

Replacement of the ZIMSEC O-Level English Language Paper 2 Registers Component with the Grammar Component: Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions

Rugare Mareva & Jairos Gonye,

Great Zimbabwe University, Robert Mugabe School of Education and Culture

Emails: marevarugare@gmail.com, rmareva@gzu.ac.zw

jairoskonye@gmail.com, jgonye@gzu.ac.zw

Abstract

This inquiry sought to investigate the perceptions of Zimbabwean O-Level English Language teachers and learners on the replacement of the ZIMSEC O-Level English Language Paper 2 registers component with a grammar component in the context of the Unhu/Ubuntu-oriented Updated Curriculum Framework (2015-2022). The study was guided by a qualitative approach. It adopted a multiple case study design which purposively sampled three secondary schools in Masvingo Urban District, Zimbabwe. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six teachers and focus group discussions with sixty learners. Findings revealed that although teachers felt that the registers component had been examined for a long time (27 years since 1990), replacing this component with a grammar one was unfortunate since registers instilled more Unhu/Ubuntu than grammar. It also emerged that teachers no longer taught registers seriously since this facet was no longer being examined. The teachers also believed that grammar was now being over-examined in the English Language examination since Paper 1, too, largely examined candidates' grammatical competence. It also emerged that learners were not comfortable with the grammar component as it forced them to memorise grammatical structures, a boring and rigorous activity. The learners also revealed that they missed learning registers, which they previously enjoyed through activities such as role play. The study concluded that replacing the registers component with grammar had caused a tremendous shift in the teaching and learning of English Language at secondary school level in Zimbabwe. Thus, the inquiry recommends that ZIMSEC consult teachers before changes are made in the content of examinations. The researchers advocate the re-inclusion of the registers component in the O-Level English Language Paper 2.

Key words: *grammar; communicative competence; linguistic competence; Unhu/Ubuntu; registers*

Introduction and background

The present study sought to investigate O-Level English Language teachers' and learners' perceptions on the changes that have been effected in the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) O-Level English Language Paper 2 (an equivalent of the Ordinary Level

General Certificate in Education), in the context of the new curriculum framework for Zimbabwe's schools. The Education Secretary's Circular No. 2 of 2017, which gives the rationale and instruction to implement new curriculum submits that the updated curriculum "is premised on the development of competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes) and [the] promotion of national identity, including inculcating values of *Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu*" (Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education, 2017: 2).

This study was interested in the change that has been made in the examination of English Language, one of the compulsory subjects in the new curriculum framework. According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2016:34):

The learning of English and its use as a language plays a vital role in the development of literacy in that it enhances learning in other areas of the curriculum. A foreign language creates opportunities for the learner to interact with an otherwise closed world, [...] help(s) learners to develop communication skills and critical understanding that are necessary for meaningful and active participation in society and the world at large.

Following the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) Report (1999), the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) designed and developed a new curriculum framework, the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015-2022, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2016). The new curriculum framework privileges the principle of respect or *Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu*, in addition to other principles which are inclusivity, life-long learning, equity and fairness, gender sensitivity, responsiveness, balance, diversity, transparency and accountability.

In the context of this new curriculum framework whose underpinning philosophy is *Unhu/Ubuntu*, the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) changed the structure of the O-Level English Language Paper 2 by removing the registers component of the paper and replacing it with the language structures/grammar component. The registers component in the preceding Ordinary Level English Paper 1122/2 looked as follows:

Extract from 1122/2, 2002

<p>ZIMBABWE SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level</p>

ENGLISH LANGUAGE 1122/2

PAPER 2

Wednesday 30 October 2002

Afternoon

2hrs

Section B (10 marks)

4 Listed below are **five** situations which are described briefly. Read each situation carefully and then answer the questions which follow, **briefly**.

- (a) A teacher responding to a pupil's answer says:
- (i) "That's the silliest response I've heard this morning!"
 - (ii) "That's not quite correct but let's work on your answer and use it for argument's sake..."

What will the pupil's feelings be to each of the statements?

Number your answers separately (i) and (ii).

[2]

- (b) In a woodwork lesson, the teacher is going around observing the pupils' carved items. He stops behind one boy, looks at his item and says:

"I have never seen anything like this in my life!"

Suggest **two** different reasons why he should say these words.

Number your answers separately (i) and (ii).

[2]

- (c) You hear over the radio that Cyclone Edward is approaching and may cause damage in your area. Two neighbours make the following remarks:

- (i) "These things happen, there is nothing I can do!"
- (ii) "I'd better make sure I have some tinned food in stock."

What does each statement show about each person's character?

Number your answers separately (i) and (ii). [2]

- (d) A child keeps going towards a tub full of water. The mother says to the child:

- (i) "If you go near that water, a horrible creature will come out of the water, pull you in and eat you."
- (ii) "If you go near that water, Mummy will not like it and will not give you sweets."

In each case, what strategy is the mother using to keep her child away from the danger?

Number your answers separately (i) and (ii). [2]

- (e) An acquaintance calls to you but you are unable to hear what she says owing to the noise of a passing vehicle. Listed are responses you might make to the speaker.

Choose the **four that are most appropriate**. Write **only the four** numbers you choose.

- (i) "I can't listen to you when you talk so softly. How do you expect me to hear?"
- (ii) "Why don't you speak louder?"
- (iii) "Could you please repeat that? That car was very loud."
- (iv) "Can't you please speak louder or do you need a loudspeaker?"
- (v) "I'm sorry. I didn't quite get you."
- (vi) "May you repeat what you said? I didn't quite catch it the first time."

The new structure of the paper, as represented in the new version of the English Language Paper 2 (4005/2) still examines reading comprehension and summary skills in Section A but has the new grammar/language structures component in Section B. The extract of the English Language Paper 2 specimen paper below shows how the grammar/language structures are examined. The items of Section B question 4 are based on the comprehension passage examined in Section A.

Extract from Specimen Paper 4005/2, 2018

ZIMBABWE SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL
General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
ENGLISH LANGUAGE 4005/2
PAPER 2 INSERT

SPECIMEN PAPER NOVEMBER 2018 2hrs

Section B (10 marks)
Answer all questions

4 (a) Each of the following sentences contains **one** spelling error. Identify and **re-write the word** correctly in the space provided

(i) Barney and his assistant continuously received calls from their Transport Manager who wanted to check on their safety.

----- [1]

(ii) Joel Chino decided to buy a house in the surbub not very far from the patrol car station and that solved his accommodation problems.

----- [1]

(b) Choose the correct word or phrase from those in brackets to correctly fill in the blanks in the following sentences. Write the correct word or phrase only.

(i) The Corkscrew was a murderous steep slope which (comprised of/comprised) curves and humps.

-----[1]

(ii) Barney and his assistant (discussed about/discussed) all safety precautions before they started the journey.

----- [1]

(c) Rewrite the following sentences replacing the underlined words with their opposites.

(i) The truck driver engaged low gears on the Corkscrew descent which stretched for two kilometres.

----- [1]

(ii) The driver who was ahead of Barney began to accelerate, looking for [an] escape.

----- [1]

(d) Rewrite the following sentences changing the punctuation marks, not the word order, so that each sentence gives a different meaning from the original one.

(i) Barney and his assistant had packed the following as part of their provisions: mealie-meal, dried fish, sugar beans, cooking oil and salt.

----- [1]

(ii) Barney said Chino took his job seriously.

----- [1]

(e) Rewrite the following sentences [by] changing them to reported speech.

(i) “Barney you are now an exceptionally experienced driver,” Joel Chino remarked.

-----[1]

(ii) Barney said to himself, “I don’t want a repeat of what happened last time on this Corkscrew.”

-----[1]

In the English Language Paper 1, candidates write a free composition in Section A, and a guided composition in Section B. In both compositions, the examination primarily tests the candidates’ linguistic accuracy, proficiency and awareness of correct grammatical conventions.

Statement of the problem

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe has come up with a new *Unhu/Ubuntu*-oriented curriculum framework for schools, whose implementation started in January 2017. However, the researchers note that the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) has removed the registers component from the O-Level English Language Paper 2 examination, replacing the register portion with language structures/grammar. The researchers are convinced that registers appear to inculcate more *Unhu/Ubuntu* than the grammar feature. Thus, the study sought to identify the perceptions of Zimbabwe’s English Language teachers and learners from Masvingo Urban on the removal of the registers aspect from the examination paper in question.

Objectives

The study sought to:

- establish the views of Zimbabwe’s O-Level English Language teachers’ and learners’ on the replacement of the registers component with the grammar component in the English Language Paper 2 examination;
- examine how, and to what extent, the change made on the English Paper 2 examination affects the teaching and learning of English Language.

Conceptual framework and literature review

Samkange and Samkange (1980:89), the founding philosophers of *Unhu/Ubuntu* in Zimbabwe, define *Unhu/Ubuntu* as “The attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people, a code of behaviour, an attitude to others and to life.” In other words, *Unhu/Ubuntu* valorises the humane treatment of others. Chibvongodze (2016:157) cites Broodryk (2005) to buttress the view that, in recognising the humanness of others, an *Ubuntu*-oriented individual “activates a sense of collective personhood that imbues ethos of respect, tolerance, sharing, empathy and love for a fellow human being.” Samkange and Samkange (1980) further state that *Hunhuism/Ubuntuism* positions human relations as a central premium. According to Murithi (2009), *Ubuntu* is a cultural worldview that captures the essence of being human. *Unhu/Ubuntu* is the foundation for the basic values that manifest themselves in the ways in which African people think and behave towards one another and towards those whom they encounter (Sulamoyo, 2010). Some of the values that are espoused in the ontology of *Unhu/Ubuntu* are community sharing, caring and solidarity, which are the opposite of being selfish and self-centred (Nzimakwe, 2014). A more illuminating definition of *Unhu/Ubuntu* is proffered by Nussbaum (2003:2) who perceives it as:

... The capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring ... speaks to our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each other that flows from our deeply felt connection. *Ubuntu* is our consciousness of our natural desire to affirm our fellow human beings and to work and act towards each other with the communal good in the forefront of our minds.

Given this background, this paper’s task was set to seek Masvingo urban (a town in southern Zimbabwe) teachers’ perceptions on the discontinuation of examining registers – which construct, in our view, could inculcate more the spirit of *Unhu/Ubuntu*- in the ZIMSEC O-Level English Language Paper 2 examination than the grammar segment.

The context of the updated curriculum has seen the overhaul of the content, pedagogy and assessment practices of all subjects, including English language. This is in keeping with the

earlier recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) (1999), which initially suggested the adoption of the African philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu* in the curriculum in order to give Zimbabwean students a sense of identity, self-respect, tolerance, politeness, national values and cultural anchorage. These traits and values, embodying African humanness, are often realised in how people communicate and use language (register) in context, whether in politics, education, commerce, relationships, and ordinary conversation, among others.

The Curriculum Review Process Narrative Report 2014-2015 (2015:19) summaries the characteristics that school graduates should exhibit: “self-respect”; being “well-groomed, helpful and well mannered”; being “disciplined, responsible, reliable and trustworthy, with civic attitude, confident, of upright morals and having creativity/innovativeness and analytical skills”, as well as being “diligent and industrious.” Registers, we are convinced, are closely linked to the *Unhu/Ubuntu* philosophy implied above and, therefore, teaching and testing registers could help in the moulding of school graduates who exhibit the qualities espoused in the Narrative Report (2015).

The CIET report implored the Zimbabwean nation to:

Seriously ensure that *hunhu/Ubuntu* was taught and ingrained in the education of all the learners in the country noting that the cultures, practices, values and norms generated by technologies these days, are totally and frustratingly driving our children out of the genuine Zimbabwean culture. One needs to just see what comes on Facebook etc. to understand the importance of *hunhu/Ubuntu* as a philosophy of education (CIET, 1999:62).

Registers

The term ‘register’ is used in sociolinguistics to refer to language varieties that are distinguished according to use and context (Wallwork, 1985; Hudson, 1999). Similarly, Halliday (cited in Mooney, 2011), defines register as linguistic variation that is determined by context of use. Ervine-Tripp (in Pride, 1981:28) explains that register is a type of situational language switch “where the primary determinants appear to be setting, situation, addressee, and topic.” Trudgill (1983) conceptualises registers as linguistic varieties that are linked to

occupations, professions, or topics. Wardhaugh (2006) views registers as sets of vocabulary items that are associated with particular occupations or social groups, and variety as a specific set of linguistic items or human speech patterns which we can connect to some external factor, such as geographical location or social group. A broader definition of register is proffered by Romaine (1994:20), who contends that “The term register is typically concerned with variation in language conditioned by uses rather than users and involves consideration of the situation or context of use, the purpose, subject matter, and content of message, and the relationship between participants.” To Zhang (2018), register refers to use of language varieties in different situations, governed by field (subject), tenor (the communicators), and mode (different expectations of how a text should be organised).

Thus, from the various definitions interrogated above, register may be defined as language use variation according to setting, situation or context, purpose, topic, addressee, occupation, profession, or social group.

Registers, communicative competence and *Unhu/Ubuntu*

Hymes (cited in Simensen, 2007:72) coined the term ‘communicative competence’ to refer to “when to speak, when not, and what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner.” Similarly, Diaz-Rico and Weed (2010:58) refer to communicative competence as knowledge of “when, where, and how to use language appropriately.” Canale and Swain (1980) conceptualise communicative competence as consisting of four aspects, namely grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence includes the ability to comprehend and manipulate vocabulary, rules of word formation and combination, pronunciation and spelling. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to produce and comprehend appropriate utterances, based on the situation and the people involved in the communication. It is “an understanding of social context in which communication takes place” (Richards and Rodgers, 2007:160). Discourse competence involves the skill of combining grammatical forms into a unified spoken or written text that is appropriate to the situation and the purpose. It is “concerned with the connection of utterances to form a meaningful whole” (Savignon, 1983:38). Finally, strategic competence has to do with the ability to use communication strategies to achieve goals, and compensate for breakdowns in communication. Strategic competence refers to “the coping strategies that communicators

employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication” (Richards & Rodgers, 2007:160). Yule (2012) also argues that communicative competence is the ability to use a language accurately, appropriately, and flexibly, that is, grammatical, pragmatic, and strategic competence, respectively.

From the above, there is an apparent relationship between communicative competence and the concept of ‘register’, particularly the component of sociolinguistic competence as “an understanding of social context in which communication takes place” (Richards and Rodgers, 2007:160). It is our contention that the concepts of communicative competence and register are related to the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu*, the philosophy that informs Zimbabwe’s new curriculum framework.

Grammar, linguistic competence and *Ubuntu*

The teaching and testing of language structures is associated with the teaching and testing of linguistic competence, also known as grammatical competence. Linguistic competence relates to knowledge of, and ability to use, forms of expression that are grammatically correct and accurate. These include rules of word and sentence formation, meanings, spelling and pronunciation (Gao, 2001). These aspects are conceptually divorced from the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu*, on which the new curriculum for Zimbabwe’s school is premised, hence this study on teachers’ and learners’ perceptions on the excision of the register aspect from the O-Level English Language Paper 2 and its replacement with components of grammar.

The influence of examinations on teaching and learning

The way examinations influence teaching and learning is referred to as washback or backwash. According to Spratt (2005), washback refers to impact, and it affects many aspects of the classroom, including curriculum delivery, teaching materials, pedagogical methods, feelings and attitudes, learning, as well as policy. Washback is the extent to which the test has an impact on teachers and learners, influencing them to do what they would not necessarily do (Messick, 1996; Shohamy, 2001). On the washback phenomenon, Madaus (1988:8) observes that “it is testing, not the ‘official’ stated curriculum, that is increasingly determining what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned.” On why concerned ministries and stakeholders would rather not virtually remove from the curriculum, aspects that feature in the

syllabus but remain untested, Muskin (2015:17) bemoans how, “In practice tests do in fact drive much, if not most, of the curriculum that is taught and how.” Similarly, Taylor (2005:154) points out that “it has long been believed that tests directly influence educational processes in various ways.” This means that the manner in which subjects are eventually examined or the known structure of examination paper could influence the way teachers teach and learners prepare for that subject. This is echoed by Sarich (2012:29) who states that “Washback refers to how tests influence a teaching context.” Sarich adds that if classroom study focuses on the content of tests, less attention may be paid to areas that the tests do not cover. Similarly, Hove and Hlatshwayo (2015) argue that teachers adjust their teaching to suit examinations.

Boit, Njoki and Chang’ach (2012) carried out a study in Kenya and found out that examinations had a backwash effect on the curriculum, with teachers being selective in what they teach as content, while other content areas were partially done or completely ignored, especially unexamined subjects. These findings indicate that examinations continue to influence the actual teaching despite the argument that teaching should inculcate in the learner the right attitude, knowledge, understanding, skills, ways of knowing and practical competencies that are necessary for one to function autonomously in a society, all of which reflect the fundamental aims of education and widely accepted values of a particular society (De Luca, 1994).

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, an approach to empirical research that relies primarily on the collection of non-numeric data (Christensen, Johnson and Turner, 2015). It is a research approach where the data collected is non-numerical oriented, though rich in its description of contexts, participants and whereby the latter’s responses lend themselves more to narrative analysis and discussion than to statistical handling (Magwa & Magwa, 2015). Participants’ perceptions are an example of data gathered in qualitative research (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013), hence our choice of this approach to explore teachers’ and learners’ perceptions on the removal of registers component from the ZIMSEC O-Level English Language Paper 2.

The study adopted the case study design, which represents a basic form of qualitative research and involves the in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). In the present study, a multiple case of three Zimbabwean secondary schools was the focus. Three selected secondary schools from within Masvingo urban were purposively selected for the study.

Population

The target population for the study comprised all the teachers and secondary school learners of English Language at the three selected Masvingo urban schools in Zimbabwe.

Sample

Four (4) female and two (2) male teachers, adding to a total of six (6) educators of O-Level English Language (two per school) were purposively selected to participate in the study on the basis of them having taught O-level English Language for at least ten (10) years. We thus viewed them as information-rich cases which could “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007:125). Sixty (60) learners (twenty [20] from each school) were also conveniently selected, using purposive sampling, from the classes which were taught by the six teacher participants. For a balanced gender representation, we managed to proportionally select a total of thirty (30) males and thirty (30) females from the participating schools. In such a convenience sample, however, advantage is taken of cases, events, situations or informants who are close at hand (Punch, 2005).

Data collection tools

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with six O-Level Language teachers from the three selected secondary schools. The interview was chosen as a data gathering tool regarded as suitable for information about people’s experiences, knowledge, opinions, beliefs and feelings that constitute perceptions (Best and Khan, 2014). The semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows for additional probing. The interviews were held in apparently free face-to-face manner and each lasted thirty (30) minutes. The interview responses were audio-taped to allow for replay of authentic recordings and analysis later on. The interview participants were coded as T1 up to T6.

Focus group discussions

Apart from interviews, focus group discussions were also held with six groups of ten learners of O-Level English language each (two groups per school). Hence sixty learners participated in the focus group discussions which were facilitated by both researchers. Focus group discussions were chosen to collect data because in such discussions the interviewer “creates a supportive environment, asking focused questions to encourage discussion and the experience of differing opinions and points of view” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:114). Each focus group session thus stretched from forty-five to sixty minutes, depending on the momentum of debate amongst the participants. The focus group participants were coded as FGD A1 up to FGD A20 for school A, FGD B1 up to FGD B20 for school B, and FGD C1 up to FGD C20 for school C.

Findings and discussion

Findings from teachers

The teachers who participated in the study were convinced that registers in the old ZIMSEC O-Level English Language Paper 2 had been examined for a long time (twenty-seven years), and in a very predictable way, so there was some need to vary the way registers were examined, without necessarily discontinuing examining the focus. Teachers from the three schools also unanimously agreed that they were not consulted when registers were removed from the examination paper in question. One of the interviewees noted:

T3: The manner in which registers were being examined had become an open secret. For more than twenty years the same questions were being rotated on slightly different communicative situations. Change was long overdue but we were not consulted on the issue of replacing them with grammar component.

The majority of the teachers interviewed in the case study held the belief that, unlike grammar which does not seem to have a direct relationship with *Unhu/Ubuntu*, registers promoted the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu* through character building and behaviour moulding by instilling values such as compassion, empathy, respect, courtesy, and sensitivity. The teachers' views can be summed up in one participant's words, thus:

T5: We had the opportunity to lead learners towards good mannerly behaviour, politeness and to be upright characters as we discussed different register situations. Questions like: Is this appropriate behaviour, or what does it tell you about the

speaker's character? helped modify learners' behaviour and communication choices and style.

The above observations resonate well with Hymes' (cited in Simensen, 2007:72) definition of communicative competence as knowledge of "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner", as well as Richards and Rodgers' (2007:160) conceptualisation of sociolinguistic competence (an aspect of communicative competence) as "an understanding of social context in which communication takes place." It is our contention that an individual who knows when to speak, when not to, what to speak about, and with whom, depending on social context, is likely to display values of compassion, empathy, respect, courtesy, and sensitivity; values that are enshrined in the philosophy of *Ubuntu* as argued by Chibvongodze (2016).

However, a few of the teachers who were interviewed believed that it was possible to incorporate *Unhu/Ubuntu* in grammar teaching through contextualisation, but conceded that not many teachers may envisage the possibility of doing so.

The teachers also revealed that although registers were not removed from the new O-Level English Language syllabus, teachers now either pay little attention to them, or they have stopped teaching registers altogether. They further observed that replacing registers with grammar questions in the examination paper means teachers of English now concentrate much on language structures, which apparently do not have a direct link with the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu*. This finding points to the washback effect, in which examinations affect teaching (Madaus, 1988; Messick, 1996; Spratt, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Boit, Njoki&Chang'ach, 2012; Muskin, 2015; Hove & Hlatshwayo, 2015).

It also emerged from the interviews with teachers that O-Level English Language teachers now place a lot more emphasis on the teaching of grammar at the expense of registers, because grammar is now being over-examined, in the sense that the complementary O-Level English Language Paper 1 examination (composition writing), again, largely emphasises linguistic and grammatical competence.

Another finding from the teachers was that teaching registers is associated with interesting, 'humanistic' methods such as Communicative Language Teaching that employ role play, simulations, drama, games, among others, unlike the drills and memorisation techniques that are associated with the teaching of grammar and accuracy. Indeed, at the centre of the definition of *Unhu/Ubuntu* is humanism, that is, humane treatment of others (Samkange&Samkange, 1980; Chibvongodze, 2015).

Finally, some of the teachers in the cases averred that while examining grammar may be good for linguistic proficiency, it should not have replaced the assessment of registers which instil the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu* in learners. Rather, registers and grammar could be examined concurrently.

Findings from learners

From the focus group discussions, the learners in the six cases agreed with their teachers, observing that teachers no longer teach registers as they used to do, yet registers are good for building good character, behaviour, attitudes and manners, and for learning how to communicate appropriately in real-life situations. Such values are apparently embodied in human values that are central in the *Unhu/Ubuntu* philosophy as articulated by such scholars as Samkange and Samkange (1980), Murithi (2009), Nussbaum (2003), Sulamoyo (2010), Chibvongodze (2015) and Nzimakwe (2014). This observation that teachers no longer pay much attention to the teaching of registers because this component is no longer examined confirms Taylor and Shohamy's (2001) contention that tests and examinations have a direct influence on educational processes, an observation shared by Muskin (2015) and Madaus (1988), who state that testing is increasingly determining what is taught, what is learned and how it is learnt (the washback effect). As one discussant narrated:

FGD A4: Our teacher brought the 2018 Specimen Paper to class one day and while flipping through it, announced that registers were no longer part of the examination. She told us that we should be more prepared for grammar exercises as presented in the specimen if we wanted to pass our exams.

Another common theme that emerged from the learners was that it was interesting when they used to learn registers through activities such as dialogues and role play. Now the learners have to memorise grammatical structures and rules in preparation for the grammar component of the

examination, which they find boring and technically rigorous rather than contextually and socio-linguistically appropriate. The following words by one of the learners attest to these sentiments:

As we studied registers component previously, we could be asked to stand up as pairs and choose a situation where we would act on the suitable registers or the reverse, say, a stranger meeting a stranger on the road and one of them requesting directions to some place. The exchanges, it was really some fun then. (FGD C 11).

This finding confirms what emerged from interviews with teachers, that teaching registers is associated with interesting and humanistic methods and techniques, unlike the teaching of grammar which is associated with drills and memorisation.

The learners also unanimously agreed that registers offered opportunities for a diversity of answers that were accepted, unlike grammar which insists on rigid correctness and accuracy. The latter is an apparent reference to linguistic competence or knowledge of, and ability to use, forms of expression that are grammatically correct and accurate, including rules of word and sentence formation, meanings, spelling and pronunciation (Gao, 2001).

Conclusion

It emerged in this study that although registers had been examined for a very long period and in a predictable way in the ZIMSEC O-Level English Language Paper 2 examination, teachers who were not consulted believe that this component should not have been replaced by the grammar component. The study also established that both teachers and learners believe that registers promote the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu* more than grammar does. It further emerged from the study that owing to the washback effect, teachers no longer take the registers aspect of the syllabus seriously. There is now over-emphasis on grammar, although learners are more comfortable with registers. The removal of the registers aspect from the English Language Paper 2 examination and its replacement with grammar has, thus, had a dramatic, if not negative impact on the teaching and learning of English Language at O-Level in Zimbabwe and has been met with taciturn perceptions from both teachers and learners.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study recommends that the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council should consult teachers, who are the implementers of any curricular changes, before making changes in the structure and components of examination papers. Furthermore, we recommend that ZIMSEC should reconsider bringing back the registers component to the O-Level English Language Paper 2 examination since there appears to be a strong relationship between registers and the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu* that informs the new curriculum framework for Zimbabwe. If grammar is to be examined, this should not be at the expense of registers. In addition, it is submitted that teachers should continue teaching registers since this component has not been removed from the English Language syllabus. Teaching should be for life skills and for the norms and values of society, not principally for examinations.

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