The Efficiency Of The English Language National Examinations Written By Ordinary Level Students And How It Aids The Proficiency Of English As A Second Language In Zimbabwe.

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Abstract : The focus of this study was to find out the efficiency of the national examinations written by students in mission, government and private schools at Ordinary level in English language. In particular it was to investigate to what extent the examinations aid the proficiency of English as a Second language in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in three schools from Manicaland. A total of one hundred and twenty students were used as the respondents for the study. Forty students were selected randomly from each school. The schools were Mission school A, Government school B and Private school C and these schools were a microcosm representative of the macrocosm investigation under study. All the three schools take up ZIMSEC examinations respectively. Not only were the schools accessible to the researchers but they were composed of students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and also use the same English syllabus for Zimbabwean schools. The research instruments that were used by the researchers helped reveal attitudes, thoughts, methods and knowledge of both teachers and students upon the nature of the English language as well as examinations in general. The results of the study proved that the nature of the ZIMSEC examinations are not efficient enough in aiding the proficiency of English as a language importantly used for economic, political and social spheres in Zimbabwe. This has greatly affected in a negative way the manner in which the teaching of English as a language is exercised in most schools today, in which case some of the important skills are not being given enough attention as a result of them not being tested in the national examinations. There ought to be a difference between how languages are examined vis-à-vis other subjects taught in schools. Without this change, the desired proficiency in English language that is acquired as a result of schooling will be in vain.

Key words: efficiency, national examinations, English language, English syllabus, Ordinar level, examinations, proficiency, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

The ability to express oneself in any given language is one of the most essential assets of a person. Cook (1996) states that language is indeed one way in which individuals fulfil their everyday needs no matter how diverse these maybe. According to Gimson and Cruttenden (1994) a language is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. Zimbabwe has a variety of languages that are used in day to day life. About eighty percent of the country’s population have Shona as their mother tongue and these are found in the five regions in the country namely Manicaland, Mashonaland, Harare, Matabeleland and Midlands. Seventeen percent of Zimbabwe’s population have Ndebele as their mother tongue. The remaining three percent represents the other minority languages like English, Venda, Ndwau, French, and Portuguese to mention a few. Despite this, Nziramasanga (1999:161) observes that Chishona and Ndebele are not really used as the media of instruction in either Primary, Secondary or Tertiary schools.

Having been a British colony, Zimbabwe adapted English as its official language. As a result of this the English language is used extensively in the country. All formal Economic, Political, Educational, Social even religious functions are mostly conducted in English. It has gained prestige and clout that goes with a language that everyone aspires to use. For most Zimbabweans therefore, English is a second language. It serves as the medium of instruction and pupils are exposed to it from the time they enter primary school at the tender age of six right up to secondary and tertiary level and even in the commercial world.
With this knowledge therefore, the researchers asked themselves thus, that if English has such an important function, was it being appropriately developed to achieve its proficiency in the four major areas written, spoken, reading and listening as in the curriculum? Language according to Verghese (1998:8) is the great tool which has made human civilisation possible. Scott (2011) argues that learning another language is not merely to learn a new set of sounds or marks on paper for saying something; it is to learn that, it is possible to think in a slightly different way from that to which one has become used. What this in effect means is that when we learn English we should aim at a degree of language proficiency, both in speech and in writing that is comparable to the native speakers.

Secondary school students at Ordinary level are expected to write Paper I and Paper II. Paper I comprises of a variety of free written compositions and both free and a guided one involving a test in all types of composition writings in English. Paper II comprises of a comprehension passage, a summary and a section on registers. All these are tested in written form and major focus on grading the students is placed on their ability to display their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in English language.

It is against this background coined together with the researchers’ experience as teachers that triggered their interest to investigate the efficiency of the national examinations used by ZIMSEC to assess’ students language proficiency in English at Ordinary level, a level that is considered to be critical in the education system of Zimbabwe in which case it is a compulsory basic prerequisite for any form of employment in the country.

2. Research Questions

The following were the research questions:-

1. What are the functions that affect the development and or retardation of English language proficiency in schools?
2. To what extent does the structure of the ZIMSEC final examination affect the attitude of students’ taking the subject?
3. To what extent do students understand the demands of English as a Second language differing from their native languages?
4. Are there any marked differences upon individual schools perpetuation of the successful learning of the four skills in English literacy?
5. Why do some, if not most private schools in Zimbabwe prefer to write the Cambridge type examinations as opposed to the ZIMSEC one?
6. Is there a significant difference in the ZIMSEC pass rates in English language between the students’ performance of a Mission School A or a Government School B and a Private school C?
7. To what extent do ZIMSEC examinations promote students’ knowledge of the dynamic nature of vocabulary?
8. What strategies can ZIMSEC adopt to ensure that all four aspects of the English language proficiency are tested in examinations to avoid rote-learning in the teaching/learning of the English language?

3. Research Design

The research design was a mixed method one that incorporated both the quantitative and qualitative research design due to the nature of the study and were of descriptive type in which three schools in Manicaland province were used. Quantitative research was suitable for this particular research as it was capable of providing data necessary to the clarification and solution to the problem under study. Qualitative research was also suitable for this study because it allowed the researchers to describe, analyse and interpret data easily and had the capacity of describing the characteristics of large populations with seemingly divergent interests or views. Besides, the descriptive survey made it easy to quantify the data and it allowed the use of percentages which were very essential in the description, analysis and interpretation of data. The method typically involved designing and administering questionnaires to selected students and teachers.

4. Population and Sampling Procedures

The research targeted all Form Four students in Zimbabwe. However, the researchers could not cover every school in Zimbabwe and therefore, the targeted population was reduced to three schools in Manicaland that is; a Mission school A, a Government school B and a Private school C. These schools were chosen because they were accessible to the researchers and they are a representative of the varied types of schools we have in Zimbabwe that is they are mission, government and private run respectively. A total number of one hundred and twenty students and three English teachers were used for the study. Forty students were randomly selected from each school making a total of one hundred and twenty students. The researchers selected any teacher that
was teaching Ordinary level at the time at any of the school.

5. Data Collecting Instruments
Data collection instruments are the tools the researchers used in finding the information that are required in relation to the research topic under study. For this particular research, questionnaires, interviews, lesson observations, students’ written work, evaluated schemes of work, Ordinary level syllabus and examiner’s reports were all collectively used to gather the data of importance to the targeted research findings.

5.1 Questionnaires
Oyedele (2011) defined a questionnaire as a set of well constructed questions designed to collect data. The researchers used questionnaires because they provided a way to collecting personal information from subjects which was not readily obtainable using other methods. It was relatively economical and ensured anonymity. Questionnaires allowed the uniformity in the way in which questions are asked therefore ensuring comparability in the responses. Every respondent was given a set of questions which were all similar, therefore the researchers were able to compare the responses and come up with a justified and reliable conclusion. The bias of the interviewer was removed. The respondents completed the set of questions on their own without the influence of the researchers. Questionnaires have been criticised as creating distance between the researchers and the subjects. Borg (2007) comment that questionnaires are “often too shallow, they fail to dig deeply enough to provide a true picture of the opinions and feelings of the respondents”. This weakness was countered by the use of interviews which permitted greater rapport with the subjects.

5.2 Interview schedule
The schedule listed all the questions that were to be used giving room for the interviewer to write answers to responses in their notebooks. The questions were related to the research questions and were intended to substitute and give additional information to that was not readily available through using the questionnaires. The questions used by the researchers were both structured and semi-structured in nature and followed a given sequence that was adhered to in each interview. The nature of the interview questions allowed the researchers great latitude in asking broad questions in order to gain more knowledge on the topic under study.

Structured questions were formulated to avoid the interviewer’s bias. According to the greatest weakness of an interview is the interviewer bias. The interviewer may project his own personality into the situation and thus influence, by means of intonation, gestures and facial expressions, the responses he gets.

5.3 Observation schedule
The observation schedule relied on the researchers’ seeing and hearing of students’ and teachers’ responses and attitudes during lesson times. A maximum of 3 lessons from each school were attended by the researchers in which case the researchers recorded the observations that they made. Thus, the researchers had six sessions of lesson observations. The first session had the objective of finding out what language was used the most in the English language classroom by both students and teachers? The second session’s objective was to assess the level to which teachers promote the successful learning of the four skills in English language. The third objective was to assess the level of students’ participation and the teaching aids that were used in the teaching and learning of the English language. Observation was an effective research instrument for this research study as it helped the researchers gaining first-hand information rather than relying merely on subjects’ self report responding to questions or statements. Observations that were noted were recorded so that the researchers would not forget what had been observed.

5.4 Students’ daily written work
Students’ written work in this research study was used to assess whether the teaching of English language in schools is being used to aid pupils’ proficiency in the subject. The students’ response as indicated by their written work was reflective of the pupils’ performance in the subject.

5.5 Evaluated Schemes of work
This document was used as an assessment tool indicating time allocated for teaching the four skills of English, resource materials used to teach each skill and the materials, objectives and the evaluations made on the teaching and learning of the English language. This document was self-revealing of the teachers’ views upon the subject context to be studied.

5.6 Ordinary level English Syllabus
This syllabus gave the guideline on the teaching and learning of the English language and thus was used as a guiding tool for the researchers to focus correctly on the objectives under study and not draw false conclusions about phenomena.

5.7 Examiner’s Reports
The reports studied for this research work indicated what is considered to be the strengths and
shortcomings on the teaching and learning of the English language in Zimbabwean schools as compared to the examiners reports of other modern day foreign languages written in Zimbabwe and this went a long way in helping the researchers to gain an insight into the comments and views of the examiners toward the structure of the national examinations written in English language.

6. Data Collection Procedures

Data for this research was collected using questionnaires, interviews, lesson observations, students’ daily written work, teachers evaluated schemes of work, analysis of the Ordinary level syllabus as well as examiners reports. The researchers visited the three schools by appointment to see the Heads and seek permission to carry out a study at their schools of which they all agreed. The researchers was permitted to carry out the research any day that deemed suitable during the students’ normal working hours.

6.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaires used for this research comprised of clear questions that all the respondents were able to interpret in the same way. These questionnaires were relevant to the study as the questions asked on these questionnaires were largely designed to give formative feedback to the research questions under study. In all three schools after permission had been granted the researchers was escorted to the relevant classes and after being introduced was left to have a free dialogue with the students about their purpose. A random sampling of 30 Ordinary level students and 10 Lower Six students of balanced mixed sex was done by the researchers in each school. The researchers then issued out the relevant questionnaires for students to fill in. Instructions on paper were clearly reiterated for the students before they filled in the questionnaires and their honest opinions to the responses was emphasised. Students were thus requested to take their time to fill in the questionnaires. The time the students took to fill in the questionnaires ranged from between 25-30 minutes and this was a good time as it was evident of the fact that the students did not just rush through the questions but instead took their time to understand the questions first before rushing to answer which would have resulted in the researchers gathering inaccurate information. After the questionnaires had been completed, the researchers then collected them immediately in order to ensure that none of the questionnaires would go missing thus all the issued out questionnaires were successfully collected in all the three schools.

6.2 Interviews

The interview is, in a sense an oral questionnaire because instead of writing the response, the subject or interviewee gives the needed information in a face to face interaction. Best and Kahn (2003) argue that ‘the interview is often superior to other data gathering devices,’ thus the people are usually more than willing to talk than to write’. After the researchers gained rapport with the subjects, certain type of confidential information was obtained that individuals were reluctant to put in writing.

A 30 minutes interview was scheduled for after schools hours with the three teachers. 5 Ordinary level students and 5 Lower Six students from each school selected at random from the samples were interviewed during their prep time which ranged from between 2:30 pm and 3:30 pm. Interviews formal and informal were used to gain information about attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, knowledge, experience and understanding of the ZIMSEC national examinations in English language by teachers and students as well as their understanding of the subject matter. By using interviews, the researchers intended to find out the views of both teachers and students about the English language. Formal interview which were more planned and more structured were largely used for this research study. Thus the researchers planned questions to ask and recorded the responses in a notebook. The questions were largely open and this gave room for varied responses from both students and teachers. These were carried out in a face to face encounter and this helped the researchers to get more in depth with each subject by asking open questions and follow up questions. Group interviews were also used on some questions and the approach was beneficial to the researchers as it saved time and many subject’s responses were included in this research work.

6.3 Observation

As a data gathering device, observation made an important contribution to this research study. This involved the physical presence of the researchers when observing the target population as they were conducting their normal day to day lessons. A maximum of 3 lessons were attended at each school by the researchers and in this case the researchers physically sat at the back of the classrooms and observe the students and teachers as they conducted their normal daily lessons. Through observation, the researchers learned what happens in context. This was gathered through announced and in some cases unannounced visits to the three schools. Due to the fact that Form
Four’s were writing their examinations, the researchers had to gather data using observation by observing the Form Three classes.

The researchers used the teachers’ timetables to visit the classes and all the lessons attended by the researchers were conducted in the morning before Break time. This was a good time as it avoided any biases that might have been incurred had the lessons been conducted in the afternoons in which case the students would be tired due to either hot weather or fatigue.

The unannounced visits helped to limit the artificial behaviours of both teachers and pupils under investigation. In observations of classroom behaviour, a change of behaviour of both teachers and class members usually occurs when observer enters a classroom. To curb this problem the researchers first got accustomed to the subjects by visiting them and introducing themself. Borg and Gall (2007) argue that;

‘Occasionally studies are conducted in which the observer visits the classroom a number of times before recording any observational data so that the class will become accustomed to his/her presence and will act normally when the research data are actually collected.’

Thus, the researchers were participant observers as they played an active part in the activity. The researchers took down notes of what was transpiring that was relevant to their study. Lesson observations were used to check if the assessment objectives in English language were catered for in a lesson. The lesson objectives largely indicated the teachers’ perceptions and beliefs about the language. Teaching strategies gave an overview of the value of the topic under study.

6.4 Students’ daily written work.
In order to gain more primary information on the students’ performance in the subject and the nature of work they are given, the researchers had to request from each school and selected students a maximum of ten exercise books that the students use to write their work. Among these were 4 language exercise books, 2 composition books and 5 test exercise books. Students at Mission School A did not have separate test exercise books and instead used the back of their language exercise books to write the tests that they are given by their teachers. The researchers had to go through each of these exercise books in order to analyse the nature of the content that the students are tested on by their teachers in their day to day learning of the subject and on what the teachers’ emphasis more in their marking of students’ work. This exercise took the researchers a period of almost 120 minutes per each individual school as the researchers took time to read each student’s individual work in order to gain knowledge about the quality of language used by students in particular the quality of vocabulary students were capable of using in their daily written exercises.

6.5 Evaluated schemes of work
After gaining rapport with the three teachers, the researchers managed to request for their evaluated schemes of work in order to gain an understanding of how they plan their work, what resource materials they use, the time the allocate to each individual question, duration of each lesson and the objectives they evaluate on. Teachers were at first reluctant to issue out their schemes of work to the researchers as some were not up to date and the other covered work was not evaluated but after assurance by the researchers for confidentiality they managed to give them to the researchers. The researchers spend almost 40 minutes analysing each schemes of work and recorded down the contents that were similar and different amongst the three schools. Upon what the researchers did not understand, they had to ask the respective teacher to explain for clarification purposes so that the researchers would avoid writing incorrect information about the teachers.

6.6 Ordinary level syllabus
In order to understand and not draw false conclusions about phenomena the researchers had to get hold of and go through the Ordinary level syllabus requirements. This syllabus gave a guideline on the teaching and learning of English language. As such before visiting the schools and conducting interviews, issuing out questionnaires and observing lessons the researchers took 3 days to study and familiarise themselves with the contents of the Ordinary level English Language Syllabus. After the understanding, the researchers then took time to formulate interview questions and design the questionnaires that were used to carry out this study.

6.7 Examiners’ reports
In order to understand more on the shortcomings on the teaching and learning of the English language in Zimbabwean schools the researchers had to get hold of an examiner’s report since it was the only one that was available to the researchers and read through it. This examiner’s report although a report from Cambridge was relevant to the researchers considering the fact that the educational reforms that were done in Zimbabwe were more of revolutionary than transformatory and the English language in Zimbabwe, although being carried out now under ZIMSEC there seems
to be no difference in the quality of content taught and even the nature and structure of examinations in English language even up to present day. This report is more or less similar to the reports that are written by ZIMSEC to schools and the area of focus by examiners is the same.

In order to understand and prove more about the ineffectiveness of the English language examinations written in Zimbabwe the researchers had to get hold of a specimen report on modern day foreign languages that focus on the demands to be tested for these examinations. A comparison of the two documents was evident to the researchers of the inadequate quality of testing of the English language examination being conducted in Zimbabwe vis-à-vis other modern day foreign languages as well.

7 Data Analysis Procedures
This involves the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the information or data. The researchers coded, classified and accounted for the findings from questionnaires, interviews, students’ written work, schemes of work, observation, examiners’ reports and the Ordinary level syllabuses. These were analysed in relation to the 8 research questions and data was presented largely in the form of Tables (% frequencies, summaries & verbatim), bar graphs and some data was presented using evidence from the original documents namely the schemes of work and sample of Ordinary level past examination papers.

8. Discussion and Interpretation
These are presented in relation to the five research questions and from the findings made through the questionnaires, documentary analysis, and the interviews carried out with the respondents, the eight research questions will be discussed below one by one.

8.1 Research question 1 states that:
“What are the factors that affect the development and or retardation of English language proficiency in Zimbabwean schools?”

Table 1: Background information on Form Four English Language teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Mission School A</th>
<th>Government School B</th>
<th>Private School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Qualifications</td>
<td>B.A (hons) English, Diploma (Dip) in Education(English and History)</td>
<td>B.A (hons) English</td>
<td>B.A in English and French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position held at present school</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of service at present school</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.S.L teaching experience</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“O” Level teaching experience</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of oral lessons per week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (1 as compulsory homework)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Listening lessons per week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of reading lessons per week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of written lessons per week</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Mission School A</th>
<th>Government School B</th>
<th>Private School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of Lesson</td>
<td>35mins</td>
<td>35mins</td>
<td>40mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources used to teach the subject in general and the following:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Role play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- past exam papers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- audio visual aids</td>
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<td>- novels</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Textbooks</td>
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<td>- past exam papers</td>
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<td>- past exam papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>- novels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Oral skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- recital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Recital of work</td>
<td></td>
<td>- group work</td>
<td>- role play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- debates</td>
<td></td>
<td>- recital</td>
<td>- group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Listening skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>- textbooks</td>
<td>- quiz/debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td>- textbooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Reading skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>- novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- textbooks</td>
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<td>- novels</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- novels</td>
<td></td>
<td>- novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Writing skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>- examination papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td>- examination papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- examination papers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- writing tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 1, information gathered on the background information of teachers’ shows that there are various factors that can affect the development and or retardation of English language proficiency in Zimbabwean schools. Differences as tabled are largely seen on individual teachers’ length of experience in teaching the English language, the total number of oral and listening lessons allocated per week and on the type and quality of resources used to teach the four basic skills in English language. Prabhhu (1992) asserts that unlike in other subjects taught in schools by teachers, teachers experience is important in language teaching because language is continuously and slowly learnt to perfection and its quality improves with constant use and practice thus teachers who have taught a certain language for a long time usually produce quality results in that particular subject than those who are mere starters hence as such teacher’s prolonged experience is a factor that affect the development of language proficiency in schools.

On all three schools much time is allocated to lessons and resources that promote the development of writing skills and as such oral, listening and reading skills are neglected. It was interesting to note that some teachers when asked concerning the resources materials they use to teach oral and listening skills, they would embark in a moment of silence and confusion and would give stammering answers implying that they did not see any importance of wasting resources in developing these skills in learners largely because they are not tested in the students final examinations. It is only those schools where the English language is used constantly as a medium of communication inside and outside the classroom that these skills are emphasised no wonder why as tabled Private school C maintains a balance in its allocation of time to oral, listening and reading skills. Makau (2001) argues that this could be a direct result of the nature of the Zimbabwean examination system where all aspects of the English language proficiency are not examined. This consequently affects the delivery of content taught in the subject in which case English
language teaching in most Zimbabwean schools is examination oriented, only done to meet the demands of the final external examination. It therefore promotes rote learning and teaching of the subject which results in a retardation of all-round English proficiency amongst English language learners in Zimbabwe.

Because the communicative aspect of the subject is neglected research findings proved that most teachers and students agreed that the most difficult section of the question paper was the section on Registers. All students could not explain exactly what they found difficult concerning registers asked in the English language. Such findings tally with Aggarwal’s thesis that examinations distort knowledge in that they make the student believe that only what is examined is important, that knowledge can be compartmentalised, that a knowledge of facts alone is important and that the mastery of a subject requires only the learning of an accumulation of facts.

8.2 Research question 2 states that:

“To what extent do students understand the demands of English as a Second language compared to their native languages?”

Table 2: Students’ understanding of English language as a Second language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response of students</th>
<th>Total (on Likert scale of 5 point grade)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 2, about 38% of the students that respondents to the questionnaire strongly agree that they understood the demands of English as a Second language. A total of 22% agreed that they understood the demands of English as a Second language while 40% of the respondents were undecided. Those who disagree and strongly disagree constitute 0%. Verkutsaran (2000:18) states that in most non-English speaking countries, the problem with instructors is that they do not conscientise learners with the differences between learning a foreign or Second language and learning native or first language and as such the demands that carry with learning a foreign or Second language are missed.

Learning a second language is in fact learning the basic four skills effectively. Failure to do so will result in learners perceiving a second language as difficult and as such they loose their interest in the subject. When students loose interest in a particular subject they are likely to pay minimum attention to what is being taught. Therefore, before any subject is taught in schools, students need to be given an in depth understanding of that particular subject so that they know the skills and methods they are supposed to use and gain in that particular subject area. Cook (1996) states that by the time the students learn a foreign language, they already have preconceived ideas about the language and affects the way they will learn the language. This affects the way they will learn the language. Gardner and Lambert (1992) added that a learner will only learn a language if they feel it useful in their way of life or for employment purposes in years to come.

Most students during interviews clearly highlighted that they had not taken a look at their syllabuses and when asked for the reasons why they clearly cited that they trusted their teachers to teach them the required content for the subject. The only reason that was commonly given for the differences of learning the English language from their native languages by students was that the English language was more difficult than their native ones. These responses show that the English language becomes more difficult to the students because the four basic skills are not taught thoroughly to them and as such they find it difficult to tackle the secondary aspect which is tested to them in the English language national examinations.

8.3 Research question 3 states that:

“To what extent does the structure of the English language national examinations written in Zimbabwe affect the delivery of content taught in the subject by teachers?”
Table 3: Verbatim responses from teachers

- We emphasise more on students being able to read and understand comprehensions because they constitute 40/50 of Paper 2 so reading and understanding are more important.
- We spend much time training students to be good composition writers because they comprise half of the total marks.
- Registers are not emphasised because they constitute only insignificant 10 of the total marks.
- Listening lessons are boring and monotonous as we do not have aids to teach them.
- Oral lessons are the easiest as we just seat back and listen to students presenting.
- Because of the large classes we cannot follow up reading given as homework.
- We teach form Fours using past examination papers as our English language national examinations in Zimbabwe as our teaching guide.

These results show that the way the English language national examinations in Zimbabwe are structured has affected in a negative way the delivery of content to be taught in the subject in most schools. Because the large section of the paper where a great deal of marks is allocated has to do with the testing of writing and reading skills it means that listening and oral skills are highly neglected. Few marks allocated for the section on registers affect the manner in which teachers structure their schemes of work with much time allocated to writing and reading lessons at the expense of the other two equally important skills. This can be contrasted to the way other modern day language are examined distribution of marks is even and ensure that all essential aspects of a language are taught in schools.

8.4 Research question 4 states that:

“Are there marked differences upon individual schools’ perpetuation of the successful learning of the four skills required in English language proficiency?”

For an investigation using 105 students as subjects, a 3x4 contingency table was designed as shown below:

Table 4: Frequency table showing skills students confident to display in public.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission School A</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government School B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School C</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures were computed and applied to Chi-square formulae. Since the calculated value 2.78 checked at 0.05 level of significance is less than the table value 12.59 the results show that there are really no significant differences upon individuals’ schools perpetuation of the successful learning of the four skills in English language proficiency.

Makau (2001) states that most teachers are largely concerned about producing results that will make them gain widespread popularity the result of which most schools in their subject teaching train students to meet the demands of the examinations. This has a detrimental and crippling effect to the effective learning and teaching of English language in most schools teachers take heed not to waste their time teaching students skills that they think will not benefit them in the examination despite the syllabuses citing that students should be taught the four skills in English language proficiency equally and fairly. No wonder why in private schools where the development of the English language proficiency is remarkable are regarded as having ‘dull’ students because what is considered at the end of the day is each individual schools perpetuation of the effective learning of the four basic skills in general but rather each individual schools’ perpetuation of the effective learning of skills to be tested in the examination as will be revealed by the compared national pass rates.

8.5 Research question 5 states that:

“Why do some if not most private run schools in Zimbabwe prefer to write the Cambridge type examinations as opposed to the ZIMSEC ones?”

Among other things a modern language is aimed at forming a sound base of skills, language and attitudes required for further study, work and
leisure, to provide enjoyment and intellectual stimulation, encourage positive attitude in foreign language learning and social skills as well as enable students to communicate clearly in the foreign language through both spoken and written form and because the National English language examinations written in Zimbabwe fail to promote these aims they are not liked by most Zimbabwean citizens as evidenced from the percentage table below which shows the calculated results of responses drawn from the questionnaires issued for this research study:

Table 5: Preferred examination type by students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response of students</th>
<th>Total(on Likert scale of 5 point grade)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Form table 5, about 68% of the students that responded to the questionnaire strongly agree that they prefer Cambridge examinations to the ZIMSEC ones. 26% agree that they prefer Cambridge examinations to ZIMSEC and 6% of these are undecided, while those that disagree and strongly disagree constitute 0%. These results prove that the national examinations written for English language in Zimbabwe have gained widespread unpopularity amongst Zimbabwean citizens thus authenticating their ineffectiveness. This is clearly shown from the comparison graph tabled below which illustrates the results of the preferred examinations at the three schools where from Fig 1 at Mission school A, only 35% of the students prefer ZIMSEC examinations and 65% prefer Cambridge examinations, at Government school B, 45% of the students prefer ZIMSEC examinations and 55% of the students prefer Cambridge and at Private school C 45% prefer ZIMSEC examinations while the rest of the 55% of students prefer Cambridge examinations.

8.6 Research question 6 states that: “Is there a significant difference in the ZIMSEC pass rates in English language between the students’ performance of a Mission School A or a Government School B and a Private school C?” The results show that the pass rates in English language for 2015 was 81%, 80% and 89% respectively for Mission school A, Government
School B and Private school C. This range of pass rates has been maintained in the last two years for each school as illustrated by the following table and also in fig 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mission school A</th>
<th>Government school B</th>
<th>Private school C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Percentage pass rates for 2014-2015

In order to find out the statistical significant differences amongst the schools, the researchers had to consider one school between a Mission school A and a Government school B since these schools have almost a similar range of pass rates during the past two years and compared it to a Private school C. As such, a test of significance (t-test) was carried out to prove these statistical differences and the results are summarised in the table below; with a hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between the performance of students in a Mission school A and a Private school C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission school A</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school C</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at 0.05

The hypothesis which state that, there is no significant difference between the performance of students in a Mission school A and a Private school C with those at a Private school C performing better than those at a Mission school A. Brooks (1990) argues that “language is primarily what is said, only secondarily what is written…and is a set of habits…”, thus speech is primary because when people want to speak they want to express ideas, opinions, desires and to establish social relationships and friendships. The general
pass rates of students at a Private school C is better than those at a Mission school A or Government school B, students coming from a Private school C or similar private schools have their chances of success in education and the niches of the economy because they are taught more on the vital and practical side of education and in this instance they are taught more of speech work which is primary and more vital whereas in other schools like Mission school A and Government school B students are focused more on the writing aspect which is secondary and hence as such they are not competitive enough when it comes to the actual practical use of the language.

It was interesting to observe that during lessons most students at Mission school A and Government school B, although students were familiar with and knew the answers to asked questions, they had problems expressing their answers verbally to their teachers who would in most cases finish up their answers for them. Some students who knew the answers were too shy to speak in English in front of their peers and once their individual names were called out they remained tongue tied. The opposite is true of Private school C where most students were keen to participate even though they had wrong answers to give to asked questions. Thus, most schools in Zimbabwe are neglecting the vital contents to be taught in English language all because they are largely examination oriented and do not care to teach skills that are not to be tested in the examinations.

8.7 Research question 7 states that:
“To what extent do schools perpetuate the dynamic nature of vocabulary in the English language?”

Table 10: Students’ perception of registers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response of students</th>
<th>Total(on Likert scale of 5 point grade)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that 86% of the students that responded to the questionnaire strongly agree that the section on registers is difficult. 14% of the students agree that the section on registers is difficult. Those who are undecided, disagree and strongly disagree constitute 0%. This is as a result of section on registers requiring students to display their dynamic knowledge of vocabulary in practical use.

Because the practical communicative aspect of the language is neglected most students find sections that have to do with their test of vocabulary in English language very difficult. All students could not explain exactly what is difficult about registers except to say that they run out of words. Government school B students indicated that they are not quite sure as to which words to use best to suit a situation presented even though they might know the answer in their mother language.

Some students clearly expressed that they did not mind learning at all or failing them because they constitute only 10 of the total marks for Paper 2 and as such they focused more on English grammar and will only cram a few vocabulary terms to use their compositions which constitute 50 marks in which case they are guaranteed of an ‘A’ grade with or without answering the section on registers.

Aggarwal (1997) states that this has a negative effect of lowering the educational standards. The efficiency of the teacher is judged by the percentage pass rates of his results. As a result teachers and students adopt the trick of the trade method to improve their results. ‘Idea of exam’, the sole aim and the ‘cram’, the only method dominates the educational system. Students become more interested in notes and guides rather than in textbooks with the result that they ignore habits of independent study. Stress is laid on spoon feeding and students are encouraged to memorise vocabulary and vomit it out in the examination.

None of the schools was seen to possess any current dictionary let alone the teachers themselves and the ones that were shown to the researchers were old and dilapidated. A better 2001 dictionary edition was seen to be in the hands of one Private school C student whereas most students in the three schools were consulting outdated dictionaries while others clearly stated that they did not see any need to use dictionaries as they passed without using them anyway.
One student clearly stated that their English teacher had prohibited them from using ‘mavhoko’ a slang term for new vocabulary when writing their compositions because the teacher had cited that she had no time to consult the dictionary when marking their work as this would take most of her time to mark. The teacher even clearly stated to the student that even in their final national examinations in the subject use of ‘mavhoko’ would disadvantage the student, thus the student in order to pass should use popular and known vocabulary that is familiar to the markers. One lower Six student testified that in order to pass with an ‘A’ grade in the subject he had gotten hold of his sister’s composition book who had written 5 years earlier and had also passed with an ‘A’ grade and crammed it the result of which he equally succeeded.

These responses and testimonies analysed show that the way English language national examinations are conducted in Zimbabwe does not promote the dynamic nature of the English language both internally and externally. Same symbol being attained for the same quality of language in a space of 5 years clearly reveal that the ZIMSEC markers are not concerned with students display of the dynamic nature of language but rather with merely correct use of outdated vocabulary and as such schools, teachers and students find no reason to update their dictionaries and vocabulary. This contrasts with the demands required of any modern day foreign language in which the examiners’ report used in this research study states that “…Marks will be awarded according to the comprehension shown and no penalties will be exacted for inaccuracies in the language.

8.8 Research question 8 states that:
“What strategies can ZIMSEC adopt to ensure that all four aspects of the English language proficiency are tested in English language national examinations to avoid rote-learning and teaching of the subject?

Table 11: Verbatim responses from students and teachers.
- There should be an oral paper as is done in French.
- Allocation of marks to questions should be distributed evenly.
- Syllabuses to carry with them new vocabulary terms expected of students each year.
- ZIMSEC to avoid repeating old questions.
- English language to be continually tested as a compulsory examination to ‘A’ level students.
- CDU to continually revise the syllabus to suit the relevant needs of students at a given time.
- Structure of the question paper should be dynamic.
- Avoid asking complicated comprehension questions that are too difficult for the students.
- Making guide should stop emphasising more on grammar and spelling accuracy at the expense of other skills.

These suggestions given prove that there is need to create a room to improve the statue of the English language national examinations written at Ordinary level in Zimbabwe in which case the nature of the English language should not be compared to that of other subjects and consequently receive the same testing. It should instead receive the same testing as other foreign languages are tested in Zimbabwe for example in French where there is an oral paper written to test students proficiency in the subject.

9. Conclusions
The researchers found evidence pointing to the fact that the English language national examinations written by ordinary level students in Zimbabwe are not efficient enough in aiding the anticipated proficiency of English language in Zimbabwe. First, there is no national system for quantitatively assessing progress in English language literacy acquisition among student below the national examination class. This weakens efforts to provide formative feedback to schools, teachers, students, parents and other educational stakeholders.

Moreover, these examinations only rank a student against peers for the sake of placement purposes thus they do not explicitly show the degree of student mastery of curriculum content and concomitant skills. Further in these examinations all essential aspects of English language proficiency are not examined, for instance there is no oral paper to test measure listening and speaking skills but instead the English language national examination in Zimbabwe is dominated by a test of writing skills through a continuous composition part. This disadvantages students who consequently fail to be competitive in displaying the primary communicative aspect of the language which is vital in the niches of the economy.

Resultantly, as part of their work teachers set tests but the quality of these tests as measures of all
round progress in English language proficiency is weakened by the strong tendency of teaching and learning to be dominated by the end of Ordinary level examination in English language. Language skills that are not tested in the examination are largely neglected in the teaching and learning process and even in internal school based examinations that are used for summative evaluation.

10. Recommendations

The English language national examinations need to be improved and as such the following recommendations are put forward as suggested improvements in the study area:

- There should be 3 papers issued in English language that is one paper testing written skills, another testing oral and reading skills while the last one to test listening skills.
- It is essential that scientific scoring procedures should be devised so that there may be optimum reliability in the assessment of the candidates’ performances.
- Before question papers are set in English, a detailed design needs to be evolved indicating the weight age to be given to various areas of content, types of questions and the objectives of teaching and learning.
- There is need for an introduction of concomitant changes in instructional materials and methodologies in English language teaching.
- There is need for a laying down of norms for continuous comprehensive internal evaluation and suggesting safeguards against abuse of this evaluation system.
- There is need to establish more than one board of Education on that the great number of students in Zimbabwe are accurately examined.
- There is need of an introduction of objective grading bases on grades not marks.
- Admission to colleges should not be based only on a pass in Ordinary level language but also on the basis of an entrance test conducted specifically for assessing the students’ aptitude in English language.
- There is also a need for uniform distribution of marks on questions.
- The certificate issued by ZIMSEC should have two columns, one giving the result of the National Examination and the other giving the result of the continuous internal assessment of students by teachers.

In the light of the research finding brought out by this study, recommendations given are hoped to bring improvement in the examining system of Zimbabwe, ZIMSEC, in particular with regards to the way they examine the proficiency of English language in Zimbabwe at Ordinary level.

REFERENCES