachers were encountering challenges in the teaching of English as a second language in schools and also the nature of those challenges. Reference is made to Table 1.

Table: 1**Teachers' responses on whether the teaching of English as a Second Language presented problems. (n=25)**

Responses	Number of teachers	%
Yes	21	84
No	4	16

Eighty four percent (84 %) of the respondents indicated that the teaching of ESL posed some challenges whilst 16% stated that they had no problems at all. These results show that generally teachers are facing challenges in teaching English.

Teachers were asked through an open-ended questionnaire item to indicate the problems they were facing in teaching English as a second language. The following were some of the responses:

- *English acts as a barrier to communication. Many pupils fail to express their thoughts and ideas in English. Some pupils do not understand the language.*
- *It is difficult to achieve objectives because language impedes teacher/ pupil rapport. Many pupils become temporarily mute and oral lessons usually flop.*
- *Most students cannot express themselves in English in rural settings.*
- *Some students who are enrolled for Form one cannot even construct a sentence.*

The word barrier which was used in the response meant that lack of proficiency in English limited the extent to which learners communicated with the teacher or among themselves. Teachers ended up code switching or in the worst scenario they depended on translating instruction in the process of lesson delivery. The inability of students to express themselves in

English, especially in rural schools is a big challenge for the teachers because they then fail to execute their duties efficiently.

School heads also responded to the item on whether teachers were encountering challenges in the teaching of English as a second language. The following were some of the school heads' responses:

- *Our major problem is the high level of inability by our students to express themselves using the second language.*
- *Teachers always resort to L1 when teaching but we insist that they should teach in English especially in English language lessons.*

These responses were similar to the responses given by teachers. Ngwaru (2013) indicated that lack of comprehension and communication skills on the part of the learners resulted in pedagogical challenges for the teacher. As a result, no meaningful learning would take place. Tsui (2003), says that the English learners are in most cases a diverse group that offers challenges to education and to teachers.

This study also sought to establish factors which aggravated challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language. Reference is made to in Table 2.

Table: 2

Teachers' responses on factors which affect the teaching of English as a Second Language (n=25).

Factors	Frequency	%
Lack of resources	20	80
Lack of reading culture	22	88
Poor teaching methods	5	20
Mother tongue interference	22	88
Environment	25	100

Data in Table 2 indicate that environmental factors (100%) affect the teaching of English as a second language followed by mother tongue interference and lack of reading culture both at 88%, a lack of resources at 80% and lastly poor teaching methods at 20%. The data could be interpreted to mean that teachers perceived the environment, mother tongue interference and lack of resources to be the main factors which contributed to challenges which teachers encountered. Very few respondents (20%) indicated that teaching methods was one of the factors involved.

Teachers were asked to elaborate on each of the factors listed in Table 2. On the environment as a possible cause, some of the responses were:

- *The community does not provide a platform nor means to acquire necessary tools for the acquisition of English language.*
- *Students do not speak the language at home as a result to learn it at school becomes a problem.*
- *English is used in isolated intervals. It is mainly used during lessons, especially English lessons.*

On lack of reading culture some of the teachers elaborated by saying:

- *Rural schools do not have good libraries. Some schools do not even have libraries. The reading culture is really lacking.*
- *No one speaks English in rural homes so students lack practice in the language.*

These responses reveal that the environment inhibits the pupils' acquisition of the language. The biggest problem is that English is a language of instruction and yet most students cannot speak in English.

On the same item on factors which contribute to these challenges, some of the heads of schools responded as follows:

- *The classes are too big for effective teaching....Here some classes have got up to sixty to seventy pupils in one class' A child has to be naughty to be known by the teacher because besides that you'll spend the whole year without being known. The teacher has no time to*

cater for individual needs. To make matters worse the departments are understaffed. Imagine here at such a big school I've got only five teachers.

- *The teachers lack relevant textbooks. Our students are mostly Shona and Chewa speakers they only use English in the classroom and er ...this makes it difficult for them to have enough vocabulary.*
- *The greatest challenges are a lack of resources especially literature novels, textbooks, projector and laptops for e-learning. There is no library*
- *The timetable is so congested because of the sessions. Instead of the normal six periods they have only five. Lack of tutorial rooms. Lack of resources. We have no funds, money trickles in the school.*

These responses clear that the issue of lack of resources is a great challenge followed by the big classes and the congested timetable which see English being allocated five periods instead of six periods per week. Stuart cited in Mmela (2006), also indicated that many students meet the language in the classroom only and with limited time there is not much that the teacher can do to achieve the expected results. Thondlana (2000), indicated that lack of resources, big classes and limited time also hinders the learning of the subject. Wamalwa and Wamalwa (2014) stated that huge numbers of students in classes pose a great challenge to effective teaching and use of resources.

Theme 2: Strategies for minimize the challenges encountered by teachers in the teaching of English as a Second Language.

This study sought to find out strategies which could be used to minimize the challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a Second Language. Reference is made to Table 3.

Table: 3

Teachers' responses on strategies which can be used to minimise the challenges. (n=25).

Teachers intervention strategies	Frequency	%
Remedial work	18	72
Promoting a reading culture	22	88
Team teaching and using resource people	14	56
Code switching	6	24
Vary teaching methods and use of visual aids	9	36
Group pupils according to their reading levels	3	12

Data on strategies to mitigate the challenges reveal that 88% of the teachers thought promoting a reading culture is a good strategy, followed by 72% who picked remedial work. Team teaching and using resource persons stood at 56% while varying teaching methods stood at 36%. Code switching stood at 24% followed by grouping pupils according to reading levels at 12%. The results show that promoting a reading culture had the highest frequency, followed by remedial work and team teaching and the use of resource persons. Code switching was not very common in the research findings. Only a few teachers grouped pupils according to their reading levels.

Teachers also responded to an open ended item on strategies and the following were some of the responses:

- *There is need to build many libraries, fully packed with books of different genres in English.*
- *Use of different technologies to motivate learners.*
- *There is need for further training of teachers on methods of teaching English.*
- *More time should be allocated to the subject English need to be taught with teachers who are trained to teach the subject.*
- *I feel the teacher pupil ratio should be revised and temporary teachers should not be allowed to teach English.*

When asked about what could be done by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to minimize the challenges faced by the teachers, heads of schools came up with a number of suggestions and the following are some of the remarks which were made:

- *We need staff development for teachers regularly.*
- *Those who join the teaching profession should do so wholeheartedly.*
- *.Schools should provide textbooks and all the other resources to support the teaching and learning of English.*
- *Teachers need motivation to work.*
- *Pupils should be encouraged to use English at home with parental support.*
- *We need to find ways of reducing class sizes'*
- *Positive attitudes towards English should be cultivated in learners.*

Comments made by school heads show that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should focus on professional development of teachers, availing resources and reducing class sizes. Teacher motivation Wamalwa and Wamalwa (2014), said that teachers who join the service without interest in the career may lack motivation to implement effective teaching.

On the issue of what the schools can do to alleviate the problem, some of the responses which were made by the teachers are as follows:

- *Schools should have a language policy that encourages the speaking of English.*
- *Schools should avoid more emphasis on written work but rather more on the practical application of linguistics in activities involving the actual speaking of the language.*
- *Schools should introduce e-learning. Cooperate with the department and allow teachers to do seminars and workshops.*
- *Schools should encourage students to participate in drama, public speaking and debates.*

However, whilst there are challenges, literature suggests some mitigating strategies which can be described as good practices. Aggrwal (2009), suggests that teachers should be innovative enough and venture out to experiment so as to improve and enhance learning. Governments need to improve on provision of school resources and the administrators must analyse recent research on language acquisition so that the teachers are kept abreast of developments. Ignacio and Martinez

(2010) proposed that all schools should be provided with language resource centres and other learning facilities for pupils to have ample practice. Khan (2011), in his presentation on teachers' problems in teaching English as second language, suggested the use of libraries and English newspapers, informal meetings of students and teachers having access to the Internet and study trips.

The research established that the child, the parent, the school, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the curriculum developers need to work hand in glove to combat the challenges being faced by teachers in teaching English as a second language. The use of workshops, seminars and provision of resource materials to teachers were the most suggested solutions.

Conclusion

This study sought to find out the challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English as a second language in a bid to come up with strategies which can be used to mitigate these challenges. It is in light of this problem that the following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study.

The findings revealed that lack of in-service training, unavailability resources, large classes and the congested timetable which sees English being allocated five periods instead of six periods per week and negative attitudes towards English are some of the challenges faced by teachers of English in executing their duties.

Recommendations

In light of the above conclusions it is recommended that:

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should launch workshops and seminars for teachers of English as a second language with a focus on teaching methods and second language acquisition theories.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education must make sure English is taught by teachers who are trained to teach English, not just anyone who passed English at Ordinary Level, since

the knowledge of second language acquisition theories is a prerequisite in the teaching of English.

The Curriculum Development Unit and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should revise the syllabus and policies pertaining to the subject. They should also provide the teaching learning resources to schools.

- The school heads and the head of department should supervise the teaching methods being employed by the teachers to make sure they are using the recommended methods.
- Whilst training more time should be spent in the field since the teachers from colleges always cry foul when they are deployed in schools and they claim that the training is too theoretical and does not prepare the teachers for the challenges they face in the field.

The schools should support the English department in an attempt to motivate the teacher and the pupils. English, being a second language, is acquired in a different manner from the first language and needs a lot of effort from both the teacher and the pupil. The teachers cannot solely improve students' performance; thus there is need for a partnership between the teachers, school heads and pupils.

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