



An Examination of the Challenges Teachers Face in Teaching the English Language in Rural Schools: A Study of Five Selected Public Schools in Chilubi District, Northern Province, Zambia.

Makungu Jeremiah Choongo

Pg Scholar Dmi St. Eugene University-Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract- This study examines the challenges teachers face in teaching the English language in rural secondary schools in Chilubi District, Northern Province of Zambia. English is the official language of instruction in Zambia and plays a critical role in learners' academic success. However, teaching English in rural areas presents numerous challenges that affect both teaching effectiveness and learner performance. The study employed a mixed-methods research design involving 100 respondents, including teachers, pupils, and school administrators from five selected public schools. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that major challenges include lack of teaching and learning materials, inadequate teacher training, large class sizes, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and negative learner attitudes. Additionally, infrastructural challenges and language barriers further complicate instruction. The study concludes that these challenges significantly hinder effective English language teaching and learning in rural schools. The study recommends increased government support, improved teacher training, provision of adequate teaching materials, and the promotion of English language use within school environments.

Keywords- English Language Teaching, Rural Schools, Language Barriers, Teaching Challenges, Zambia

I. Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, learning, and social integration. In Zambia, English serves as the official language and the primary medium of instruction from upper primary through tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2013). As such, proficiency in English is essential for academic success and future opportunities. However, teaching English in rural areas presents unique challenges. Rural schools often operate under resource constraints and learners typically have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. According to Crystal (2003), effective language acquisition requires continuous exposure and practice, which is often lacking in rural settings.

Chilubi District, located in Northern Province, is characterized by geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic challenges. These factors significantly affect the quality of education, particularly in English language teaching. This study therefore investigates the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in five selected public schools in Chilubi District.



Statement of the Problem

Despite English being the official language of instruction in Zambia, many learners in rural schools' struggle to achieve proficiency. Examination results consistently show poor performance in English, which negatively affects overall academic achievement. Teachers in rural areas face numerous obstacles, including limited resources, inadequate training, and linguistic barriers, which hinder effective teaching. According to Cummins (2000), language learning is influenced by both cognitive and environmental factors, many of which are lacking in rural settings.

There is limited research specifically focusing on the challenges of teaching English in Chilubi District. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine the challenges teachers, face in teaching the English language in rural schools in Chilubi District.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify challenges faced by teachers in teaching English
2. To assess the impact of these challenges on learner performance
3. To examine teacher preparedness in English language instruction
4. To propose strategies to improve English teaching in rural schools

Research Questions

1. What challenges do teachers face in teaching English in rural schools?
2. How do these challenges affect learner performance?
3. Are teachers adequately trained to teach English?
4. What strategies can improve English language teaching?

II. Literature Review

Importance of English Language

English is a global language used in education, business, and communication (Crystal, 2003). In Zambia, it is the medium of instruction and a key subject for academic progression.

Challenges in Teaching English in Rural Areas

- **Lack of Teaching Materials**

According to Harmer (2007), effective language teaching requires textbooks, visual aids, and audio materials. Many rural schools lack these resources.

- **Language Barriers**

Learners in rural areas primarily communicate in local languages, making it difficult to learn English (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

- **Teacher Training**

Richards (2011) notes that trained teachers are essential for effective language instruction. However, rural schools often have underqualified teachers.



- **Large Class Sizes**

Large classes limit individual attention and reduce teaching effectiveness (Ur, 1996).

- **Learner Attitudes**

Gardner (1985) highlights that motivation is critical in language learning. Negative attitudes hinder progress.

- **Limited Exposure to English**

Krashen (1982) emphasizes the importance of language exposure. Rural learners rarely use English outside school.

III. Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was used.

Sample Size

Category	Number
Teachers	30
Pupils	60
Administrators	10
Total	100

Data Collection Methods

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Classroom observation

Data Analysis

- Quantitative: Percentages
- Qualitative: Thematic analysis

IV. Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Major Challenges

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of Materials	85%
Language Barrier	80%
Large Classes	78%
Inadequate Training	72%
Poor Infrastructure	70%

Analysis



The most significant challenge is lack of teaching materials (85%), followed by language barriers (80%).

Table 2: Impact on Learners

Impact	Percentage
Poor Performance	82%
Low Participation	75%
Low Confidence	73%

Analysis

These challenges directly contribute to poor academic performance and low learner confidence.

Table 3: Teacher Preparedness

Factor	Percentage
Fully Trained	40%
Partially Trained	35%
Not Adequately Trained	25%

Analysis

Only 40% of teachers are fully trained, indicating a major gap.

Qualitative Responses

Teachers

- “Learners struggle because they rarely use English at home.”
- “We lack textbooks and teaching aids.”

Learners

- “English is difficult to understand.”
- “We prefer speaking our local language.”

V. Discussion

The findings confirm that multiple factors hinder effective English teaching in rural schools. These results align with Krashen (1982), who emphasized the importance of exposure, and Harmer (2007), who highlighted the role of resources.

Language barriers remain a major issue, as learners think and communicate in local languages. Additionally, inadequate teacher training reduces instructional quality.

VI. Conclusion

The study concludes that teaching English in rural schools in Chilubi District is affected by multiple challenges, including lack of resources, inadequate training, language barriers, and poor infrastructure. These challenges significantly affect learner performance.



Recommendations

1. Provide adequate teaching and learning materials
2. Improve teacher training and professional development
3. Encourage English language use in schools
4. Reduce class sizes
5. Improve rural school infrastructure

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