

Teaching English In Zimbabwean Secondary Schools: The Importance Of Preparation

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a survey that was carried out in 1988 - 1989 on the teaching of English in Zimbabwean secondary schools with special emphasis on the teachers' preparation for their lessons.

First the school, teachers' academic and professional data are discussed because they form an important background to the survey. Different aspects of lesson preparation by teachers of English are reported on thereafter.

While we begin with a hypothesis that there will be apparent differences in the way teachers prepare for their lessons based on experience, academic and professional qualifications, we conclude by rejecting that hypothesis because the results of the survey do not confirm it. Therefore, more research is needed to collect more data from a bigger sample of teachers and perhaps using different methods of data collection in order to confidently comment on the way teachers prepare for their English lessons.

The effectiveness of such teacher preparations on pupil achievement is not covered by this report. That will be a necessary follow-up to such an investigation as this one.

Introduction

This report is part of the former Curriculum Studies Department collaborative research project undertaken in Zimbabwean secondary schools in 1988 to 1989 and co-ordinated by Dr Levi M. Nyagura, Professor J.L. Reece and Dr Gail Jaji. "Research teams within the Department designed fifteen sets of questionnaires, each focusing on various aspects of the secondary schools" (Nyagura & Reece, 1989, p. 312).

This particular report is based on a study of the teachers of English in secondary schools. By "teachers of English" we are referring to those teachers who teach English language and/or literature in English. These are the teachers who handle "the English subject" in forms one to six. The population of the study consisted of 1 133 secondary schools where technical subjects are offered. They had to be in those schools because the collaborative research project included studies on the teaching of technical subjects since the policy of the ministries of Education is "to encourage secondary schools to offer at least two technical subjects" (Nyagura & Reece, p.314). It is therefore, from these schools that a sample of 120 teachers was drawn to answer a questionnaire on the teaching of English in the secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study was to determine teacher quality and teaching quality through the use of a questionnaire. In particular we focused on the teachers' *preparation* for teaching.

In order to determine this teacher and teaching quality, we wanted to find out whether teachers do the following:

1. prepare for their classes adequately;
2. define what they mean by "prepare";
3. use creative methods in teaching the different aspects of the English language and/or literature.

Justification

This area of teacher preparation has not been adequately investigated to date. In fact for Zimbabwe, perhaps this is the first time attention is being paid to this aspect of teaching. We believe that the success of whatever goes in the thirty-five to forty minute class period is determined by the amount of preparatory work put in before-hand. It is thorough preparation which uplifts the quality of work; which enables the teacher to do his/her work confidently and which enables the pupils to learn more. Yet "very little research has been conducted on the influence of teaching practices and classroom organisation on achievement levels of Third

World students" (Fuller, 1986). While more research has tended to focus on such proxies as teacher academic and professional qualifications, home and school environment for the student; preservice and inservice training for teachers to determine pupil achievement, "more direct assessment of actual skills which are directly related to the teacher's effectiveness is very rare" Fuller, p. 3).

These "actual skills" include the amount of time teachers spend in class preparation. The few studies that have been carried out to determine the effect of teacher preparation on pupils have confirmed its significance. For instance,

The IEA data showed that the amount of time Science teachers spent in preparing lessons... was significantly related to pupil achievement in Chile, Iran and India [though] not in Thailand. Three different measures were used: hours spent marking papers... The magnitude of the effect was statistically significant ($p < .05$) (Fuller, p.44).

Therefore, in this study we deliberately focused on this aspect of teaching because "these management practices may raise literacy and academic achievement more than new investments in material inputs" (Fuller). Furthermore, in Zimbabwe there has been explosive expansion both at primary and secondary school systems requiring not only skill and human resources, but also financial and physical resources which have not been as widely available as is necessary. So criticism has been levelled against government for "dropping standards". Among educationists too, there has been growing concern as to whether teachers are giving of their best in order to ensure a good passing rate at the Junior Certificate, Form Four and Form Six levels. But the most disturbing factor of all is that students themselves see through the teachers' weaknesses at times, much as we know that they are untrained in the art of teaching. Some are worried about the quality of teachers they have. Consider the following letter which appeared in *The Herald* on Tuesday, May 8, 1990:

LAX TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Editor ... I am an O-level student doing eight subjects. I am sure of passing all the subjects except English because of the way English is taught. Some teachers seem to think that English can be passed only by "talented" students. As a result they relax and don't bother to teach properly.

schools. These statistics are useful for us because they show that we have sampled the majority of the school types in Zimbabwe to determine how English teachers do their work.

Teachers

The majority of the teachers sampled, (59.5%) were male and among these 91.3% were Zimbabwean. Forty-one percent were female of whom 8.7% were expatriates. In terms of age, we found that 38.3% of the teachers fall below the age of twenty-four with the majority of these deployed in the former group B and rural day secondary schools (see Table 1 below). Fifty-two and half per cent are in the twenty-five to thirty-nine age group, again with the majority in former group B and Rural District Schools (RDS). Only 9.2% are between forty years and over.

Table 1
The Teachers' Age Groups by School Type

AGE	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Under 24	4	16	2	24	46	38.3
25-39	8	27	9	19	63	52.5
40 & over	6	1	3	1	11	9.2
Totals	18	44	14	44	120	100

This Table shows some differences in the distribution of teachers by age in each of the school types. If we apply the chi square test we confirm that the differences are statistically significant for both the under twenty-four and the twenty-five to thirty-nine years age groups ($X^2 = 64.54$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$; and $X^2 = 79.71$, $df = 6$, $p.001$ respectively). The implications of this where the under twenty-four year age group is concerned is that the RDS and the former Group B schools are operating at a disadvantage because this group of teachers is young, inexperienced and in most cases, minimally qualified. On the other hand, these same school types have a majority of the twenty-five to thirty-nine year olds which may be an

Table 2
Teachers' Highest Academic Qualifications by Schooltype

Qualification	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Grade 11; 'O'; 'A' levels	7	37	9	41	94	78.3
Graduate & Post Graduate Degrees	11	7	6	2	26	21.7
TOTALS	18	44	15	43	120	100

We need to apply the chi square test again here in order to determine whether statistically, the differences in the above distribution are significant. On the grade eleven, 'O' level and 'A' level qualifications we get a chi square value of 148.11, $df = 3$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the differences are indeed very significant. When we apply the same test to the column of the degreed teachers we observe that the differences are not significant at the five percent level. All school types would benefit greatly from incentives to attract and retain these highly qualified individuals in the teaching profession.

Professional Qualifications

A very important aspect of teaching is the professional qualifications teachers possess in order to carry out their work efficiently, confidently and knowledgeably. We wanted to know therefore, whether all the teachers in our sample were professionally qualified to carry out their duties and we came up with the following evidence (see Table 3 below).

According to this table, 35.8% of the teachers are untrained and the majority were found in the former group B and the rural day schools. Thirty per cent have 'O' or 'A' level including three to four years training while 18.3% are graduates with training. There is a small per cent of 7.5%

good housing, electricity, water etc. which would attract teachers. We would thus, urge trained teachers to opt to develop these rural schools also, to ensure a good secondary education for the rural child.

Teaching Experience

All the teachers surveyed indicated that they had had teaching experience either in primary or secondary school in and outside Zimbabwe. Eighty-five percent of the teachers reported that they had experience in their current schools with the majority having one to five years experience only, the 9.2% with seven to thirty years experience in the current school is obviously too small a percentage which reflects a very high staff turn-over in the schools. It seems few stay on in one school to build up its tradition and to sustain its development, a fact which would be highly desirable.

As far as the system of hot seating is concerned, we discovered that that system is operational only in the former group B and the rural day secondary schools. In the Church schools and the former Group A schools it is not there, yet as Nyagura and Reece report (1989), these are the schools which have more facilities such as classrooms, furniture, better libraries etc. and would certainly be better placed to handle hot seating classes.

With all these variables in mind, we now need to find out whether there is a difference in the way teachers prepare their lessons for their classes. Overall we want to know whether there is a variance in the way the degreed and the non-degreed teachers; the trained and the untrained teachers prepare their work; what they mean by "prepare" and the general approaches or strategies they use with their classes. Tables will show results by school type. Underlying this investigation is our hypothesis that differences will be apparent in the way teachers prepare their work in the different school types depending on experience and qualification.

B. The Teachers' Preparation

In this section we will focus on the teachers' preparation. By "preparation" we are talking about the cumulation of everything that goes into the teaching of a lesson. On the questionnaire the following areas of "preparation" were singled out: scheming; lesson planning, looking for

appropriate audio-visual aids, planning on-coming educational or field trips, determining whether or not a guest speaker ought to be invited to class, consulting colleagues and peers, reading more than one text in order to select the best content etc. These are some of the areas singled out by over 87% of the school heads in Nyagura and Reece's survey as the most important topics which should be focused on in inservice training of teachers. They are also important documentation and professional issues that a teacher of English should be thoroughly conversant with and should practise in order to be an effective teacher.

Implied in "preparation" is the time factor needed to carry it out. So the first question in this section focused on this sector. We wanted to know when this preparation is done.

Twenty-four per cent of the teachers said they prepare for their lessons the *night before* class; 25% do it a *week before* teaching the lesson; 20.8% do it *two weeks before*; 23.8% said during the *preceding holiday*. We do recognise the ambiguity of this information arising from the ambiguity of the question itself which simply asked for "preparation", encompassing all kinds of activities under that designation. So the next question specified the activities lumped under "preparation".

Sixty-seven per cent said that by "preparation they mean *scheming*" while 32.5% said they do not include it. Those who include it are correct as long as they do not do it the night before the classes to be taught because it takes a lot of time to do.

Seventy-four percent (74%.2) said by "preparation they include *planning*" which is correct. Fifty-seven per cent (57.5%) included "looking for appropriate audio-visual aids" under preparation while 41.7% did not. Sixteen per cent (16.7%) included "educational or field trips" under preparation while 82.5% did not. This can be interpreted to mean that the majority of English teachers sampled do not undertake field trips as part of their teaching strategy. Twenty-five per cent included "determining who to invite as guest speaker" under preparation while 74.2% did not. Those who do are doing the right thing. Four per cent (4.2%) said they do other activities besides the ones specified above when preparing for lessons while 89.2% said they do no other activities.

All together, 18.3% of the teachers agreed that all the above aspects are included and implied when we talk about "preparation" of a lesson while 80% thought these aspects are not always included. This is unfortunate

because one would expect all teachers to agree rather than disagree. One explanation could be that the majority of the teachers misunderstood that particular item. But then again, it is highly unlikely since they agreed or disagreed with each relevant aspect of preparation separately. If indeed the majority of sampled teachers do not believe that all those aspects are what makes up global preparation for teaching, then there is definitely a great need for inservice teaching to be done in order to clarify issues. Therefore, the question still remains unanswered.. What does one really do when "preparing for one's lessons?"

Ideally, at the beginning of the first term, an English teacher should work out a "broad outline of the year's work [which] should indicate the main skills and areas which the teacher aims to cover during a year's work with a particular class" (Ellis & Tomlinson, p. 317). This allows the teacher to take into account what the class did the previous year. Next, the teacher prepares a scheme of work for each term in which all the skills to be taught during that year are divided into three components, each to be covered during each of the terms. Finally, the teacher makes up a weekly and then daily lesson plans.

Ideally too, all weekly lesson plans are better done in "one sitting" ... sometime *before* the beginning of the first lesson in the week. All this allows the teacher time to read around the topics to be taught, collect the appropriate audio-visual aids for each lesson; plan different approaches to each lesson, figure out when to call an outside guest speaker, when and where to take a class for an educational trip and what for, etc. Thereafter, upon teaching each lesson, the teacher reviews the next one and adjusts the content, methods and activities as dictated by the actual conditions prevailing in each class. This review is what can be done the night before. One cannot plan each and every lesson the night or day before because there is so much to be done besides; things like marking, family obligations, and so on. If lessons are left unplanned at the beginning of each week or cycle, one may be forced to walk into class, not knowing what exactly to do. This is when one just resorts to following whatever the text-book says whether or not it is suitable for that class at that time.

Consultation

One very important aspect of preparing for one's lesson is *consultation* in all its different forms including colleagues, peers and books. Wilga Rivers correctly affirms that "there may be new discoveries in linguistic or

psychology which are relevant to [a teacher's] work. He must keep abreast of developments and achievements in the country.... Within his own classroom he should be alert to evaluate techniques on which he has come to rely and be ready to change and adapt them from year to year to increase their effectiveness" (1988, p. 380). Thus in our survey we focused on consultation and got the following evidence (Table 4):

Table 4
Consultation

(i) Teachers Consult more than one textbook

Answer	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Yes	16	40	13	42	111	92.5
No	2	4	2	1	9	7.5
Totals	18	44	15	43	120	100

(ii) Teachers Consult Colleagues/Peers

Answer	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Yes	13	31	8	13	83	69.2
No	5	13	7	12	37	30.8
Totals	18	44	15	43	120	100

(iii) Teachers Read Other Books Besides Textbooks

Answer	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Yes	17	36	13	33	99	82.5
no	1	8	2	10	21	17.5
Totals	18	44	15	43	120	100

The above table 4(i) shows that 92,5% of the teachers said they consult more than one textbook in the course of their scheming and planning while 7.5% said they do not. This is an ideal situation which we shall comment on later. Because different authors present material in different ways, the teacher, and ultimately the pupils, would benefit from such consultation. From the table, rural day schools reported the highest number of teachers who consult more than one text while preparing for their lessons which is good considering that this type of school also had the highest number of young, inexperienced and untrained teachers who need the most help in acquiring different teaching skills.

Besides consulting different books, it is also imperative that English teachers consult fellow teachers, heads of departments etc. in order to come up with lessons that encompass a wider spectrum of topics and subjects which would give English its true character as "English across the curriculum". In fact John Greenwood goes a step further in his ideas on consultation with colleagues when he says, "if the timetable allows, it might be possible occasionally to have joint activities... one class [can] act as audience for an activity which another class had prepared. Such collaboration would have to be carefully planned" (1981, p.251). Indeed, such "careful planning" cannot be successfully done individually, but in collaboration with other teachers.

Hobbs, (177) shows the value of consulting colleagues as three teachers demonstrate how this could be done in a film:

Another important part of [Mrs Akinyele's] preparation ... is to consult colleagues who teach other subjects to her students. We see her [in film] talking to the social studies teacher about a map to illustrate areas where raw materials are found or produced. After getting his advice, she draws a suitable map on a roll-up black-board.... When pupils work from it, they will be practising language they will need for their work in their social studies (Geography, History, Civics etc.). Mrs Akinyele then discusses with the head of Science department the language which students will need to use in their Science activities. We also see her consulting the head of the English department about a speech drill from the coursebook (p. 91).

The point here is that through consultation with colleagues, a teacher gets good concrete ideas on the kind of facts to include in the English "grammar" drills; a teacher of English draws from other subjects on the curriculum to provide relevant context for his/her lessons in order to avoid turning the subject into a "four-walled affair," divorced from the rest of the child's living and learning experience. Thus, Table 4(ii) shows that 69.2% of the surveyed teachers do this kind of consultation while 30.8% do not.

On reading, Table 4(iii) shows that 82.5% "read other books on the topic to be taught besides the textbook, making notes before finalising their scheming and planning". Once again, this is an ideal situation which we shall refer to later. As Wilga Rivers (p.380) convincingly argues,

The teacher who remains alert professionally, evaluating carefully in the light of his experience what he has heard and read and contributing himself from his considered judgement, remains vital and interesting in the classroom, even after years of teaching the same subject.

Indeed, it is through reading different subject area books that one is able to adapt the material to suit one's class; to supplement it and to avoid following the class coursebook slavishly from beginning to end (Hobbs, Rivers). As for the time teachers spend preparing for their lessons per week, answers ranged from one hour to thirty-six hours per week. Perhaps time spent on one's preparation is really determined by the kind of reading and other activities deemed necessary to make an English lesson successful. One cannot always prescribe on this while at the same time recognising that spending one or two hours only per week may be categorised as inadequate.

Strategies in Class

The next important areas in teaching are the actual approaches that teachers adopt when they get to class. So we asked and got the evidence recorded in Table 5 below.

Table 5(i) shows that 87.5% of the teachers surveyed always or often "outline objectives at the beginning of each lesson" to ensure that pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Furthermore, 98.3% affirmed that they always or often "ensure that pupils understand the topic for each

lesson." This is quite ideal. While it may sound obvious that teachers should do this, there are times when one sits through a lesson at the end of which one wonders what that lesson was all about. At least our survey has shown that these teachers try to do the correct thing.

Table 5
Teaching Strategies

(i) Teachers Outline Objectives At the Beginning of Each Lesson

Answer	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Always/often	27	39	12	37	105	87.5
Rare/Never	1	3	3	5	12	10.0
Missing observations					3	2.5
Totals	18	42	15	42	120	100

(ii) Teachers Make Use of Audio-Visual Aids

Answer	F.G.R.A.	F.G.R.B.	Church	RDS	Total	%
Always/often	6	20	9	26	61	50.8
Rare	8	14	5	12	39	32.5
Very Rare/Never	4	5	1	5	15	12.5
Missing observations					5	4.2
Totals	18	39	15	43	120	100

Audio-Visual Aids as a Teaching Strategy

The use of appropriate audio-visual aids is imperative in an English class. This becomes a culmination of all the work that goes into the preparation stage of a lesson which should include locating the necessary aids for each lesson. So we wanted to know whether teachers make use of this strategy in their teaching.

As Table 5(ii) shows, 50.8% said they always or often "make use of appropriate aids, such as radio, tapes, pictures, posters, cards, etc". Thirty-two per cent said they rarely do and 12.5% said they never do. The percentage of those using aids in the classroom should have been higher, for their importance can hardly be over-emphasised. As McGregor writes, "If I hear, I forget; if I see I understand; if I do, I know" (1971, p.203). The problem most teachers would quickly cite perhaps about audio-visual aids is that the classes are too large and so how could one possibly bring to class enough objects for over forty pupils! Well, there is a way round that problem.

We wanted to find out how teachers are coping with this problem and to our question, 51.6% of the teachers said they always or often bring *ava's* to class themselves; 34.2% said they rarely do while 8.3% said they *never* do. On the other hand, 34.1% reported that they always or often "ask pupils to help bring some *ava's* to school for particular lessons;" 30.0% said they rarely ask pupils to help; 20.0% said they *never* ask pupils to help bring *ava's*.

There is tremendous value in asking pupils to help bring some of the *ava's* to school because it places good responsibility on pupils so that they feel they are participating in it rather than just being disinterested by-standers while the teacher does everything. For a lesson on "clothes," for example, each child should be asked to bring an item, and together, the class would participate co-operatively in trying to make the lesson a success.

Field of Educational Trips

We wanted to find out how many of the teachers regard field trips as part of audio-visual aids to their lessons. Unfortunately, only 13.3% said they always or often "organise field trips to reinforce certain topics taught" in class; 37.5% said they rarely do; 39.2% said they *never* do. This information ties in with the 16.8% of those whom we reported earlier as saying that preparation for lessons also means planning for educational trips. One reason why the majority probably do not plan any is that trips *per se* are expensive and one needs transportation such as a bus or lorry to take students anywhere meaningful. However, one could always begin with areas where children can walk to and then later on the teachers can organise a trip further afield. English teachers must realise that it is through language that students need to express themselves and so while headmasters may be willing to finance a Geography or History trip to

Kariba or Great Zimbabwe, they may not see why a Literature class needs to see the Great Zimbabwe. Yet a trip there may inspire a few poems and may reinforce the study of a novel like Chipamaunga's *A Fighter For Freedom*. Implied in this is the fact that careful planning needs to be done before term starts to make such excursions a success.

Homework

While we dealt with the teachers' own preparation for the lessons, we would also like to find out if teachers asked pupils to make their own preparations in the form of homework. Ninety per cent of the teachers said they always or often give homework to pupils while 5.8% said they rarely do. Homework could be in the form of reading, exercises, locating other information, consulting people at home, etc., and is important because it ensures an informed discussion in the classroom. As Fuller observes, "assignment of homework... shows promise in raising student achievement..." (p.44).

Next we wanted to know the outcome of such co-operative preparation between teacher and students in the classroom. Ninety-four per cent of the teachers reported that both their preparation and that of the pupils as homework including consultations at home "results in very interesting lessons". This is as it should be because creativity becomes a natural result of such lessons as evidenced by 83.3% who reported that both "their presentation and that of pupils is very creative" when pupils have been given homework in English. The nature of this "creativity" was not followed up at this point however. On whether both teacher and pupils learn mutually each from the other, 89.2% said that they do while 5% said they rarely do. Close to 3% said they *never* do. There is a danger that those who never learn from their pupils are practising what Paulo Freire calls the "banking concept of education" in which knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing". He continues:

Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of enquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the

slave in the Hegelian dialect, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence -- but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher (1972, p. 46).

Fortunately, this study has revealed that the majority of the teachers admit there is reciprocal learning between teachers and their pupils.

On whether teachers think that the lessons are boring for the pupils, only 0.8% reported that the lessons always tend to be boring to the pupils while 6.7% said the lessons are often boring. Perhaps these are the teachers who do not assign homework, who do not consult etc. We do not know. But if lessons are often or always boring to pupils, something must be done quickly to remedy the situation.

Interpreting the Survey Results

In this section we would like to comment on the observations made from the results of this survey and the meaning of these results.

We started with the hypothesis that "differences will be apparent in the way teachers prepare their work in the different school types depending on experience and qualification". From Tables 2 and 3 we have a summary of trained versus those who are untrained; those with higher academic qualifications and those with just grade eleven, 'O' and 'A' levels. Yet from Table 4 and 5 and other discussions on what teachers do while preparing for their lessons and in class, all are doing the same thing... scheming and planning the ideal way; involving pupils the ideal way, using *ava's* ideally and creatively and all lessons seem to be done exactly the same good way. We believe that this is odd. But then the teachers have reported what they do assumedly. Well, where is the discrepancy? We cannot, for instance explain the lax attitude of the English teacher who teaches "Concerned Student" of Mvuma from these results. Neither can we explain the often experienced poor 'O' level English results in terms of poor preparation by the teachers or poor teacher qualifications. Therefore, where is the problem? In the students themselves?

Several explanations are possible, the most likely of which is the complacency syndrome; that is, that the teachers surveyed decided to write what we would like to hear rather than what they *actually do*. If this is what happened, then it explains all the ideal responses above, and hence, the meaning of these results is to be taken a little sceptically. Another

explanation could be that the 120 teachers surveyed just happen to be some of the most diligent and conscientious English teachers in the country, trained or untrained. Thus, to get a truer picture of how English teachers prepare their work we would have to widen our sample group or to visit the schools physically to find out what is going on within those four walls. We could also survey the pupils themselves and then compare what they say they do with what the teachers say they make them do. This way we might be closer to the truth of what preparations go on before a particular lesson is taught. But this would apply only to pupil activities as directed by the teacher, a subject which is not dealt with here. Results of such preparations could be visible in class.

As far as this paper is concerned, we have tried to highlight what teachers do and can do in order to make their English lessons a success. The survey results too make us reject our hypothesis at the beginning that there are bound to be some differences in the way teachers prepare for their lessons based on academic and professional qualification differences. However, for us to make tentative conclusions on how effectively teachers of English prepare their work and the impact of that preparation on pupil achievement, we need more data on the actual techniques teachers use in class and the actual pupil activities in the classroom. That will be the subject of another report. For now, we take it that basically most of the teachers surveyed have no problems with preparing for their lessons since they have demonstrated that they know what should be done in order to teach English competently... or so we hope.

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