

**PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND THE PROBLEMS FACED  
WITH TEACHING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.**

**An analysis of the obstacles in the way of effective pupil-centred  
teaching and learning of the English language in Tanzanian government  
primary schools with recommendations.**

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## **Summary:**

I have 14 years' experience working in government primary schools through the NGO Village Education Project Kilimanjaro. It is apparent from working in the schools, from visiting the EQUIP programme in August 2007, and from conducting a district seminar and other training and observations that pupil-centred learning is not taking place on any significant scale in the teaching of English. Only an honest evaluation will assist any future development of primary English education.

It is contended that most Tanzanians over the age of 50 know quite good English with good pronunciation, and many are fluent speakers. However, if you speak to people below the age of 50 there is a noticeable degradation of their English language ability commensurate with their younger age. It is impossible to hold a conversation in English with most Standard VII pupils. The standard of English has declined considerably. Most of the primary school teachers are in the under-50 category; most have poor knowledge of English and no confidence in speaking it.

English teaching in Tanzania was first taught in Standard V, then in 1958 it was taught in the primary schools from Standard III. At that time the New Oxford English Course was used, and within two years pupils knew sufficient English to have all their education conducted in English from Standard V. There were various changes and now English is taught from Standard I, and indeed in pre-primary.

In teaching English to young learners it is essential to consider how children learn. There are recognised stages of cognitive development that every child passes through, and teaching material should take account of this. There is also a very great need for the motivation to learn English for both the pupils and the teachers.

The majority of primary school teachers have an insufficient command of English to be able to teach it effectively. Teachers with insufficient subject knowledge have very little if any confidence. Without subject knowledge then subject application cannot take place, and it is unfair to place expectations on primary school teachers of child-centred learning or participatory practices. Where should they start if they do not understand the materials and their own knowledge of the language is so shaky? Lack of subject knowledge is one of the main causes of the present problems in teaching English in primary schools.

The teachers are not assisted by their materials. The materials are not prepared with the level of available teacher expertise in mind. The teachers need help and it is not being provided. Teachers are not even being treated as out-patients and yet the reality of their condition is for treatment in intensive care. The textbooks need to set out many more classroom activities and exercises. The greatest need is for the teachers' books to be in Swahili. This would be in-line with most other countries where the teachers' materials are in the native language, or L1. For instance, in England teachers who teach French have all their teachers' materials in English. This is essential if they are to understand the instructions and explanations. It is pretentious and suicidal in Tanzania to continue to give the teachers' materials in English when Swahili is the commonly understood language.

Another problem is the lack of differentiation between the pupils and the allocation of teachers.

There is urgent need to differentiate between the younger pupils and the older pupils; partly because of the pupils' developmental stages but also because of the allocation of teachers. Thus pre-primary, Standard I and Standard II pupils have teachers who are with them all day long and the teachers allocated to those pupils tend to have lesser subject skills than those teachers allocated to older pupils. The older pupils are taught English by teachers who have some subject knowledge, but who only teach for time-tabled 40 minute periods. These two categories deserve urgent, separate attention.

Pre-primary, Standard I and Standard II pupils are only just beginning to gain literacy and numeracy skills in Swahili. They are in the stages of pre-operational thought moving to concrete operations (Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development).

There is scope for frequent, short sessions of English using a number and variety of activities, and these should take account of the notional 7 intelligencies using both sides of the pupil's brain. Given that the teacher is with the pupils of pre-primary, Standard I and Standard II all day there is scope for real meaning and practical application of English by using English for classroom routines such as the register, lining up, writing the date, distributing or collecting books etc.

To engender motivation of pupil and teacher there should be introduced inter-cultural education to promote interest in the Tanzanian culture and that of speakers of English – eg in learning about flags, music, children's songs, rhymes and games, food, gestures, playtime activities etc. An examination of language and its influence will show that young pupils already know several English words without realising that they do so.

The teachers need a clear framework, models for pronunciation, a scheme of work and teaching ideas. It is not sufficient to leave these teachers with inadequate support. They must now be spoon-fed with lesson plans, detailed ideas for games and activities and material for inter-cultural studies, as well as basic structures, words and phrases for them to conduct classroom routines in English as well as delivery of some specific English tuition.

All of this will take account of the age of the pupils and their stage of cognitive development and also of the current level of expertise of the available teachers, the need to motivate both pupil and teacher, and the time available in the classroom for routine activities.

The teachers of the higher standards (Standard III to VII) take the role of specialist teachers who give 40 minute periods to their classes, and yet their subject knowledge, yet alone their subject application, is not of specialist level. These teachers need detailed, supportive materials so that their pupils are motivated, and learn systematically and the teachers themselves are assisted to understand the English being taught and assisted with the methods of teaching. Rather than re-invent the wheel it is suggested that the 'tried and tested' New English Oxford Course which gave such a good, thorough English language

training to so many older Tanzanians be re-introduced. In fact, it is still in print! To write new material would take time and would not be written by primary school specialists but in all probability by TEFL<sup>1</sup> specialists who know little of the needs of children in this age group. A priority is that the teachers' books be in Swahili. Without this any English course is destined to failure as the teachers cannot be expected to read detailed instructions and explanations in a foreign language in which they are not competent. Indeed, teachers in other parts of the world have all these materials in L1 (their native language) and only the pupils' books and 'target language' are in L2 (the foreign language). There should also be considered a complementary radio programme series taking teachers through a step-by-step guide to basic English with emphasis on pronunciation, together with short courses in the holidays at teacher training colleges.

### **Background:**

I have lived in Tanzania since January 1994 and from that time have been involved in government primary schools in the Kilimanjaro region. My involvement has been through the NGO, Village Education Project Kilimanjaro. I taught in two primary schools for three years using the English syllabus and the available textbooks. Over the years I have spent much time in several primary schools working with the local teachers. For many years I have trained UK student teachers who come to help to teach English in the primary schools and I regularly observe their lessons. I have conducted a District seminar for teachers in the teaching of English to primary school pupils. Our NGO has, since 2000, embarked on programmes of in-service training for primary school teachers and has hosted many visiting professionals, and their views are taken into account in this paper. In August 2007 I visited the EQUIP programme in Shinyanga, and visited Pandagichizi primary school by appointment. I observed two lessons: a mentor-teacher conducting a Swahili reading comprehension for Standard IV and an English lesson for Standard I. In my report of the visit sent to Oxfam I wrote 'if these were demonstration lessons for visitors then they were disappointing, but even if they were 'ordinary' lessons they showed little or no sign of participatory teaching and were like other lessons being taught in primary schools across the country'. My sole aim in writing this paper is to give an honest account in order to improve the standard of English in Tanzania as proficiency in the language is not only needed for academic studies but for aspects of business, for use of computers and the internet and for contact with most visitors from abroad. This paper aims to be a pragmatic look at present problems impeding pupil-centred learning of English and how to solve them.

### **Introduction:**

It is my considered opinion after working and living in Tanzania for over 14 years that the English language syllabus and accompanying textbooks for the primary education sector are the main reasons for the lack of good command of the English language, both spoken and written, in Tanzania today.

This paper attempts to show that the standard of English has declined dramatically over the years, that the main cause of this decline is the teaching of English in primary schools

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching English as a foreign language – usually aimed at adult learners and not child learners

following the English language syllabus and using the current textbooks. It also includes recommendations for addressing the situation and arresting the further decline. It is apparent from working in government primary schools for 14 years, from conducting a district seminar, in-service training seminars and other training sessions that pupil-centred learning is not taking place on any significant scale.

### **Lack of good command of the English language both spoken and written**

It is contended that if you talk to Tanzanians over the age of 50 the chances are that they will know quite good English. A percentage of these will speak and write English very well and their accent and pronunciation will be good. They might use some rather archaic expressions such as 'it's raining cats and dogs' or 'I'll try my level best' and call you Sir or Madam, but on the whole their English is of a commendable standard such that a conversation can be held about general topics, and many are fluent speakers.

Today if you speak to people below the age of 50 there is, on the whole, a noticeable degradation of their English language ability commensurate with their younger age. How many primary school children are heard to say 'What is my name' (*'What is your name?'*)<sup>2</sup>, 'Give me my pen' (*'Please could you give me a pen?'*), 'Goodi mworn' (*'Good morning'*)? There is also a marked over-use of the present continuous tense which is grammatically incorrect and where the present simple tense should be used. For example, 'He is having a nice car' (*'he has a nice car'*), 'We are speaking English at my school' (*'we speak English at school'*), 'He's coming from England' (*'he comes from England'*). There is also very little use of elisions which gives rise to a very staccato and unnatural delivery of English. For instance, 'My name is John' (*'my name's John'*), 'We would like to come, but we do not have a car' (*'we'd like to come but we don't have a car'*), etc.

It is impossible to hold a conversation in English with most Standard VII primary school pupils. It may be possible to elicit answers to questions, but even when simplifying the language structure for them their grammar and vocabulary is too poor to be able to engage in dialogue. Broken grammar may get their message across, for example, 'Me now go home' (*'I'm going home now'*), but lack of vocabulary and knowledge of grammar defeats most conversation. Indeed, John Benson states 'A statement I heard over and over again in all the schools was that a standard VII leaver knew far less English than a standard IV leaver in earlier times.'<sup>3</sup>

Very many speakers in this under-50 category have poor pronunciation with marked interference from Kiswahili's vowels, especially vowels at the end of words. This gives rise to utterances such as 'the oldi mani was firsti in the bus' (*'the old man was first in the bus'*), 'Eating fruit is good for my healthi' (*'eating fruit is good for my health'*). There is a distinct reluctance to pronounce the 'y' at the end of English words, such as 'Please come to my part on Saturday night' (*'please come to my party (parti) on Saturday night'*). This can give rise to funny sentences, such as 'He is in the custod' which sounds to an English person as if 'He is in the custard' (custard is a very sweet sauce)! It should be '*He is in custody*

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<sup>2</sup> The italics in smaller font represent the correct English that is meant to be said or written

<sup>3</sup> John Benson "A Complete Education?" Observations about the State of Primary Education in Tanzania in 2005

(custodi)’. Most primary school teachers today are in this category of under-50 year olds with poor spoken English.

Written English is admittedly difficult, and spelling is not mastered by many native English students these days. However, most noticeable in written English in Tanzanian schools is the lack of command of grammatical structures.

### **History of English language teaching in Tanzania and the use of the NOEC<sup>4</sup>**

#### ***1927-1950***

The Tanganyika Territory Syllabus of Instruction – under the Authority of the Education Ordinance 1927 and the Education Regulations 1934 (printed in 1935) together with the Tanganyika Territory Syllabus of Instruction for use in the schools of Tanganyika Territory as prescribed by the Director of Education under the Authority of the Education Ordinance 1927 and the Education Regulations (printed in 1939) refer to the use of the textbook: Michael West Series, The Oxford English Readers for Africa or equivalent for the reading component of the syllabus, and gives short paragraphs of advice for the other components of conversation, translation, writing, dictation, spelling, grammar, composition and repetition. **With the opening of Middle Schools in the 1950s English was introduced as a subject in Standard V and used as a medium of instruction from Standard VII onwards.**

#### ***1950-1958***

In 1952 the Tanganyika Department of Education Provisional Syllabus of Instruction for Middle Schools **again states that English as a subject is introduced in Standard V.**

The syllabus stated that, ‘No provision for the separate teaching of formal grammar, dictation or composition is made in this syllabus, as these subjects are taught incidentally as part of the Oxford English Course, the adoption of which in full is recommended.’

#### ***1958-1970***

There followed the *Tanganyika Department of Education Provisional Syllabus of Instruction for Middle Schools 1959*. **In 1958 English was introduced as a subject from Standard III onwards.**

In the *Tanganyika – Ministry of Education Approved Primary School Syllabus for Standard I to VIII* printed in 1963 in Swahili it stipulates the use of the *New Oxford English Course* Book 1 to Book IV for standards III to VI. The syllabus for Standards VII and VIII is written in English and stipulates the use of the *New Oxford English Course* Books V and VI respectively. This, with amendments, remained in force until March 1970. However, from 1966 NOEC Book 6 was no longer used as Standard VIII was abolished.

At that time children started primary school aged 7 and entered Standard I. **They started learning English in Standard III. At the end of Standard IV there was selection to go to Middle School. At Middle School all subjects were taught through the medium**

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<sup>4</sup> NOEC – *New Oxford English Course* by F G French CBE. Oxford University Press 1956–1961 with revisions

**of English.** Middle School was from Standard V to Standard VIII, but in 1966 Standard VIII was abolished and from then on all Middle School children only attended Standard V to Standard VII. At the end of Middle School there was selection to go to secondary school.

### ***1970-1980***

**In early 1970 English was introduced in Standard I.**

### ***1980-1997***

In 1980 the Ministry of Education decided to change **the year in which primary school pupils began to learn English** from Standard 1 to **Standard III**. The English Language Syllabus for Primary Schools Standards III-VII 1986 was a response to the Ministry's decision. At that time the number of periods allocated to English learning was dramatically reduced.

### ***1997-***

Coming full circle again, it was announced in 1997 that from 1998, in some regions, **English would again be taught from Standard I**. The English Language Syllabus for Primary Schools Standard I to VII 1997 was a response to that decision. [A comparison of language items and the stages at which they were/are taught is in Appendix 2.]

### *Periods allocated to English*

In the years when the NOEC books were in use the primary schools (Standard III to Standard IV) had 7 periods a week for English, that is about 280 periods in the school year. In the Middle Schools (Standard V to Standard VII or VIII) there were 11 or 12 English periods each week (although it should be noted that there were 3 class periods on Saturday mornings). Since 1997 there have been 6 periods of English per week for Standard I and II, eight periods per week for Standard III and Standard IV and seven periods per week for Standard V, Standard VI and Standard VII – so a range of 240 to 320 periods in the school year. It is worth noting that in Norway each of the seven years of primary school is given 328 teaching hours of English (equivalent to 480 periods or 12 periods a week).

### *New developments*

Now there is also an English syllabus for pre-primary schools; a two year course for 5 to 7 year olds.

The design of a primary foreign language course has above all to be responsive to the actual local context and to take account of the level and nature of the available expertise. Practice has to be shaped by actual circumstances. The current English curriculum for the primary schools does not reflect the actual circumstances and is a reason for the continuing problems.

Before examining what is needed to deliver the primary English syllabi for children from aged 5 to 14 (that is the entire English course from pre-primary through to Standard VII) it is important to consider the development of children.

### **Don't forget the children: How do children learn?**

It is important to bear in mind the stages of development of children when assessing or planning a primary language course. For an overview of Piaget and Stages of Cognitive Development see Appendix 1.

In addition attention should be paid to how the brain works. Glover and Bruning<sup>5</sup> have summarised six major principles of cognitive psychology as they relate to instruction:

1. Pupils are active processors of information
2. Learning is most likely to occur when information is made meaningful to pupils
3. How pupils learn may be more important than what they learn
4. Cognitive processes become automatic with repeated use
5. Metacognitive skills can be developed through instruction
6. The most enduring motivation for learning is internal motivation

There are also considerations of the 7 intelligencies put forward by Howard Gardner<sup>6</sup> which take account of functions of the different sides of the brain. (see p15 below)

There is strong empirical evidence to support younger pupils' superiority in oral and aural performance irrespective of formal or informal settings. Young learners appear to possess a superior 'sound' system which enables them to imitate sounds more accurately, and increasing age shows a decline in the quality of native-like pronunciation.<sup>7</sup>

However, before looking at foreign language learning a brief consideration of a child's acquisition of his or her mother tongue or native language is useful.

L1<sup>8</sup> acquisition is a monumental task with five main components<sup>9</sup>:

- i. phonology
- ii. vocabulary
- iii. grammar
- iv. discourse (how sentences are put together such as stories, explanations)
- v. pragmatics (rules about how to use the language).

The speaker must have control over all five to be a native speaker, and, therefore, it is a major undertaking in the first five years of a child's life.

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<sup>5</sup> John A Glover and Roger H Bruning *Educational Psychology: Principles and Applications*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Little Brown 1987

<sup>6</sup> Howard Gardner *The Untrained Mind* London, Harper Collins 1993

<sup>7</sup> D Singleton *Language Acquisition and the Age Factor* 1989 Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd; E Hawkins *Awareness of Language: An Introduction* 1984 Cambridge University Press; M Vilke *Some Psychological Aspects of Early Second-language Acquisition* 1988 Journal of Multilingual Development

<sup>8</sup> L1 refers to native language (language 1)

<sup>9</sup> See *One child, two languages: a guide for preschool educators of children learning English as a second language*, Patton O Tabors 1997

The child's L1 development is broadly:

5-8 months = syllables, ba, ma

12-18 months first words, and turn-taking in conversation.

The process of learning culturally appropriate ways to use the language continues throughout pre-school years as the child learns rules of politeness etc. During pre-school years children engage in extended oral language development and acquire 6-10 new words a day while broadening their understanding of meaning of words they know, and grammar.

When a child learns a foreign language, eg English, he has no native speakers of English at hand whom he may imitate – nor does he receive as much social encouragement as learning L1. Possibly patterns of speech of his L1 are in conflict with those of English especially in the early stages. Most striking is the relative lack of powerful motivation. In learning L2<sup>10</sup> the teaching must be systematic, progressing from one point to another in regular fashion. Structural patterns must be taught in an orderly way, and therefore insight into grammar or structure is absolutely essential, and is central to L2 learning.

Learning English is an important task: learning new habits and skills. It is more like riding a bike or learning to swim than learning history or geography. Learning new habits is a matter of practising new patterns of behaviour, not of learning facts. So, the learner must be shown patterns that recur regularly and practise them systematically. The whole of English should be broken down to a limited number of regular patterns. If pupils practise all these regularly and systematically they can quite quickly acquire a mastery of speech habits in English.<sup>11</sup>

L2 is acquired after the basis of L1 is established. However, for child learners it is important to compare cognitive capacity and cognitive demand. The older the child the greater capacity for cognitive capacity. The older the child the greater the demands made on him. Young children might not be better or quicker language learners but if they know a little it impresses others because of their overall cognitive ability.

So, the belief that primary schoolchildren were *ipso facto* better language learners than older children has not been upheld.<sup>12</sup>

Factors affecting L2 acquisition are aptitude (some are more talented at languages), social (some are more outgoing and talk more) and psychological (some are more motivated because they want to become like people who speak L2).

There are three other factors at least which affect a child's progress in language acquisition: motivation; exposure; age.

1. Motivation: the child must want to learn L2. This is an actual decision for children, a decision to take on the process of learning L2. Even if the child has made that decision then he may stay in a non-verbal phase for ages. Wanting to communicate with people who speak that L2 is crucial if acquisition is to occur.

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<sup>10</sup> L2 refers to the foreign, second, language being learnt (language 2)

<sup>11</sup> L A Boadi et al (ibid)

<sup>12</sup> See Steven H McDonough, *Psychology in Foreign Language Teaching* 1981

2. Exposure: the quantity of exposure to L2 in a learning environment
3. Age: young children are at an advantage because expectations of what they must learn is quite low. They don't have to use L2 in as sophisticated a way as older children. But young children are at a disadvantage because their learning capacity is not very great. Therefore, young children may take longer to move along the developmental pathway, and young children may spend a longer period in a non-verbal phase; the younger the child the longer in the non-verbal phase. Younger children take longer to acquire formulaic phrases because of the need to develop strategies for breaking down phrases into useful pieces and to create productive phrases in L2.

Motivation is perhaps the greatest factor: 'Let us say that, **given motivation**, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data.' (Corder, 1967)

Alongside motivation the incentive value of success is another most important factor. For teachers and writers of the language materials there are five 'strengths' to bear in mind.<sup>13</sup>

1. Relevance – of the content to the pupil's own language needs
2. Completeness - inclusion of all the language necessary for the stated aims of the course
3. Authenticity – the material should be both linguistically and culturally authentic
4. Satisfaction – the pupil should leave each lesson feeling he has benefited more than simply progressed
5. Immediacy – the pupil can use the material in a lesson straight away

The first three above apply overall to courses and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> more particularly to individual lessons. It is not to be expected to find all five present in any one piece of teaching material.

The analysis below of the *New Oxford English Course* books by F G French shows how all of the above were incorporated, while an analysis of the textbooks that followed the NOEC shows that they were lacking in these 'strengths'.

Studies have indicated<sup>14</sup> that early success is more likely to be followed by favourable attitudes at later stages, and with success at later stages. Nothing succeeds like success! Thus, the content of a primary English course needs to be motivating and to fulfil the above so that pupils can succeed.

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<sup>13</sup> See E Stevick, *Evaluating and adapting language materials*

<sup>14</sup> Steven H McDonough (ibid)

## The current situation in the primary schools and classrooms and the root causes of the problems

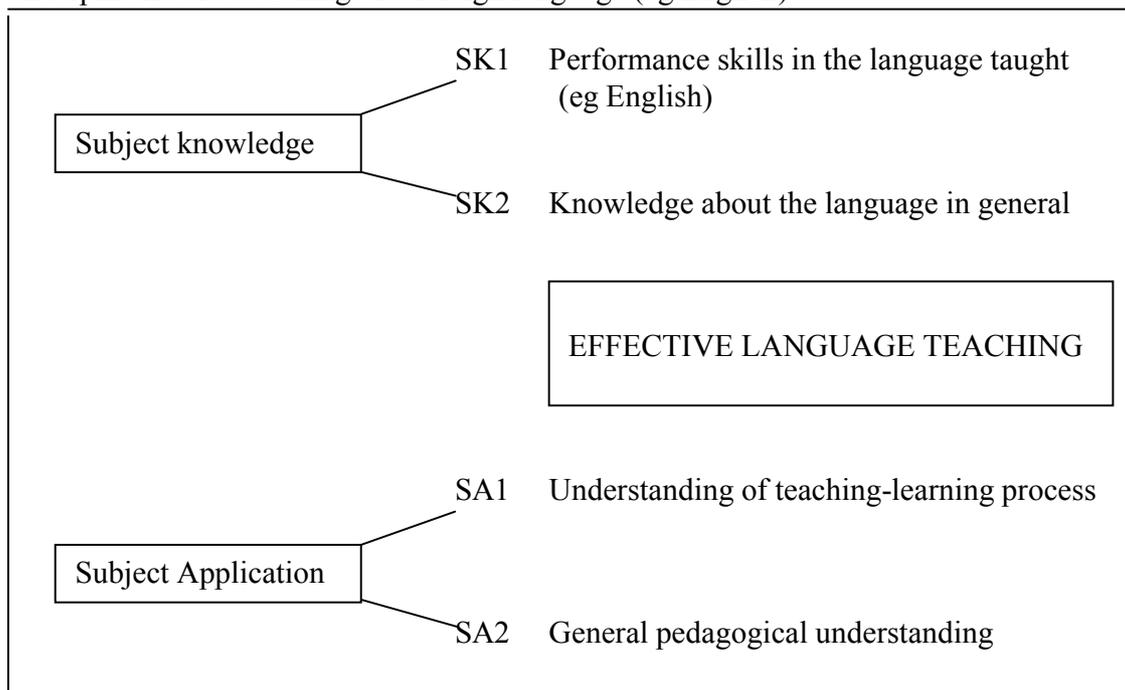
It seems fair to state that the majority of primary school teachers have an insufficient command of English to be able to teach it effectively. Good command of grammar and vocabulary is lacking and alongside this the most striking failing is in the pronunciation. Interference from Swahili and particularly its ultimate vowel sounds is the main problem. Many teachers are vehement in their refusal to teach English, and if they are assigned to do so they feel victimised and may not teach all their time-tabled periods. In the lower standards the teaching of English may be ignored altogether.

Teachers with insufficient subject knowledge have very little if any confidence.

Teacher training should be concerned with two elements:<sup>15</sup>

1. **Subject Knowledge** – ensuring that the future teachers know and understand enough about what they are to teach to be able to teach it effectively
2. **Subject Application** – ensuring that the future teachers know and understand enough about how to teach what they are to teach to be able to do so effectively

This table suggests how the elements of subject knowledge and subject application underpin effective teaching of a foreign language (eg English):



<sup>15</sup> Keith Sharpe *Modern Foreign Language in the primary school in England – some implications for initial teacher training* 1999 Routledge

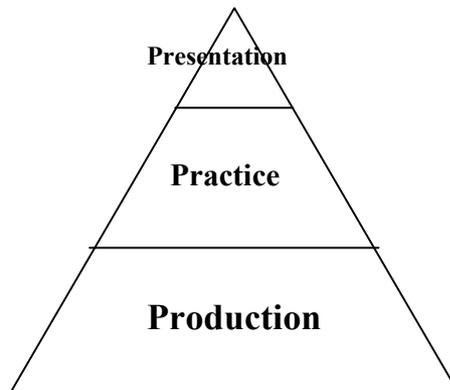
Subject application cannot take place without subject knowledge. Without subject knowledge it is unfair to place expectations on primary school teachers of child-centred learning or participatory practices. Where do you start if you yourself do not understand the textbook information?

From observations in schools it is apparent that lack of subject knowledge is the main root cause of the present problems in teaching English in primary schools. Many teachers are fairly confident teaching the present continuous tense for an action in progress at the time of speaking, eg 'we are clapping, I am speaking, they are crying' etc. This particular use/meaning of the tense leads to pupil participation and so it is popular to teach. The trouble is that it then becomes overused and mis-used. The other uses/meanings of the present continuous tense are not taught and possibly not understood or known by the teachers, such as an on-going activity ('I am learning French', 'I'm losing weight') or a planned future activity ('I'm meeting Anna this afternoon').

The present simple tense perhaps is the least understood of the tenses. It is, of course, neither 'present' nor 'simple'. It is though one of the most important tenses as through the auxiliary verbs (to be, to have, to do) it forms the root for forming other tenses. Because of its difficulty it is given insufficient attention. 'I speak', but 'he speaks' is one of its difficulties, but forming questions and negatives become even more difficult – 'he speaks' but 'he does not speak', 'we run' but 'do we run?', etc. That is only the 'form' of the tense. The use/meaning is difficult to convey. According to the text book 'labels' it is used for fact, (I live in Dodoma), for instructions, ('take two eggs and whisk'), for habit, ('I get up at 5am every day') for future timetabled events, ('I fly to Nairobi tomorrow') etc.

Bigger problems come to light with the present perfect ('I have lived here for 5 years' 'he has lived here since he was 3'), past perfect ('I had arrived before lunch') and future perfect tenses ('I will have arrived by 10am'), and the biggest problems of all are encountered with the passive tenses (eg 'The book is torn', 'The bag has been mended' 'The egg was being whisked'). Other problems arise with reported speech (eg 'He said he didn't want to go') and question tags (eg 'It's good weather isn't it', 'We don't want to go, do we?')! How can a teacher plan for a pupil-centred lesson when his or her own knowledge of the language and structure is so shaky?

How can a teacher aim for his or her pupils to progress down the 'PPP pyramid' when he or she cannot freely produce the language? The PPP pyramid is the classic guide for methodology in teaching new grammar, structures and vocabulary. The top P of the pyramid is 'Presentation' when the teacher presents and models the new structure and its form and meaning. The second P is 'Practice' when the pupils use the new structure at first in very controlled practice and then moving to freer practice. Ultimately the aim is to achieve the third P of 'Production' when the pupils produce the new structure naturally on their own. If the teacher cannot himself or herself attain the less controlled Practice and cannot Produce the structure freely, how can she or he plan for pupil-centred lessons with the structure? The fear of not knowing how to correct or even whether things are right or wrong is overwhelming.



The teachers' dependence on the text books is total, and there is utter dependence on the teacher's book for the correct answer. Often the answer in the teacher's book is the teachers' only clue as to the meaning or structure - a bit like working out the meaning of the kitendawili from its answer, or a crossword clue from its solution.

Planning a lesson is the most important stage if real pupil-centred learning is to take place, but no planning of this kind is taking place while the majority of teachers do not fully understand their materials. Unavuna unachopanda!

However, even when subject knowledge is mastered much help is needed with its application if the primary pupils are to learn and understand. The best and most widespread example of this is the teaching of 'my' and 'your' in the early Standards. I have observed numerous classes where the teacher holds up his or her pen and says 'this is my pen'. That is repeated by the teacher several times who then asks the pupils to repeat after him or her 'this is my pen'; a classroom of pupils then says 'this is my pen' while not holding a pen but looking at the teacher's pen! All meaning of the sentence is lost. Yet is hard to believe that the teacher does not know the meaning of 'my' and 'your'. It is that she or he cannot apply the meaning. It is difficult to teach. You cannot explain "don't say 'my pen' because it's my pen and not your pen so say 'your pen'" as that is far more complicated than needs be. One way is to demonstrate pointing to your nose and to demonstrate to the class 'this is my nose', then tell all the pupils to point/touch their nose, and while touching their noses each pupil says 'this is my nose'. They can then touch the nose of the pupil next to them and say 'this is your nose' etc. Another method is for the teacher to stand behind a pupil (so that what the teacher says is conveyed as what the pupils must say) and to make sure he or she is holding a pen, touching his or her nose etc. and to help him or her to say 'this is my pen/nose'. The meaning should then be clear. Teaching in this way would eliminate the endless 'give me my pen' that is heard from children on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro when they see tourists!

Another root cause of the problem is that the teachers are not assisted by their materials. The materials are not prepared with the level of available teacher expertise in mind. The teachers need help and help is not being provided. Teachers are not even being treated as out-patients and yet the reality of their condition is for treatment in intensive care. The

only way to arrest the decline in English is to help the teachers as much as possible. It is not a task that can be ignored. It requires careful planning and an injection of money but not so much money that it is impossible. Taken step by step with a planned process there is no reason why English should not be well taught in the primary schools and why there should not be a cohort of competent, confident English teachers.

The teachers need textbooks with many more classroom activities and exercises set out. The greatest need is for the teacher's books to be in Swahili so that the teachers can understand the instructions and explanations. They need training materials written in Swahili. There is no longer any point in preparing all the teachers' materials in English when it is known that many of the teachers do not have competency in English to understand them, and that they will be put-off reading them because of the language barrier. The teachers need spoon-feeding: training materials must be written in Swahili and more importantly the teachers' textbooks must be in Swahili so that all the explanations of structure, meaning and how to conduct classroom activities are in Swahili. It is pretentious and suicidal to continue to give all these materials in English. Most other countries give all these materials to their teachers in the teachers' L1 (so in England teachers who teach French nevertheless have all their teachers' materials written in English)

Spoon-feeding the patient must start with proper communication and the only language that all teachers fully understand is Swahili. This is not a suggestion that Swahili is used in the classroom. It is merely stating that if the teachers are to understand the material it must be explained in Swahili. If teachers are to increase their knowledge of English then explanations must be in Swahili.

Another root cause of the problem is the allocation of teachers. An important point is the division between teachers:

- those who teach in pre-primary and Standard I and II
- those who teach Standard III and above.

The pre-primary teacher and the Standard I and II teacher is with his or her pupils all day long. The teachers of English to Standard III and above only enter the classroom for the periods allocated to English.

It has also been observed in most schools that the headteachers have a tendency to allocate 'weak' teachers to the younger classes. This is most apparent in Standard I and II, where teachers with no special skills in mathematics, English or science are often allocated to teach. In pre-primary it depends whether the school has been sent a trained pre-primary teacher; if it has not then the headteacher tends to allocate a teacher with no special subject skills.

There is then a dichotomy: those teachers with the better skills only see their pupils for periods of 40 minutes at a time; those teachers with the lesser skills are with their pupils all day long and have a greater knowledge of each individual pupil and have the chance to use English at different times in the day and could use English for cross-curricular purposes. This is discussed below.

There is, therefore, a special case for re-addressing the teaching of English to pre-primary, Standard I and Standard II pupils. Not only are their teachers with them all day long, but these pupils are at ages where their development and ability must be carefully considered when producing teaching materials and syllabi.

There is a separate case to be made for re-addressing the teaching of English to Standard III pupils and above. These have English for only 40 minutes at a time given by the allocated English teacher. However, their age and development permits the use of different materials from those of the younger children.

After all, if now, higher levels of English language are expected to be provided up to Standard II than in previous year, then the demand on teachers' subject knowledge for the upper Standards of primary school will be considerable. It seems that the teacher expertise for this is not yet available.

The separate cases of pre-primary to Standard II, and then that of Standard III to Standard VII will be considered in turn.

### **English for pre-primary pupils, Standard I and Standard II pupils**

Account needs to be taken of the age of the child, the expertise of the teacher and the allocation of time for English teaching.

We know the children are from ages 5 to 8/9.

We know that the children are only just beginning to learn to read and write and are slowly gaining literacy and numeracy skills in their L1.

We see from what has been observed that the teachers have little subject knowledge and very little confidence in English.

We know that the time-table can be flexible as the same teacher is with the pupils all day.

Research shows the longer the period of initiation the better the level attained by the pupils, but there appears to be a saturation threshold above which increased time is less effective; frequent short lessons are more successful than less frequent longer ones. Teachers who are with their pupils all day can have frequent, short lessons.<sup>16</sup>

The pre-primary pupil is in the stage of pre-operational thought (following Piaget's stages of cognitive development – see Appendix 1). They are egocentric and can often only cope with one thing at a time.

The Standard I and Standard II pupil is in the stage of concrete operations. They are more sociable and can understand new concepts and ideas with 'concrete' experiences.

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Johnstone *A Research Agenda for Modern Languages in the Primary School* Routledge 1999

It is also at these ages that the child has a good 'sound' system and can imitate sounds accurately. It is also at these ages that the child is more receptive and has an attitude of openness and curiosity. This attitude declines with the onset of adolescence.<sup>17</sup>

However, the teachers mostly allocated to teach pre-primary, Standard I and II have little subject knowledge of English, and in most cases their pronunciation is not good.

The training aim therefore needs to prioritise three main objectives:

1. Equipping the teachers with secure knowledge of the basic structures, vocabulary and pronunciation which can underpin:
  - a. effective real use of English in routine events in the classroom
  - b. some specific teaching of elements of English within a planned scheme
2. Developing in the teacher a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards English
3. Enabling the teacher to apply principles of effective primary teaching to the specific instance of English teaching

The primary teacher needs to acquire a sound knowledge of:

- The sound system of the language – accurate pronunciation/intonation
- The alphabet and the numbers
- Personal language – yourself, your family, where you live
- Descriptive language – people, animals, clothes, houses, town, weather, food and drink
- Affective language - likes/dislikes, feelings, emotions, aches and pains, praise, terms of endearment
- Classroom language - daily routine, greetings, instructions, teacher language for organising pupil activities, pupil language for asking for permission, for help, for solving problems
- Language to cover activities from other curriculum areas such as maths, or physical education
- Language needed to play games; to teach children poems, songs, tongue-twisters; to tell and act out with the children simple popular stories in the foreign language<sup>18</sup>

Every session should include a certain number of regular, predictable classroom routines that make heavy use of language repetition and patterned teacher-pupil interaction. All teachers could potentially be trained to conduct ordinary class routines in English – taking the register, collecting money, lining up, writing the date, distributing or collecting books and files, celebrating birthdays can all be easily accomplished through the medium of English by teachers whose training has made them committed to the importance of doing so. Given a willingness to do so, these are not difficult matters to master, and the constant repetition eases the learning process.

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<sup>17</sup> E Hawkins *Awareness of Language: An Introduction* ibid; M Byram and P Doye *Intercultural competence and foreign language learning in the primary school* Routledge 1999

<sup>18</sup> Peter Satchwell *Teaching in the Target Language* Routledge 1999

This is a pragmatic approach to the introduction of English learning which is based on a recognition that it is an important factor in educating the whole child. Where English is used naturally and reinforced in everyday contexts it develops subconsciously.

The teachers need a clear framework. They need models for pronunciation, a scheme of work and teaching ideas. Emphasis should be on the important mathematical and number-related work. Many children can count in sequence but are unable to manipulate the mathematics and need a great deal of practice. It is sometimes not appreciated by language specialists that, for the majority of children, honing of mathematical skills is still very important. With practice, children can calculate as quickly in L2 and in L1.<sup>19</sup>

English sessions should also include a number and variety of activities. In general the younger the children the greater the number of different activities they need. That attention span increases with the age of the child. Activities should be planned with attention to high and low energy requirements on the part of both teacher and pupils. – also of excitement, movement, physical and verbal involvement. A balance of active and passive activities, of listening and speaking.

Pupils' tasks should try to cover the notional 7 intelligencies put forward by Howard Gardner so that pupils learn English through using both sides of the brain and by doing tasks that involve not just linguistic but also mathematical thinking, spatial representation, musical/rhythmical activity, use of the body to solve problems and make things, encouraging understanding of others. This lends itself to using English in other parts of the curriculum where possible.<sup>20</sup>

As the majority of teachers teaching pre-primary to Standard II are not strong in English so the emphasis on games and activities lead naturally to opportunities for sustained use of English even for the least confident teacher because they rely on simple repetition, often with only minimal variation.

Used in this way the activities would build on:<sup>21</sup>

- The child's right to silence
- Opportunities to hear and re-hear the new language in a stress-free environment
- Learning through *all* senses
- Memory skills
- The holistic involvement (engagement) of the child

In foreign language learning motivation is everything. It is absolutely crucial that the pupil actually desires to communicate. A positive attitude is vital for success. The whole point is to promote the engagement of the pupil with the language and the culture in which it is embedded.

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<sup>19</sup> Glynis Rumley *Games and songs for teaching modern foreign languages to young children* Routledge 1999; Peter Satchwell *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Peter Satchwell *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Alison Hurrell *The Four Language Skills* Routledge 1999

The essence of primary modern languages is to be found in the four Cs of communication, culture, context and confidence. Ideally all primary pupils should be able to *communicate* at some level in *culturally* appropriate ways in specific real *contexts* with *confidence*, and to do so with positive enjoyment and enthusiasm. Teachers who are with their pupils all day are well placed to enable this to happen.<sup>22</sup>

### *Inter-cultural education*

Language is culture in motion (Sandra Savignon 1983), and language is a main element of culture. The study of English can help develop pupils' understanding and appreciation of other cultures and ways of life, and the process can be begun in the early years of primary school. Thus teachers of these early years who lack great subject knowledge of English language can be assisted to explore with the pupils cultural information of both their own culture and that of speakers of English. This should help to motivate the language learning and general interest in the language and speakers of it, for both the teacher and the pupils. For instance, an introduction of cultural symbols – flags, symbols associated with holidays and festivals, symbolic meaning of animals etc. Or an introduction of cultural products such as arts/artists, music, traditional children's songs and rhymes and games, traditional and festive foods. There are also cultural practices, such as forms of greetings, celebration of holidays, use of gestures, meals and eating practices, playtime activities etc.<sup>23</sup>

Information is best learned and retained if it is made meaningful to the pupils. Pupils might consider words from their tribal language similar to those in Swahili. The teacher might also point out some relationships and cognates between the Swahili language and English, and show how many English words the pupils may already be familiar with without realizing it.

An examination of the English curriculum in Norwegian primary schools was made, as the Norwegians speak exceptionally good English. It was assumed that their primary school syllabus would lay the foundation for this mastery of the language. Their curriculum states, 'Learning English may also give us better insight into our native language and other languages we know, thus becoming an important element in our personal development and making a significant contribution to our communicative abilities.' It also states that one of the aims of English language learning is that the pupil shall be able to:

- Identify areas where English is useful to him or her
- Find similarities between words and expressions in English and his/her own native language
- Use dictionaries and other aids in his or her own language learning

A young Swahili speaker learning English might be surprised to know that he/she already knows at least 20 words of English before he/she has any English language lesson. All that is needed is a little help with a change of pronunciation. It is suggested that the introduction of these words (examples are listed below) in some of the early lessons

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<sup>22</sup> Keith Sharpe *Modern Foreign Languages in the Primary School* Routledge 1999

<sup>23</sup> Curtain and Pesola *Languages and Children – Making the Match* Longman 1994

would give enormous motivation to the language learning. Work on the pronunciation at an early stage would also be most beneficial.

<b>Swahili</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Pronunciation tip for English</b>
Betri	battery	acceptable as it is pronounced in Swahili
Buluu	blue*	acceptable as it is pronounced in Swahili
Kompyuta	computer	acceptable as it is pronounced in Swahili
Kondukta	conductor	acceptable as it is pronounced in Swahili
Picha	picture*	acceptable as it is pronounced in Swahili
Pancha	puncture	acceptable as it is pronounced in Swahili
Basi	bus*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Begi	bag*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Benki	bank*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Blanketi	blanket	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 2-syllable word
Blausi	blouse	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Boksi	box*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Chipsi	chips	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Faili	file	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Glasi	glass*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Keki	cake*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Koti	coat*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Soksi	socks*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 1-syllable word
Televisheni	television	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 4-syllable word
Taulo	towel*	drop the final 'o' sound to make a 2-syllable word
Wikendi	weekend*	drop the final 'i' sound to make a 2-syllable word
Baisikeli	bicycle*	drop the final 'i' and stress the first syllable
Hospitali	hospital*	drop the final 'i' and stress the first syllable
Penseli	pencil*	drop the final 'i', and stress the first syllable
Redio	radio*	move the stress to the first syllable
Sekondari	secondary	move the stress to the first syllable
Shati	shirt*	drop the final 'i' and lengthen the first sound
Sketi	skirt*	drop the final 'i' and lengthen the first sound
Biskuti	biscuit	2 syllables with sound 'bisket'. Stress on 1 <sup>st</sup> syllable
Tangi	tank	drop the final 'i' and change 'g' to 'k' sound

\* Words appear in *A General Service List of English Words*<sup>24</sup>

### **Consideration of what is needed for good English teaching and learning for St III to VII**

The pupils in Standard III and above are at a different stage in their development from the younger pupils in the school. They are in the stage of concrete operations (ages 7 – 11) and later moving into the stage of formal operations (ages 11 – 15) (See Appendix 1 – Piaget's stages of cognitive development)

<sup>24</sup> *A General Service List of English Words* – Michael West, Longmans 1953 – a list of 2,000 'general service' words considered suitable as the basis of vocabulary for learning English as a foreign language. The semantic count was a count of the frequency of the occurrence of the various meanings and uses of words as found in a study of 5 million running words

Therefore, they can begin to cope with new concepts and ideas and have longer attention spans for study activities. They have also grasped basic literacy and numeracy skills in L1.

In these Standards they have different teachers for each subject and so cross-curricular study is not feasible. Cross-curricular study is desirable, but that would put an unreasonable burden on the teachers and is only something to be thought of in long-term planning for the primary school curricula.

The teachers are assumed to have subject knowledge of English but from our observations we know that this is mostly limited. In order for the teachers to increase their knowledge and to be able to teach more effectively it is essential that the teaching materials assist the teachers fully.

For the study of English, *Grammatical Structure and its Teaching* is worth quoting from at length<sup>25</sup>. The book was written just before the decline in English teaching had started in Tanzania. The following four paragraphs are taken from it.

‘Whatever the reason, the fact remains that many teachers have suffered a loss of confidence in themselves and what they have been teaching, and there has been a marked swing away from grammatical studies, which very often, if misconceived, did give both teachers and pupils something solid to hold on to. As a result the teaching of English seems to have lost whatever ‘backbone’ it may well have had, and standards have suffered.

‘Teachers who have some insight into how the forms of English language behave in certain circumstances – who understand its grammatical structure – ought to be able to teach it all the better as this knowledge can have considerable influence on the methods they use in the classroom. A knowledge of the structure is essential for the teacher and pupil of English. In the classroom the teaching and learning of structure is a foundation for the teaching of certain other aspects of English. When it comes to the content and method of teaching it is the teacher rather than the linguist who is – or ought to be – the ‘expert’.

‘The teacher’s primary need is for:

- As fluent command as possible of the language he is to teach
- An insight into its structure in a variety of registers
- A ready command of methodics and methodology of language teaching
- An understanding of the needs and problems of his pupils

‘Very often when ‘patterns’ of English are taught in primary school they are drilled in a meaningless way. Drills are important but before a drill the pupils must learn the meaning of the patterns being drilled. Otherwise the pupils cannot see the point and therefore there will be no motivation. In primary school the spoken medium predominates. Oral practice and ‘situational’ teaching will not of itself result in an improvement in control of the written language – the grammar of conversational English is different from the grammar of most varieties of written English. Many structures, eg non-defining clauses,

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<sup>25</sup> *Grammatical structure and its teaching* – L A Boadi, D W Grieve, B Nwankwo (Lagos: African University Press, 1968)

appositives, strongly contrasting clauses signalled by ‘but, while, whereas’ etc rarely occur in conversation. Therefore it is impossible to teach through oral work many of the structures and sentence-types most common and useful in writing. Oral work must be supplemented with specific instruction and practice in patterns of the written medium.’

The book also sets out some general principles:

- Spend at least 85% of the time on practice – 10-15% is ample for explanation.
- Concentrate on elements of structure causing difficulty to pupils (whatever the textbook may say)
- Ensure items previously learned are repeated at regular intervals (not in the form of set revision) but in the form of the repetition of items previously learned in the context of the presentation of the new items. Items not repeated constantly are soon forgotten.
- Keep class lively and active, associating as much language work as possible with activities inside and outside the classroom and with other school subjects.

The analysis below (p.21-23) of the *New Oxford English Course* books by F G French highlights how well those books adhered to and exemplified all of the above.

### **The New Oxford English Course**

It is worth considering in some detail the *New Oxford English Course* (NOEC) books. As will be appreciated Book One and Two used with pupils in Standard III and Standard IV aimed to get them to a sufficiently proficient level in English in those two years that they could enter Middle School and cope with all subjects taught in English.

The NOEC books were written between 1956 to 1961 with revisions. They were written by Mr F G French CBE<sup>26</sup>. I have spoken to many people who learned English using the

NOEC books and not only do all of them speak good English but they remember the books with great affection. They can recall the stories in them, and even name the characters in the stories. They quite clearly enjoyed their English learning, were motivated to learn, and understood their lessons and succeeded – hence their good command of the English language. So, what made the NOEC books so good?

The first thing to note is that all the NOEC books are accompanied by Teachers’ Notes which give comprehensive guidelines on how to teach each lesson. The ‘stages’ of each lesson are clearly set out, and take the place of lesson notes or lesson plans. For Books One and Two there is a Handbook. The Handbook for use with the Teachers’ Notes to Book One helps the teacher to organise the lessons and to understand parts of English speech. It also sets out extensively the various techniques to be used in teaching the language. Both Handbooks for use with Teachers’ Notes to Books One and Two give detailed lesson notes for each period with suggested timings, suggestions as to when to

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<sup>26</sup> Frederick George French, born 1889 and died 1963, also wrote the NOEC for Asian schools. He fought in the Great War in Burma and subsequently became a school’s inspector in Burma. Before his work in Africa he became a judge on the Channel Island of Guernsey. He was a generous benefactor to the Island, and commissioned a window in St Anne’s Church which depicts his work in Africa. He died in Guernsey with no known relatives.

explain things in Swahili to the pupils, the stress to be given to words and how to use teaching aids. It also highlights difficulties that will be faced by Swahili speakers and how to overcome these difficulties. The Handbook itself states, 'these Lesson Notes are to take the place of the teacher's own notes. This book should be on the teacher's table, open at the right place, while he is teaching, to remind him of the different steps of the Lesson, and of the method to be used for each step. It must be remembered, however, that these are only notes; that is, they are reminders of what the teacher has prepared.' So the Teachers' Notes and the notes and techniques contained in the Handbook were to help the teachers in the preparation of their lessons. The Lesson Notes within the Handbook were to be used not only during preparation but also in the classroom when teaching.

The author of the NOEC notes, 'Well-prepared lessons make confident teachers who enjoy their work and who pass on this enjoyment to their pupils. If both the teacher and the class enjoy their English lessons together, then the pupils are sure to be learning. It is the responsibility of the teacher, by careful preparation of his work, to make sure that what is learnt is correct'.

In addition the Teachers' Notes for Books One to Three each had a complete section on how to pronounce the words used in the pupil's book. Book One was also accompanied by wall charts.

It would have been even more helpful to the success of the NOEC if all the Teachers' Notes and Handbooks had been written in Swahili. If these books were translated into Swahili they would be an excellent teaching aid for the teachers, and indeed would be a learning aid for the teachers themselves to improve their English. In most countries the teachers' materials are in L1 to ensure that they are understood. To have teachers' materials in Swahili is not only essential and sensible but in accordance with primary teachers' materials for language learning in the rest of the world.

However, the most important key to the success of the NOEC books is the pupils' books themselves. The content is of meaning and interest to the pupils, drawing on their environment and people and things to whom and to which they can relate. The stories are mostly funny, and mostly follow the same characters through several episodes. The content is built up by endless repetition and revision; each lesson uses language items from previous lessons so that the language learning is continuous and not segmented. The exercises are many and various, and in the early books there is an emphasis on looking at words and pronouncing them and recognising them and differentiating them from similar words. There is built-in group and pair work, and lots of action suggested for the pupils to be able to demonstrate their understanding. Additionally, 95% of the vocabulary used in the pupils' books is within the 2,000 words suggested in *A General Service List of English Words*.<sup>27</sup>

It is stated in the Teachers' Notes to Book One, 'Most people agree that 'direct' or 'oral' methods are best for those beginning to learn a foreign language. Pupils taught by these methods will become so used to the correct sounds and sentence-patterns that those will come naturally to their minds without conscious translation from their own language. But no one can learn to speak a new language unless he has first heard it. The pupil, therefore,

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<sup>27</sup> *A General Service List of English Words* – Michael West (ibid)

must frequently hear the correct sound or pattern before he can say it correctly; and the teacher must repeat any new word or pattern several times before he asks the pupils to say it.

‘The framework of the English language is best presented in typical sentence-patterns. There are not very many of them, but the pupils should give their whole attention to each one. First they must hear each pattern, then say it, then practise it again and again. It is important that they should add to their vocabulary; but it is even more important that they should thoroughly master the patterns.’ This is in total accord with the findings stated on p20-21 above.

The NOEC’s author continues, ‘You will have observed that when an Inspector visits a school he is always much more concerned with how much, and how clearly and how correctly, the pupils can speak than he is to discover whether they have learned the Reading Book by heart. Moreover, if the Oral Work is not thoroughly well done, the teachers of all the following classes will complain that the groundwork is weak.’<sup>28</sup>

In the Middle School Handbook No 1, Standard V-VIII, Department of Education, Tanganyika 1960, it states that, ‘The teaching of English must be individual. Too much time is spent by the whole class, or part of a class, repeating in chorus words, phrases and answers to questions. The result of this kind of teaching is that:-

- a. Individual mistakes are not noticed, and therefore not corrected
- b. Many pupils at the back of the class sit doing nothing, or merely moving their lips in time with the rest of the class
- c. The pupils form a habit of speaking English in a sing-song way, each waiting for the next one to speak, and all speaking in a slow, unnatural way.

‘In various places in the Teachers’ Notes there are instructions that the whole class should read or say some words or sentences in chorus. These instructions should be followed, but at no other time should there be chorus work. All other spoken English should be by individual pupils.’

The guidance available to teachers was plentiful. The shortcoming was that all such guidance was not printed in Swahili. Indeed, as all teachers’ books accompanying textbooks teaching L2 in Europe and many other places in the world are in L1 it seems a shame that the decision was taken to write the NOEC teachers’ books and handbooks in L2 (i.e. English) and not in L1 (i.e. Swahili).

In conclusion it seems that the NOEC books were excellent for structural sequence; it was systematic, covered ground and proved to be successful. The stories in the books were of intrinsic interest to the young learners, and they had numbered sections for ease of comprehension work. The illustrations in the books depicting the basic concepts were clear and good. The exercises were plentiful and comprehensive covering, among other things, recognition, looking and reading, substitution frames for practice of structure patterns, good comprehension questions and games.

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<sup>28</sup> The role of Inspectors is not considered in this paper, but they too bear part responsibility for the decline in standards of English teaching

It seems that when the NOEC books were no longer the prescribed textbooks a syllabus or scheme was extracted from the language items introduced in the NOEC books (see Appendix 2). This would mark the beginning of the decline in English language teaching in the primary schools. Whilst the NOEC was an excellent series of books, its success depended on its details, its particular contents and built-in repetition and revision. Its Teachers' Notes and Handbooks were another unique feature.

The textbooks and subsequent syllabi introduced from 1970 suffered from a lack of detail, and contents that could not entertain or motivate the pupils.

Immediately following the use of the NOEC was English for Tanzanian Schools (Ministry of National Education, 1969-1973). Books VI and VII were highly criticised as being very dense in content, too difficult and inappropriate in content. Books I and II introduced novel techniques for Tanzanian teachers in that pupils were expected to work on their own. There were only short orientation courses for teachers for using the books. With hindsight the English for Tanzanian Schools books probably did nothing but hinder learning. In the early 1980s Primary English for Tanzania (PET) was introduced. However, no syllabus then existed in the schools. Teachers' Handbooks were not introduced at the same time as the textbooks. The PET books were 'not transparent as far as their use is concerned, and they do not provide the support for the teachers that they should. The books have been written by panels and lack the coherence and imagination that a smaller and more skilled set of authors might have produced. Perhaps an opportunity was missed to introduce an interesting coherent primary textbook which would have encouraged a much more active and oral approach to the language. They also contain errors of English and of design which have received much criticism.'<sup>29</sup>

In Primary English for Tanzania, and most textbooks that followed, each chapter or unit was a self-contained entity that bore little relevance to what went before or after, and so items already learned were not practised, and hence were not remembered. The teachers' books lacked any detailed guidance and had very little, if any, help with the correct pronunciation of words or the rules of the grammar.

Things could have improved in the early 2000s with the opening up of the school textbook market to private publishers and the permitted multi-textbooks. However, the standards in teaching English had already declined by then, and many teachers were not equipped to be able to choose the best books for their purposes. It seems that the introduction of the multi-textbook system has not assisted the teaching of English in primary schools. Also it seems that textbooks are written by authors with TEFL experience but who are not primary school teachers. A textbook must take into account the way children learn and the natural stages of child development within the context of a primary school classroom.

Indeed, the *Report on the Teaching and Learning of English in Primary Schools in Tanzania-Mainland* by the Ministry of National Education as far back as 1982 went so far as to assert that 'the teaching and learning of the English language in Tanzania's

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<sup>29</sup> *Report on the Teaching of the English Language and its use as a Medium in Education in Tanzania* – Dr C Criper and Mr W A Dodd. July – August 1984

primary schools at the moment is very bad.’ In 1984 Dr Criper and Mr Dodd conducted a nationwide survey<sup>30</sup> and concluded ‘At the end of primary education after five years of English the average score of the pupils tested was only 4.0 i.e. barely capable of reading even a picture story book simplified down to the level of using 300 headwords and the present tense. Put another way 68% of Standard VII pupils are unable to read and understand any connected text at this level. ... The level of learning implied here is such that one must question whether these five years have not resulted in a waste of resources.... The current level of English of the majority of primary teachers is extremely low. It is clear that little progress can take place at the primary level until the proficiency of those teaching English in the classroom has been substantially upgraded.’ There may have been some improvements since the 1980s but none significant, and in the intervening period many of the teachers with good English have retired. Indeed, in *The Daily Mail* and *The Citizen* of 20<sup>th</sup> December 2007 The Honourable Minister for Education & Vocational Training, Mrs Sitta, was quoted as saying, ‘The ministry has noticed with great concern the poor performance in the three subjects (English, maths and science)...’ when in the Standard VII results for 2007 only 31.31% passed the English paper. Mrs Sitta also noted the lack of competent teachers in those key subjects and said that poor performance posed a major challenge to the government’s drive to improve both primary and secondary education.

There are also many teacher absences and, therefore, many English periods are untaught. Indeed, out of a total of approximately 38 teaching weeks or 190 days, if you deduct 10 working days taken to collect salaries, 10 days for other absences, 30 days for weekly/monthly tests and, say, 10 days when lessons are missed for whatever reason, then the teaching year is reduced to 130 days or 26 weeks or only half a year.

As Mr French wrote in the NOEC Handbook for use with Teachers’ Notes to Book One, ‘Lessons, that is one year’s work, have been divided into 232 periods, but the seven English periods a week on the time-table make a total of about 280 periods in the school year. This leaves about 50 periods for giving extra practice, or for days when lessons are not taught because the teacher is absent, because there is a special holiday, or because of rain etc. A good teacher should be able to finish Book One in a year, but it is important that at least the 232 periods outlined in the books should be taught.’

The textbooks available today give little guidance as to the periods to be used for each topic or section. They give no such lee-way for absences and untaught periods but are, on the contrary, lacking in content. For example, the NOEC Book Three pupils’ book was 138 pages long, whereas the equivalent St V books had/have the following: English Language for Primary Schools Book 5, 61 pages; English for Tanzanian Primary Schools book 5, 70 pages; Oxford English for Tanzania 5, 107 pages. Quantity does not necessarily equate with quality but the NOEC provided quality teaching material with ample guidance for the teachers.

It appears that the cause of the decline in English teaching is in part due to the syllabus, the textbooks and to the teachers themselves.

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<sup>30</sup> *Report on the Teaching of the English Language and its use as a Medium in Education in Tanzania*, Dr C Criper and Mr W A Dodd. (ibid)

## **What can be done? Recommendations**

The easy option is to blame the teachers, but this ignores the fact that they are the result of the system they are in. Their pre-service training needs to be considered, their on-the-job support needs to be considered and any continuing professional development needs to be considered.

The present teaching force is shouldering the brunt of the continuing problem of the teaching and learning of English. They are the teachers in post and are the resources with which we have to work. The only solution is to give these teachers who are currently in post every bit of support and help possible.

From the analysis above, it seems that what is needed is separate consideration of English for the younger learners in pre-primary and Standard I and Standard II, and for the older learners in Standard III to Standard VII.

Recommendations for the younger learners in pre-primary, Standard I and Standard II take account of the fact that the pupils are only just beginning to gain literacy and numeracy skills in Swahili. They are in the stages of pre-operational thought moving to concrete operations (Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development). Recommendations are for:

- frequent, short sessions of English using a number and variety of activities, and these should take account of the notional 7 intelligencies using both sides of the pupil's brain. Regular routines in English to show practical, real application by using English for classroom routines such as the register, lining up, writing the date, distributing or collecting books etc.
- inter-cultural in-put to provide motivation and to promote interest in the Tanzanian culture and that of speakers of English – eg in learning about flags, music, children's songs, rhymes and games, food, gestures, playtime activities etc.
- examination of language and its influence to show that young pupils already know several English words without realising that they do so.

This would assist the teachers who have weak language ability themselves in English, but who can learn set phrases, structures etc. The teachers need a clear framework, models for pronunciation, a scheme of work and teaching ideas. It is not sufficient to leave these teachers with inadequate support. They must now be spoon-fed with lesson plans, detailed ideas for games and activities and material for inter-cultural studies, as well as basic structures, words and phrases for them to conduct classroom routines in English as well as delivery of some specific English tuition.

Recommendations for the older learners in Standard III to Standard VII are for:

Materials that will ensure that:

- Teachers have confidence in the grammatical structure of the English language
- A text book that introduces structural patterns step by step giving at least 85% of the time to practice with constant revision and repetition of content of grammar and vocabulary

- A text book that provides motivation for the pupils
- A teachers' book that is comprehensive, with guidance on the structural patterns and pronunciation and written in Swahili

The latter point that teachers' books and handbooks be in Swahili should, in the author's view, be the very first step undertaken. All European countries, and many others too, in all their teaching of foreign languages in primary and secondary schools have the teachers' books in L1. Indeed, usually too all the instructions in the pupils' books are in L1. This can only help and not hinder the acquisition of the foreign language. So, teachers' books should be mostly written in Swahili, and possibly instructions in the pupils' books should be in Swahili too.

As the teaching of English is in a state of crisis and action needs taking sooner rather than later it is important not to re-invent the wheel. It is important, therefore, not to rush to a 'quick fix' solution which in practice will remedy nothing and will have incurred time and cost. If it is accepted that the teaching of English in the primary sector is in crisis then that recognition brings us all half way to finding the solution. Only when the patient admits he is ill and needs help can medicine start to be given.

In the short to medium term it would seem sensible to accept the only tried, tested and successful text book for re-admission to the primary sector for Standard III to Standard VII: a reissue of the NOEC.

What else would provide certainty that the teaching would be systematic, progressing from one point to another in regular fashion; that English would be broken down to a limited number of regular patterns and that these would be practised regularly and systematically; that new habits and skills be learned by practising the patterns of behaviour of the language; that the pupils enjoy the content and are motivated to learn?

Reissuing an old book is not unprecedented. Afterall, some things are timeless and high among those are good children's stories and sound principles of English language teaching. In the NOEC there are both.

The priority would be to translate the NOEC teachers' books and handbooks into Swahili, which is not a hugely overwhelming task, and to consider the instructions in the pupils' books being put into Swahili too.

Before the suggestion to reintroduce the NOEC is laughed out of court, I would challenge the reader to:

- Get hold of the NOEC books and particularly to read the Handbooks to Book One and Two and to appreciate the detail and depth with which the course was designed for Swahili speakers
- Speak to people over the age of 50 and ask their opinion of the NOEC
- Ask those people if they understood their English lessons and enjoyed them
- Think what else can be done (and it needs to be done fairly quickly) to arrest the declining standards in the teaching of English in the primary schools.

If the NOEC was re-introduced it is contended that the advantages would be immediate:

- ✓ The teachers could learn on-the-job by being taken through the structural patterns step by step with their pupils
- ✓ The teachers would be helped by the thorough guidance in the teachers' books and the pronunciation guide in them
- ✓ The pupils would be provided with sufficient practice of each step for the meaning and structure to be thoroughly understood
- ✓ The pupils would be motivated by the stories and by the classroom practice exercises

The only need is for the teachers to be committed to teach all their periods – but this concern is present now, and remains a concern with whatever solution is adopted to address the current problem. Indeed the number of periods of English should be increased.

This medium-term solution should be envisaged to be in place for at least 15 years (that is, at least two complete sets of primary school pupils). The reintroduction of the NOEC with the teachers' books in Swahili would give the teachers an opportunity to learn on-the-job, as they would, initially, be learning with the pupils from the course books. The NOEC is tried and tested, and those over 50 year olds are here to stand testament to its success in English language learning.

Within this period there should be considered a complementary radio programme series (in conjunction with a national newspaper for advance schemes, timetables, written records etc) taking teachers through a step-by-step guide to basic English with emphasis on pronunciation. In addition short, residential courses could be conducted in school holidays in Teacher Training Colleges. Possibly native speakers could be used liaising with British Council, VSO or the US Peace Corps.

Within this medium-term the authorities could work on a completely new syllabus for English language teaching in primary schools. Such a syllabus could take into account that many more pupils progress to secondary school from primary school, and so the seven years of primary school need only provide a good foundation in English, and not a complete, definitive course. For instance, the need to have question tags, reported speech, the passive voice, form-filling and business letters as part of a primary school English syllabus could be reconsidered.

If English teaching is to succeed in the primary schools in the future there are a number of important key issues which have to be addressed: initial teacher training, in-service support, continuity within the primary school, continuity from primary to secondary, and leadership.

The process of educational change has 3 dimensions: *materials* and *pedagogical practices*, and the extent to which an innovation requires a significant shift in the

teachers' fundamental *values and beliefs*.<sup>31</sup> So, any model of development to adopt in relation to primary English has to be responsive to questions of the teachers' beliefs about the value of language learning and the importance of intercultural activities. In order to develop primary English successfully we need to increase quite radically the number of primary teachers having sufficient expertise and the confidence to tackle the job of teaching English.

But these issues to do with the development of the teachers cannot be considered independently of issues to do with the role of the school as an organisation in managing the process of change, mobilising individual teachers and providing the ongoing support they will need.

This means avoiding the shortcomings of those top-down staff development strategies designed to achieve implementation of a particular innovation in record-breaking time, and choosing instead to concentrate on developing a climate for successful curriculum and professional development. This involves the development of 'total teachers' through strategies which take seriously 'the teacher's purpose, the teacher as a person and the real world context in which the teachers work'.<sup>32</sup>

There is the need to avoid 'many staff development initiatives that take the form of something that is done to teachers rather than with them, still less by them'.<sup>33</sup>

Planning is absolutely crucial. It is contended that 5-year programmes (so time-constrained because of available funding) are not successful in government schools in the long-term. Many such programmes have 'been and gone' and primary school teachers not only can't remember the essence of the programmes but more importantly have not changed their practices. A long-term programme is needed if 'deep change' is to be attained. If on visiting primary schools there is little or no evidence of pupil-centred learning, as is contended in this paper, then the teachers need further help to be able to develop towards pupil-centred learning. The suggestions above would help achieve this aim.

There should be no shame or blame in admitting that the teaching of English needs serious reconsideration. This is now the time to work for practical and realistic solutions. The author's suggested solutions above arise out of her passion about education and her passion to give Tanzania's government primary school teachers and children the best opportunities possible.

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<sup>31</sup> Fullan M *The new meaning of educational change* London 1991

<sup>32</sup> Fullan M and Hargreaves A *What's worth fighting for in your school?* OU 1992

<sup>33</sup> Fullan M and Hargreaves A *ibid.*

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## Appendix 1 Piaget and Stages of Cognitive Development<sup>34</sup>

The child develops cognitively through active involvement with the environment, and each new step in development builds on and becomes integrated with previous steps. Because three of the four stages in development normally occur during primary school years it is important for language teachers working with children to keep the characteristics of each cognitive stage in mind. (Piaget 1963) They are as follows:

1. *The stage of sensory-motor intelligence (ages zero to two years)*. During this stage behaviour is primarily motor. The child does not yet internally represent events and 'think' conceptually though 'cognitive' development is seen as schemata are constructed
2. *The stage of pre-operational thought (ages two to seven years)*. This stage is characterized by the development of language and other forms of representation and rapid conceptual development. Reasoning during this stage is pre-logical or semi-logical, and children tend to be very egocentric. Children often focus on a single feature of a situation at a time – for example, they may be able to sort by size or colour but not by both characteristics at once.
3. *The stage of concrete operations (ages seven to eleven years)*. During these years the child develops the ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems. Hands-on, concrete experiences help children to understand new concepts and ideas. Using language to exchange information becomes much more important than in earlier stages, as children become more social and less egocentric.
4. *The stage of formal operations (ages eleven to fifteen or older)*. During this stage the child's cognitive structures reach their highest level of development. The child becomes able to apply logical reasoning to all classes of problems, including abstract problems not coming out of direct experience or without concrete referents.

The thinking skills of the majority of children in primary school are at the concrete operations stage, and experience plays a major role in all learning. Piaget points out that children are not simply miniature adults who have less experience and thus less knowledge to work with as they approach problems and new situations. They do not think like adults, because their minds are not like adult minds.

As individuals develop they add new layers of sophistication without shedding the qualities and characteristics of earlier layers. Each stage contributes something vital and necessary to the mature adult's ability to make sense of the world and human experience (Kieran Egan: Educational Development . OUP 1979).

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<sup>34</sup> Taken from H Curtain and C Pesola *Languages and Children – Making the Match* 1994 Longman

**APPENDIX 2: THE NOEC AND SYLLABI TOPICS**

<b>Language item</b>	<b>NOEC</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1997</b>
	Bk St		
this is a ...	1 - St III	St III	St I
this and that	1 - St III	St III	St I
the ....of the	1 - St III	St IV (not 'of the')	
pres cont - 1st pers sing	1 - St III	St III	St I
pres cont - 2nd & 3rd pers sing	1 - St III	St III	St I
preps: on, in, under, near	1 - St III	St III	St III
over, behind, in front of	1 - St III	St III	St III
my, your, his, her	1 - St III	St III	St III
parts of the body	1 - St III	St III	St II
plurals - z sound	1 - St III	St III but no pron work	
them, they	1 - St III	St III	
plurals - ss sound	1 - St III	St III but no pron work	
plurals - iz sound	1 - St III	St III but no pron work	
have ... has	1 - St III	St III	St II
parts of the body - plural	1 - St III	St III	St II
colours & other adjectives	1 - St III	St III	St II & III
simple past tense - 3 irreg verbs	1 - St III	St IV	St IV
simple past tense - in -ed	1 - St III	St IV	St IV
negatives - don't, didn't	2 - St IV	St IV	
simple present tense revision	2 - St IV		
simple present tense - habit	2 - St IV	St III	St III
going to + inf (future)	2 - St IV	St V	St V
time phrases eg on Sunday, never	2 - St IV	St III	St III
countable and uncountable	2 - St IV	St IV	St IV
can - for ability	2 - St IV	St IV	St V
conjunctions; and, but, when, then	2 - St IV	St III	St II
questions; what, where, who etc	2 - St IV		
simple future - will	2 - St IV	St IV	St IV
why - because	2 - St IV	St V	St V
comparative adjectives	2 - St IV	St IV	St IV
why - because	3 - St V	St V	St V
instructions	3 - St V	St V	
past continuous tense	3 - St V	St V	St V
relative 'who'	3 - St V	St V	
countable and uncountable revised	3 - St V		
simple future revised	3 - St V		
relative 'which' 'what'	3 - St V	St V	St VI
superlatives	3 - St V	St V	
1st conditional	3 - St V	St VI	St VI
modal auxiliaries	3 - St V		St V
use of apostrophes	3 - St V	St IV	St V
all, every, some, none, many, a few	3 - St V	St V	
present simple passive	3 - St V	St VII	St VII
present perfect	3 - St V	St IV	St V
2nd & 3rd conditionals	3 - St V	St VI	St VI
past perfect (introduction)	3 - St V	St VI	
ordinal numbers	3 - St V		
punctuation	3 - St V		

Language item	NOEC	1986	1997
	Bk St		
revision of known tenses	4 - St VI		
relatives	4 - St VI		
phonic units	4 - St VI		
assisted composition	4 - St VI	St IV	
adverbials for time relations	4 - St VI		
constructions conveying comparisons -	4 - St VI		
- positive and negative	4 - St VI		
opportunity for dramatic work	4 - St VI		
numbers & quantities - constructions	4 - St VI		
interrogative constructions - old & new	4 - St VI		
infinitive phrases eg 'what to do'	4 - St VI	St VI	St VI
past perfect tense	4 - St VI		
passive voice forms	4 - St VI	St VII	St VII
indirect questions	4 - St VI		
reported speech/ present simple tense only	4 - St VI	St VI	St VI
until	4 - St VI		St VI
compositions with less assistance	4 - St VI		St VII
grammar - naming parts of speech	4 - St VI	St VI	St VII
more grammar - naming parts of speech	5 - St VII	St VI	St VII
composition - controlled	5 - St VII		
spelling	5 - St VII		
modal auxiliaries - instructions	5 - St VII	St VI	St VI
vocabulary	5 - St VII		
composition - free	5 - St VII		
spelling - plurals	5 - St VII		
revision of possessive pronouns	5 - St VII		
addressing envelopes	5 - St VII		
letter writing	5 - St VII	St VI	St VI & VII
adjectival phrases	5 - St VII		
with' - with a knife, with his father, etc	5 - St VII	St V	
sentence order	5 - St VII		
revision of 'too'	5 - St VII		St VII
adverbial phrases	5 - St VII		
revision - countable and uncountable	5 - St VII		
sentence construction - controlled	5 - St VII		
<i>Additional language items</i>		time telling St IV	nationality
		question tags St VII	
		form fillings St VII	