

ENGLISH FOR EVERYONE

English is a world language. Most reading materials are in English – that is text books, novels, instruction manuals etc. The internet and world of computers is dominated by English.

Without English your horizons are limited.

ENGLISH IS EVERYWHERE – BUT IS IT FOR EVERYONE?

The author believes that most people in Tanzania would like to be able to speak English and to read books in English.

What is stopping them?

English is not a difficult language. To reach a good intermediate level in English is possible for everyone. At advanced level the English language does have difficulties, but an intermediate level is quite sufficient to speak and read English.

Nearly every Tanzanian child of school age goes to primary school. This is where English is taught. But this is where English is not being learnt.

What is wrong? The teachers are teaching English but the pupils are not learning English.

Years back, pupils started to learn English in Standard III. They learned English in St III and St IV; that is for just two years. Those pupils then went to Middle School and everything was taught in English – maths, geography, biology were all taught using English. Those pupils coped and had no problems. They thrived and they received a very high standard of education.

Today pupils are taught English from St I or St III to St VII and they go to secondary school and cannot cope with studies in English.

Years ago after just two years of English pupils could manage their education in English. Now after seven years of English pupils cannot manage their education in English.

What has happened?

Well, the syllabus has changed and the textbooks have changed. Those are the causes of the problem.

Other factors such as the teachers themselves, large class sizes, poor school buildings, are of less significance. It is the syllabus and the textbooks that have caused the enormous decline in the teaching and learning of English.

What can be done?

The solution is easy – but it is not quick. Searching for a quick solution is to invite further failure.

The solution is to go back to how things were when they worked. There is then no fear of ‘innovation’ or ill-suited materials. Things were tried and tested and they worked well.

Bring back a good, sound syllabus accompanied by a proper course – that is a series of textbooks that are linked one to the other so that there is steady build-up of sentence patterns, structures and vocabulary with repetition and revision for those patterns and structures to be thoroughly learned.

Individual textbooks by different authors which are for a specific Standard/year and have no link to the book before or after are part of today's big problem in learning English.

A good course book has teacher's books which give step-by-step guidance on the language being taught and how best to teach it. The teacher's book should be bigger than the pupil's book if real guidance is within it.

Teachers who are properly guided with good material that interests the pupils and is written with full recognition of how children learn and how their brains develop, will be able to teach English so that pupils learn. Today English is merely taught and very few pupils learn.

Let's copy what worked so that English is taught and learned. English can and should be for everyone.

Katy Allen MBE

The author is an expert in English as a foreign language and has lived and worked in Tanzania for 21 years. She is the editor of the New Original English Course (NOEC) which is based on the NOEC books from which so many Tanzanians learned their English.