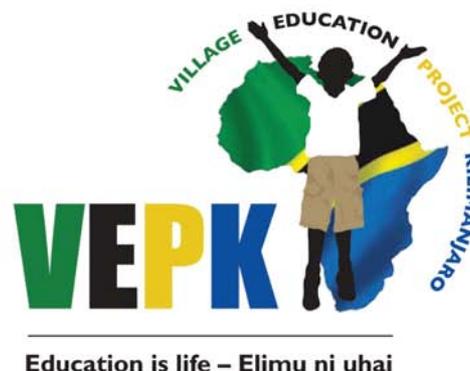


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GET READY FOR NOEC AND NOEC FOR ENGLISH IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Get Ready for NOEC – A Language Course for St I and St II

Background

The vast majority of teachers allocated to teach Standard I and Standard II are not competent in speaking the English language and, therefore, have great difficulty in teaching it. The books available give them very little guidance on how to teach, and even less guidance on how to pronounce the words.

However, teachers of Standard I and Standard II are in the unique position of being with their pupils all day long. Whilst periods in these two standards are allocated 30 minutes each, it is possible for the teachers to extend or shorten a lesson if they see fit. It is, therefore, possible for these teachers to adopt a 'little but often' approach with any part of the syllabus, so long as the topics are covered. This is very useful when dealing with young children whose attention span is limited and who might find a topic difficult to grasp, and so need the information to be given in easy, small steps.

The structures, grammar, sentence-patterns etc introduced in the NOEC are introduced so well and thoroughly, and ample guidance is given for the teachers. It is considered important that the structure of that book is not interfered with by introducing pupils to any of the sentence-patterns in an earlier course. Such prior introduction would adversely affect the pupils' understanding, pronunciation and enjoyment as it could not be introduced as well as is provided in the NOEC. The pupils are too young to grasp the structures, the teachers are not equipped to model the sentence patterns, and any language items learned badly take forever, if at all, to relearn correctly.

In order to help the teachers whose language ability is limited, and to be of benefit to the pupils the Get Ready for NOEC course comprises Language Awareness (LA) and Language Input (Lin).

The course

Its aim is to introduce the pupils to some English words most of which have already been adopted into the Swahili language (such as, jaketi, koti, blausi, sketi, shati). The course also aims to introduce pupils to the world around them and to countries where native English speaking people live. The overall aim is to motivate pupils to learning about language and to learning the English language.

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The course places emphasis on listening to the sound of Swahili words, and how to change the sound to make the English word. In this way the pupils should quickly learn many English words but with very little effort as those words are already in their own language.

In the first year of the course there is also an emphasis on pencil drawing as a prerequisite to learning to write. Pupils need to practise pencil control and arm/hand control before they can start to learn to form letters. There is practice of various shapes that will help them learn different families of letters.

The course aims to bring together work the pupils have done in Swahili, maths and science and so acts as a base for general knowledge and for reinforcement of numeracy and analytical skills.

The course aims to engage the whole class and to increase the pupils' confidence. It is essential for the teacher to build a rapport with his/her class, and the lesson notes provide for many questions of and discussions with the class using a 'think - pair - share' technique. It is important that a lesson is not conducted with a few, keen, confident pupils, but that all pupils are involved. Guidance is given for pupils to work in pairs and then in groups of four for every question to be discussed and then the teacher to get feedback from each group. In this way many more pupils will speak and discuss, and different pupils can be chosen to speak on behalf of their group to give the answer to the teacher.

The course has been specially designed with knowledge of the language input that is to come in Standard III English lessons. These two years are devoted to making sounds of English and hearing the stress, and to learning something about the world of native English speakers and finding similarities with the pupils' world.

Language Awareness topics are introduced and taught through the medium of Swahili, and consider aspects of: Tanzanian culture and traditions; the Swahili language and other languages spoken in Tanzania; the English language and speakers of it and the countries in which it is spoken. The Language Awareness topics tie-in with other parts of the curriculum, so that parts of Swahili, mathematics and science can be looked at in a slightly different context. The Language Awareness topics also begin to introduce the pupils to the bigger world around them and particularly to the people in it. This is to provide interest in the speakers of English and motivation for learning the English language.

Language In-put topics introduce the pupils to words in the English language that can be taught and introduced without great difficulty, and will serve as a useful introduction to the pupils' future English studies. Language Input topics also focus on easy number work, so that the pupils' basic understanding of numbers and number-bonds is reinforced.

Some topics are solely Language Awareness, and some are solely Language Input, but some topics combine the two.

NOEC – New Original English Course for St III, St IV, St V, St VI and St VII

These books are an amended version of the very successful New Oxford English Course books which were previously in use in all primary schools.

Teacher's books

The first thing to note is that all the NOEC books are accompanied by Teacher's Notes and, for Book One and Book Two by an additional Handbook. These are presented in Swahili so that the teachers can understand the explanations and instructions, and easily see the target English language which is printed in red ink. For help with the target English language, each Teacher's book has a dictionary, and a pronunciation guide which guides the teachers how they can make the English sounds using sounds from Swahili words.

The teacher's books 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 Teacher's 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. The Teacher's Notes to Books One and Two give detailed lesson notes for each period with suggested timings, suggestions as to when to 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 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.'

'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.'

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. The NOEC books provide a solution to this.

Pupil's books

The most important key to the success of the NOEC books is the pupil's 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 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.

The author was concerned to build word-recognition and then phrase-recognition. His overall aim was to prepare pupils for reading comprehension as this would form the basis of their work in their future education. This was achieved through much oral preparation, some specific preparation for each reading/story, and then many and varied questions on the reading. Eventually this builds up to structured composition work.

In conclusion the NOEC books are excellent for structural sequence; it is systematic, covers ground and provides variety of activity and of topic. The stories in the books are of intrinsic interest to young learners, and they have numbered sections for ease of comprehension work. The illustrations in the books depicting the basic concepts are clear and good. The exercises are plentiful and comprehensive covering, among other things, recognition, looking and reading, substitution frames for practice of structure patterns, good comprehension questions and games. A few examples are shown below to illustrate:

From Book Three:

1. Here are sixteen sentences. Read them all:

When I was	working in the garden sitting under a tree walking along the road coming down the hill	I	saw a lion found a big ant spoke to a man heard a baby cry
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2. There are five pictures on page 4 and two pictures in the story which begins on page 7. Find the pictures for:

The animals were walking one behind the other.

When he spoke to the servant, he was near the gate.

When he was outside, he was looking at the footmarks.

The man was holding a stick.

The others went, but the tortoise did not go.

3. If the word has *ou* in it, say, 'Hum.'

If the word hasn't got *ou*, read the word:

Bottom	cotton	about	corner	count	drove
Cough	food	though	good	grow	would
Hoof	should	wood	could	know	over
Outside	sugar	shout	sound	through	soon

These examples are taken out of context but show some of the variety and level of the exercises, although their success lies in their context and the comprehensive practice they provide.

History of English in primary schools and the current situation

The teaching of English in Tanzania (Tanganyika) has an interesting history:

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 was written in English and stipulated the use of the *New Oxford English Course Books V and VI* respectively.

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 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.

In early 1970 English was introduced in Standard I, and the NOEC books were no longer used in Tanzania.

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. 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.

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. Research shows that many people who learned English using the NOEC books not only 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. From 1970 the books were not used and from then standards declined.

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 primary schools at the moment is very bad.' In 1984 Dr Criper and Mr Dodd conducted a nationwide survey 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.’ The recent UWEZO report echoes this which suggests that there has been no improvement, and probably further decline.

Adoption of the NOEC books

The New Original English Course provides certainty that the teaching will be systematic, progressing from one point to another in regular fashion; that English will be broken down to a limited number of regular patterns and that these will be practised regularly and systematically; that new habits and skills will be learned by practising the patterns of behaviour of the language; that the pupils will enjoy the content and be motivated to learn.

Reissuing an old book is not unprecedented. After all, 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 activities, the topics, and the illustrations are excellent, the books contain all the 'communicative' activities and moreover present the vital structural material in a systematic and coherent fashion.

The advantages will be:

- The teachers will learn on-the-job by being taken through the structural patterns step by step with their pupils.
- The teachers will be helped by the thorough guidance in the teacher's books and the pronunciation guides in them, and the methodology that is made accessible to them.
- The pupils will be provided with sufficient practice of each step for the meaning and structure to be thoroughly understood.
- The pupils will 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.

The NOEC is tried and tested, and those over 50 years old are here to stand testament to its success in English language learning. The quality of the books can only really be appreciated by those with direct knowledge of the current crop of Tanzanian primary school teachers, who have spent time in Tanzanian primary school classrooms, and who have familiarised themselves with the NOEC books themselves having sufficient Swahili to see the thorough guidance given in the teacher's books.

The books have been approved as an ideal basic course for Tanzanian primary schools by the ex-Minister for Education (the Hon. Professor Maghembe), a committee convened by the Tanzania Institute of Education, the Prime Minister (the Hon. Mr Pinda), and by His Excellency the President, Dr Jakaya Kikwete.