

READING IN ZIMBABWE

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HISTORY OF READING LITERACY

Introduction

Zimbabwe is a young nation which was colonized by Britain from 1890 to 1979; during this time it was called Rhodesia. In 1980 Rhodesia gained full independence from Britain after a sustained guerrilla war that lasted close to sixteen years, from approximately 1963 to 1979. During the colonial period, the Rhodesian political, economic and social systems segregated against the majority of the people who were Africans numbering over seven million, in favour of the minority made up Europeans of different ancestry and numbering about 250,000. Education was one area which was very heavily segregated and so, soon after independence in 1980, Zimbabwe showed tremendous commitment to mass education and literacy.

While many new programmes were initiated at this time to prepare the country to cope with the new challenges that lay ahead, one of the most dramatic changes to be enacted was in the field of education. Besides making primary education free for all children and encouraging parents to send all their children to school regardless of age (most African schools had been closed during the war so that many children's education was interrupted), the government embarked on a national adult literacy campaign whose goal was "the eradication of illiteracy, utilising all the human and material resources available to the country" (Mujuru, 1982). The new government, therefore, found it necessary, not only to concentrate on children's education, but also on education of the adult population which was still illiterate after all these years. The questions that arise here are why was it necessary to begin this new adult literacy programme, and why did policy changes have to be implemented in the formal school sector? To answer such questions, we must discuss the historical background to the current Zimbabwean education system.

Historically, conditions governing African and European (European includes Asian and people of mixed race called Coloureds) education were different. Educational

opportunities were abundant for Europeans - while for Africans, they were not. For example, European education was free and compulsory between the ages of seven to fifteen years while for the African child it was neither. This free and compulsory European education included a two-year infant school at ages six and seven, and a five-year primary education from ages eight to twelve. "For those unable to attend infant and primary schools, correspondence school [was] available and radio broadcasts [were] offered" (Parker, 1961). So while the European child's education was well organised for him/her, the African child had no such similar facilities, and since African parents were unlikely to own radios, their child could go through life with very little or no basic education.

While entrance to the six-year secondary school level serving the thirteen- to eighteen-year-old age group was automatic for European children, African children sat rigid, terminal exams at standard six or grade seven level, form two (junior secondary) level and form four (i.e., high school) level, sometimes called Ordinary (or "O") level. Only 12.5 percent (approximately one child in every 1000) of African primary school children proceeded to junior secondary school and 4 percent of those (approximately one in every 10,000) proceeded to high school. A still smaller percentage went on to form six (i.e., university preparatory school for two years) and perhaps only one percent of that small number managed to reach university level. Let us demonstrate the full impact of that system by tracing the fortunes of the grade one class of 1952:

Of the 84,444 children who entered Grade 1 in 1952, only 10,921 reached the last grade of the primary education segment and of those only 1,919 went to secondary school; of those pupils only 386 reached O level and only 56 reached the pre-University upper-sixth form.... On the other hand, more than half the European population had 10-11 years of education, and a third had even more. [Moyana, et al., 1989 : 44]

For the African child, therefore, "to go through primary school was a great personal achievement but to enter secondary school was to demonstrate that you were a chosen breed. Going through the secondary school was a hazardous adventure. The student who survived it all and was finally crowned by getting a place at one of the two university preparation schools, Goromonzi and Fletcher, was indeed unique" (Moyana et al., 1989 : 45). Yet for the European child, "education in day and evening classes was available after form four at age sixteen. Federally administered technical colleges [were] located in main towns of Southern and Northern Rhodesia. Federal cooperation with Industry provided on-the-job apprenticeship training" (Parker, 1961 : 288-289).

Although theoretically the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland provided higher education "for men and women of all races," only a negligible number of African students ever ended up there. For instance, in 1959 the University College enrolled a total of 188 students out of which 154 were whites, 32 were Africans, one was Coloured and one Asian (Parker, 1961 : 289). This is in a country where the black-white ratio was 12-1, "an overwhelming African majority comprising 7.7 million of the Federation's 8 million inhabitants" (Parker, 1961 : 286).

These unequal educational opportunities resulted in minimal literacy and numeracy levels for African children, considering that most dropped out of school at or before the age of twelve. However, given the choice between primary and secondary school training, it seems that the government of the day preferred African children to get basic primary school education for the purposes of scanty communication between the European employer and the African labourer. In 1960, for instance 505,266 African children were enrolled in 2,859 schools, with 90% enrolled below the eighth grade. Of these, only a few entered the available 24 secondary schools. The attrition rate was therefore very high through screening in order to fit children from 2,859 schools into 24 schools, most of which were run by missionaries (Parker, 1961 : 291).

Even the administration of the African education was carried out in a haphazard manner as compared to European education. The Kerr Commission reported after their investigation that they found the schools, “not under a Minister of Education, but mixed up with agriculture and engineering, native labour and community development” (Judges, 1963 : 8).

CURRICULAR APPROACHES TO READING LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Poor educational conditions for the majority of people in (then) Rhodesia persisted right up to independence. As the years went by, fewer and fewer people were given opportunities to improve themselves educationally; their quality of life was reduced because their poor education offered few chances for advancement at the work places – advancement which would also determine salary scales. The purpose of this deliberate educational genocide on the mass of people was to ensure that they remained ignorant, obedient and subservient to the European master in all spheres. Literacy and knowledge were regarded as expensive privileges which were not to be shared by all citizens alike, particularly the segregated African children.

Independence and education

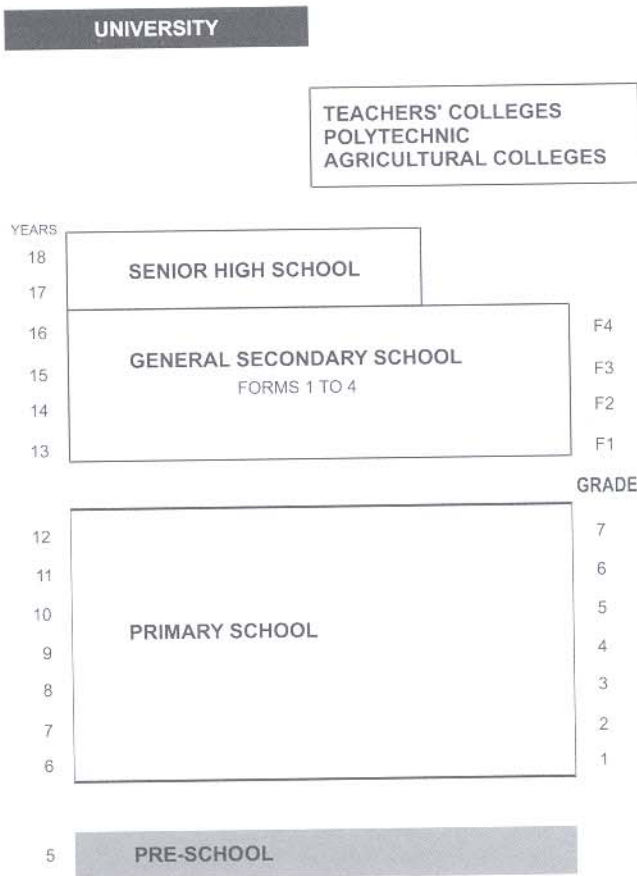
After independence, the Zimbabwean government decided to abolish the segregatory system of education. It was consciously committed to the “establishment of an egalitarian society which put emphasis on the development of the individual.” The new social order was to preside over a new and equitable distribution of knowledge and rights for everyone, which required that all people should have access to information and knowledge about their society. The government also recognised that “the realisation of one’s innate ability, the betterment of society, and the meaningful participation of the individual in development depend upon the ability to read and write” (Mujuru, 1982). Thus, unlike the Rhodesian government, the Zimbabwean government viewed literacy as a socioeconomic and political right, governed in the political arena, and as a right and not a privilege of every person in society.

Faced with an estimated over two-and-half million adults who were illiterate, action was sanctioned on two fronts:

- at the informal, adult level by mounting the Adult Literacy Campaign and;
- at the formal educational level by declaring that all children regardless of colour or creed be allowed to go to school free of charge, and, rather than make the grade 7 and junior secondary levels terminal, children were allowed to proceed to high school level, thus allowing them to complete four full years of secondary education by approximately 16 or 17 years of age (we say approximately because many children were much older than this age group especially up to 1988/89; see page 1, this article).

From 1980 onwards, all children were to begin school at age 6; previously, African children started at age 7 or 8 and European children at 5 or 6 years. Although primary school was tuition free, parents had to pay a levy to the school for improving and increasing facilities such as buildings, books, more teachers employed directly by the Parents-Teacher Associations (PTA), etc. The amount to be paid by each school was to be determined by the PTAs. Schools remained tuition free from 1980 to December, 1991. From January, 1992 the government resumed the payment of tuition in primary schools, with financial assistance given where needed. Although education has not yet been made compulsory at all levels, children are expected to remain in school until they complete high school (age 16 or 17). The school system has the following age and level groupings:

1. 5 years: preschool (though not all children manage to attend).
2. 6 years: grade one.
3. 12 years: grade seven, the last year of primary school where children write a nationally set examination in four subjects: English, mathematics, Shona/Ndebele (indigenous languages), and general knowledge.
4. 13-14 years: junior secondary school, at the end of which children write another nationally set exam in a minimum of five subjects including English and mathematics. Previously, the grade seven and junior secondary levels formed serious barriers for African children, insofar as they were used as screening points. From 1980 to 1991 all children proceeded to high school whether or not they passed these exams. However, as of 1992, children are required to pass at least the minimum five subjects at junior secondary level to continue. This stipulation has been made to avoid frustrating students who may find the work too difficult and/or unmanageable. They are, however, allowed to repeat their junior secondary subjects and to sit another exam.
5. 15-16 years: high school (or form four/"O" level), at the end of which children write final qualifying exams in a minimum of five subjects which include English. They must pass the selected five subjects to obtain a high school certificate.
6. 17-18 years: university preparatory school called lower and upper sixth form (of forms five and six). Those who do not qualify for this level or who are unable to attend for financial or other reasons can enter professional, vocational or technical training colleges to prepare for a career of their choice (see figure next page).



Ministry of Education and Culture, 1991)

Methodologies used to teach reading literacy

At preschool level children are first introduced to reading literacy in various ways, some of which are: teachers reading to them regularly, studying the environmental print such as road signs, and learning the conventions of print as presented in books (i.e., the left-to-right sequence in reading and writing). Later on in the year they are introduced to the letters of the alphabet, and they begin to practise writing their names, writing captions on their art work, and reading and writing simple messages. Generally they are provided with experiences whose aim is to expand their oral language, and their reading and their writing skills as they get ready for formal schooling at grade one level.

During the last six months of grade one children begin to receive formal instruction in reading. The first six months are used to continue preparing for the reading skill

through language-oriented acts such as: children listen to news and stories; they speak about themselves and their families, their home environment, etc. They also make good use of drama. The methods used for training reading are the look-and-say/picture reading of words and short sentences on flash cards, the phonic method, and the audio-lingual method.

By the last two years of primary school (grades six and seven) children are taking part in advanced language acts such as listening to longer stories and news items and retelling them in summary form; acting and debating; impromptu speeches, public speaking, etc. They are now reading with longer passages and summarising them both orally and in writing. Several different reading and comprehension exercises are given to children such as multiple-choice, filling-in-the-blanks, close exercises, summary work, library reading of own choice of books on own choice of subjects (where libraries are available), etc.

The junior and high school levels consolidate the reading skills developed at primary school. Reading is formally taught up to the last year of high school when children are sixteen or seventeen years old. Students practise both the intensive and extensive reading skill in the form of comprehension passages drawn from a variety of subjects including art, history, geography, science and literature. Extensive reading and research skills are also taught and practised, with students making full use of school and community public library facilities especially in the urban and suburban areas where these are available. At the secondary level, students also write longer stories and more advanced exercises such as summaries, reports, book reviews, etc. (Ministry of Education & Culture, 1991).

Literacy materials

At the adult literacy level, the materials used in the teaching of reading include numeracy and literacy primers and teachers' guides which are produced by writers in the Division of Adult Literacy, Ministry of Education and Culture. However, for lack of space, we shall not elaborate this nonformal sector in detail, preferring instead to examine the formal education sector.

In order to accommodate the rapid educational expansion which took place at independence, the Education Ministry needed to ensure cheaper and faster production of the reading materials than the conventional book publishers could provide. The book publishers themselves went on an aggressive campaign to encourage local writers to produce books that would reflect the new socio-political order of the country, since previously books tended to reflect life in England rather than Rhodesia. But because the publishing process is an extremely lengthy one, and the need for materials was urgent, the Ministry of Education and Culture's Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) embarked on a project to produce reading materials for primary and junior secondary school levels with the kind assistance of the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), which had agreed to fund it. The main objectives of the programme were:

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1. To provide reading materials for schools which reflected the new socio-political order;
2. to encourage locals to produce relevant materials for primary and secondary schools and to tap dormant writing talent;
3. to correct the bias existing in the majority of the current school readers which were basically Eurocentric (Chimbwanda, 1989).

Beginning in 1985, workshops were held to train selected writers in all subject areas including creative writing under the leadership of renowned author, scholar and teacher, Professor Micere Githae Mugo. Secondary school students and teachers whose talent could be tapped and developed were also part of the creative writing team that produced stories, poems and plays (e.g., Nhetembo, *Young Voices*, *Imicabango*, *Chimurenga I*, *Chimurenga II*, *Zamani and Sifiso*, *By the Fireside*, *Sadza Ranga Riri Kupi*), both in English and the two major local languages, Shona and Ndebele. Not only were reading materials produced by established authors, but also by school children who were mobilised to start producing reading materials for each other in the schools. Such books are currently in use at primary and secondary school levels in Zimbabwe. In 1990, the Budding Writers Association of Zimbabwe (BWAZ) was officially launched. This association is unrelated to the student development project, and its sole purpose is to encourage production of literary works as reading materials for youths as well as adults.

The SIDA project ended in 1991, and the government, through the CDU, is now continuing the production of literacy materials alongside the conventional book publishers in the country. On the whole, therefore, there has been a massive investment of material and human resources in the field of education and especially reading, to ensure that individual and national literacy levels are improved and sustained.

Testing and evaluating reading literacy in schools

The Zimbabwe curriculum in reading is prescribed by a central authority, the Ministry of Education and Culture through the Curriculum Development Unit. Therefore, teachers follow national aims and objectives in training children's reading, which are laid down in the national primary, junior secondary and high school syllabi. From these national aims and objectives, each school formulates its own aims and objectives which are suitable for its children. Teachers can also select the reading materials for their schools from a long list approved by the CDU, and they can use as many creative methods as they want in reading instruction. The time assigned for reading is, to a certain extent, also centrally controlled, in that a number of thirty to forty minute periods per week are assigned to the teaching of language by school Headmasters, and out of these periods, some are set aside for reading instruction.

Assessment of reading is made sporadically by class teachers as they train the skill; but in the middle of school year, every school sets some examinations in all subjects including reading literacy to assess students' progress --a very useful practice especially since students are required to sit nationally set exams in grade seven and the second

year of the junior secondary school. Students are tested and evaluated in reading comprehension using a variety of exercises and covering a variety of subject areas which may be in the form of narrative stories, documents or expository passages. Before students complete the last year of high school, they sit an international exam, the Cambridge School Certificate exam, in a variety of subjects including reading literacy in at least two languages: English and one local language. These exams are marked locally and in England (Zimbabwe is in the process of localising this exam as well as the form six, pre-university entry exam to wean herself from the colonial system).

“Special” students

Students with serious learning disabilities are placed in special schools where they are taught by specially trained teachers. Those students with less serious problems are placed in the ordinary schools, but receive special remedial help and training from the Schools Psychological Services in the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Technology in reading literacy instruction & evaluation

The only technological equipment used in training reading literacy in the schools is in the form of radio, audio and, for urban schools, video tapes and film. Very few schools have language laboratories and where they are available, they were set up before independence for the minority whites-only schools. However, computers are recently becoming widely used by many private and government schools, but more research is needed to determine the extent to which these are used in reading instruction.

The government also has an established and modestly equipped Audio-Visual Services Center where teachers can borrow video and audio tapes and films for use in their reading and literature programmes. The British Council Library is another good resource center for films, tapes, etc. and these are being used to train reading literacy, not only at various school levels, but also at the tertiary education levels.

RESEARCH INTO READING LITERACY

Since the mid-seventies, a reasonable amount of research has been concluded in Zimbabwe with the aim of improving the teaching and learning of reading in primary and secondary schools. Besides investigative research of individual teachers and university lecturers, Zimbabwe has a very active Reading Council called the Harare Reading Council (HRC), based in the capital. This Council was established in February, 1983, and its membership includes teachers, college and university lecturers, publishers, headmasters, curriculum developers and Education Ministry officials. The activities of the Council center on ways and means to improve reading instruction in the schools, and workshops are held at least three times a year at which reading specialists and researchers are invited to give lectures and to share their latest findings in reading literacy research. However, Zimbabwean research in this field has so far tended to focus on teaching and learning rather than on theoretical issues. More work still needs to be done in terms of determining national testing outcomes, models of reading, etc. The recently concluded IEA Reading Literacy Research Study hopes to delve into some of these issues.

In 1988, Dr. Kate Allen (who was a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe) read her research report at one of the HRC seminars in which she discussed her findings after examining the reading comprehension national exam passages and questions given to 14-year-olds at the end of the junior secondary school year. She discovered that the passage and the questions asked were not always compatible since the questions at times failed to test the wide range of comprehension skills. In particular, her research revealed that the interpretive and evaluative skills were neglected (a factor also discovered and reported on by Moyana, 1991a & 1991b), and examiners did not always give credit to the student who expanded his/her answer using material acquired in other subjects.

As a feature of the post-independence period, the Harare Reading Council's formation was a useful move which was spearheaded by the Associate College Center (now called the Department of Teacher Education) of the University of Zimbabwe. To complement activities in the HRC, the Department publishes a journal three times a year, entitled *The Bulletin of Teacher Education* (formerly called *The Bulletin of the Associate College Center*), which contains many articles pertaining to research in different subjects at the school level. Of particular interest to us are articles on reading research which go back to the seventies and early-to-mid-eighties. We shall review some of these articles to show the kind of teaching and learning investigatory research that was being conducted at this time.

Shiela Duncan (1978) and her colleagues in the English Department of Lower Gweru Teachers' College carried out a survey with first-year teacher trainees to examine reading skills. Duncan and her colleagues "made a survey of the basic untrained speeds of pupils from grade 3 through 7 in three different schools in [their] area" (p. 34). This study basically tested the reading speed and comprehension of children in primary school and it was discovered that the children who read fastest also had the highest comprehension. The report concludes that if children are taught basic principles of the fast reading skill early in their school years, they will develop to become more efficient readers at secondary school and tertiary levels of education. This research was important because it focused on an area that many teachers have followed up in their teaching with good reading results, especially in those schools where books are abundant.

David Stern describes a situation where African Orature can play a vital role in the teaching of reading, and can also enhance growth of other skills such as writing, listening, discussion/argument, etc. (1981). Using a story from Feldmann's *African Myths and Tales* (1972), he discusses the significance of "Dilemma tales as learning/reading resource materials in ESL classrooms," and concludes that such stories can be fully utilised to train children in the different skills related to reading. Although Stern's ESL class was made up of adult students from South/Central America, the Far East and the Soviet Union studying in the USA (p. 82), the situation is applicable to Zimbabwe because the students here also study English as a second language and often have to struggle with correct reading, speaking and writing.

Joyce Childs, one of the most prolific reading literacy researchers of the 1970s and early 1980s, investigated factors related to reading-disabled children (1981), and found

out that the factors related to backwardness in reading can be grouped “broadly under three headings: the pupil, the home, the school.” She states:

Casual conversation with teachers in Zimbabwe leads to the conclusion that they see the factors connected with backwardness in reading in a similar light. “The pupil is dull; his home background is poor; he has had poor teaching.” In addition, unsuitable materials, language problems and, in more recent years, the war have been seen as factors militating against success in reading (p. 89).

Dr. Childs’ conclusions were that although physical and intellectual factors may be involved in children’s reading backwardness, the home and the school also play significant roles. Therefore, remedial reading programmes have a “pay-off in terms of increasing teacher expertise as well as...helping the pupils involved” (p. 94). These factors, the pupil, the home and the school, have been followed up in the IEA Reading Literacy Study of 1988-1992, and we hope to discuss the results of that research in the near future (Moyana et al., 1989, 1990, 1991).

Dr. Childs and other teachers and researchers published several articles on reading literacy which focused on the primary and secondary schools of Zimbabwe, and some investigated children’s reading abilities in the Zimbabwean mother tongue, Shona (Childs, 1984; 1985; 1986). Dr. Childs developed a low cost Shona reading kit for children who were reported by their teachers and headmasters to be so backward in reading that they reached the higher grades without the ability to read their class texts! “...some were reported to be completely illiterate” (1984 : 110). This became apparent as the children were completing primary school. The kit was developed, piloted and adopted in a number of schools who reported improvement in their children’s reading literacy after the first five weeks of using kit. After completing the exercises of the fifteen-week programme, the children were reported to have reached their correct reading level for their classes. It was correctly noted that “failure to give help to children [at an early stage in reading], may lead to the erosion of the few initial reading skills they may already have acquired” (p. 111). This report discusses the same problems earlier identified and discussed by Childs (1979); and again, remedial work proved successful with children who could read neither English, Shona nor the other major mother tongue, Ndebele, perhaps because the children had been introduced to the reading of English before they could read their mother tongues.

In another study Dr. Childs (1986) investigated the status of reading in the teacher training colleges through a questionnaire and discovered that there seemed to be no systematic approach to the teaching of reading to teacher trainees. Each college had its own system and in each case very little time was devoted to such a vital skill as the teaching of reading. She made several recommendations which, if followed, could improve the instruction of reading to teacher trainees as well as train them how to teach it in their schools. Her investigation provoked thought and action.

Stembile Makuyana (1985) and Cathy Roller (1986) discuss further methods of improving reading instruction in the classroom, with focus on the primary school, particularly the early years of that period. The practical hints proved to be useful in

approaching the subject of reading in a creative manner.

At high school level, Collen Mutisi (1986), analysed “O” level comprehension exams, prompted by the fact that students find comprehension examinations more difficult than composition. Mutisi believes this is related to lack of choice for comprehension passages, whereas composition always offers a variety of topics to choose from. Mutisi makes a thorough analysis of the comprehension questions and answers and concludes that “of the five skills in reading, only three are tested: literal, recall reorganisation and inferring skills. These happen to be the lower order skills. The higher order skills of evaluation and appreciation are never tested” (p. 35); perhaps less emphasis is laid on these during the teaching process. In analysing the results of the pilot test of the IEA Reading Literacy Study, Jaji (1991) and Moyana (1991) also discovered that children tended to do very well when answering questions directed to a literal level of understanding and poorly on questions demanding an interpretive and evaluative level of comprehension. These are areas which still need to be focused on in further research and in the classroom when teaching children the reading literacy skills.

Research focusing on the university level

From the literature review above, we can observe that the majority of research investigates reading literacy at the primary school level and very little at the junior and high school levels. This is undoubtedly because success at the secondary and tertiary school levels depends heavily on the child’s having learned to read well at primary school level. It is those primary reading literacy skills which will be developed at the higher levels of education. Can the high school student who ends up at the technical/vocational college or at the university, cope with the sophisticated level of literacy demanded of him/her in these tertiary institutions? From the little research conducted at university level, it seems some students are struggling to cope, especially in English, which although it is a second language for Zimbabweans, it is the official language of communication in that country. Take, for example, a letter written by a Graduate Certificate of Education (Grad.C.E.) teacher trainee, teaching in a Harare school who wrote:

I am Miss...teaching at the above mentioned school I was teaching English for the first four weeks, so I started in the fifth week. May I be permitted to write my assignments commencing on the week I started teaching I once wrote a letter but I received a letter. So I can do the assignments for February and March (lesson plans).

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Miss....

NB. The co-ordinator advised me to do my assignments from the day I started teaching English (1989).

The above letter fails to communicate effectively the student's problem or request, besides containing serious punctuation errors. If one teaches the Grad.C.E. students, then one may be able to guess the actual message and request of the letter, based on what other students have experienced in the past. However, the fact remains that this graduate teacher of English has not been able to communicate, and we need to find out where the problem really lies, especially as this teacher is also responsible for teaching English as a second language to pupils who should be part of the Zimbabwean literate working society of the future.

The above student's linguistic problem is similar to that of Nigerian university students, as reported by Isaac Olaofe (1986). Olaofe's students also fail to communicate their thoughts in correct English as shown below:

In this study also the use of active sentence should be considered in the language of recipes. The use of V-ing should be considered in recipe books. Also, the use of imperatives in recipe books should be considered as could be seen in recipe books.

Here is another example showing incorrect explanation of a procedure:

Before a mains supply is connected, we foremostly check of the tappings selected on internal mains transformer is suitable for supply voltage.... We note the type of voltage in put DC or AC if we measuring voltage.

These two examples demonstrate the same problems shown by the Zimbabwean student discussed above. Thus, perhaps not all school leavers are as literate as they should be, in terms of coping with their different fields of study and work. At tertiary levels in a country where English is used as the language of education and for general official communication, it is imperative that one be able to communicate in it effectively since one's work involves that language more and more in all its aspects, i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Love (1988) of the University of Zimbabwe investigated the nature of imprecise expression by science students during their first year at the University. The purpose of her study was to identify instances of imprecision in a body of first-year science student writing and to analyse this data so as to discover what constitutes imprecision, both in conceptual and linguistic terms. She concludes tentatively by saying, "it seems likely that problems of concept formation through a second language, broad influences from students' first language and ignorance of some aspects of scientific/academic discourse conventions all contribute" (p. 41) to the causes of the students' imprecision in expression.

The report of the principal's committee of inquiry into the failure art

In June, 1982, a Report of the Principal's Committee of Inquiry into the [University of Zimbabwe] Failure Rate was published. The setting up of the committee had been necessitated by the high failure rate of students taking degree courses at the local university which had provoked a national outcry. Taxpayers and parents wanted to know why students who had gone through six years of secondary school, two of which

were preparatory for university study, should fail so dismally and in such large numbers. Hence, the Committee of Inquiry was established. The Committee's findings revealed that unsuitable teaching may sometimes recur at the form six level. However, perhaps the problem did not just lie at the last two university preparatory years of high school, but somewhere at the lower strata of the educational ladder. One other important point related to the "students' background," but it was not clear what factors made up this "background" (p. 49). To date, no research has unearthed concrete proof of what background factors are related to the teaching of reading literacy and how they are related. Data collected for the IEA Reading Literacy Study is therefore, very important, because its analysis will reveal many factors, causes and relationships.

Conclusion

This article has elaborated on: the historical background to Zimbabwean education before and after independence; the current administrative arrangements in the school system; availability of reading literacy materials; approaches to testing and evaluation of reading literacy in schools; procedures for dealing with "special" students; use of technology in schools to give children reading literacy skills and; an overview of research into reading literacy from the 1970s to the 1990s. Of all the research that has been carried out, the IEA Reading Literacy Study remains the most comprehensive to date as it randomly sampled all areas and school types in Zimbabwe at the junior secondary school level. Its results will be significant, particularly insofar as Zimbabwe will be compared with over 30 other countries worldwide and thus we can assess our efforts in providing good facilities in the training of reading literacy at that level of education. It will be possible to make inferences as to the impact of the Zimbabwean reading curriculum at higher levels, and that data will serve as a base for collecting more data at those higher levels of learning.

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