RHODES UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH PORTFOLIO
Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION
(GENERAL EDUCATION THEORY AND PRACTICE)

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Current professional position and responsibilities:

Subject Advisor for ESL at Upper Primary phase My responsibilities amongst others are to advise and develop classroom teachers professionally in the subject area of English; entails visits to schools to establish a classroom environment conducive to efficient subject teaching and learning; assist teachers not only to employ a variety of methods, but also to judge what is appropriate for an individual learner at a particular time and to engage in joint planning with schools as well as to run subject related workshops.

Academic background and interests:

Obtained HED (sec) at the University of Namibia (UNAM) in 1996 with English and Economics as majors. Obtained a B.Ed (Hons) in 2000 with Rhodes University of South Africa.

Research interests:

Entails an examination on the effect of methodology in teaching English as a second language in Primary schools. My other research interest is to investigate the following: Is the first three years of mother tongue teaching enough to enable learners to acquire the skills needed for the switch over to English medium of instruction.

Community and outreach interests:

A member of men against violence against women, an NGO that advocates against violence and other forms of abuse against women and children.

Leisure Pursuits:

Like watching soccer, reading (is so close to my heart), and listening to Jazz music.

The achievements of which I am most proud:

Having moved so fast in my professional career as a teacher to where I am today. Most importantly, when I obtained my first degree with one of Africa's prestigious University – Rhodes University.

My hopes and expectations for my Masters' course:

Hope to further add and broaden my personal horizons on different issues in education by looking at educational theories and practices with well informed critical lenses, and to eventually obtain the degree so that I will be able to contribute meaningfully to Teacher Education in Namibia.

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Research Assignment No: 1

ASSIGNMENT TOPIC: A Contextual Analysis of the Upper Primary
English Syllabus / Curriculum

Due date: 27 April 2002

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1. Introduction

Namibia's Ministry of Education set itself five goals after Independence in 1990: equitable access to education, improvement of internal efficiency, quality, life-long learning and democratic participation. The post-independence reform process was initially spearheaded in the development of a new uniform curriculum in the secondary school phase, followed by a reform of the Primary Education Curriculum. Concern about the efficiency and quality of the Namibian Education System has been increasing since shortly after Independence. This paper thus aims to investigate the Upper Primary Education Curriculum with specific emphasis on the subject syllabus for English Grades 5–7. The paper shall attempt to look at the rationale, goals and aims as well as the learning content located in this subject curriculum. It will further investigate the socio-historic and economic context in which this curriculum has been designed; the learners for whom the curriculum is designed and the learning environment in which the curriculum is presented.

2. Research Methodology

Due to the nature of the study, I decided to employ three methods of data collection: observations, interviews and document analysis. The observation method was used to get a feel for the atmosphere and to obscure the teaching techniques that teachers employ. I thus observed two upper primary level teachers to see the way they managed the subject syllabus. Through this method / tool I was able to see how children learn and interact with their fellow learners. As an observer, stationed in the back of the classroom, I was therefore able to freely observe whether there was active learning taking place in the classroom or not and the correlation between classroom teaching and the syllabus.

The second method used was through interviews that I conducted with learners and teachers. Interviews allowed me to verify what had been observed in the classrooms as well as to get individual concerns where each participant / interviewee was given ample time to express his / her opinions and beliefs about the content and materials used in the lesson relates to the syllabus. Participants are always more willing to talk than to write (Best and Khan 1993). Questions lead to further questions for more clarity. The interviews were restricted to the learners and teachers of the schools where the study was conducted. This exercise also enabled me to get answers concerning teaching philosophies, lesson planning and the availability of materials, in that my questions were answered in greater depth. It is imperative to mention here that the answers I received helped me when I eventually embarked on my document analysis method, as I compared any possible compatibility that exists between the stated goals of the syllabus and the responses received from the participants.

The third and last method used was document analysis. The document analysis method enabled me to have a look at the policy articulated formally, in terms of officially promulgated documents or through statements by various politicians and educators. Much of my contextual analysis in this paper adopted this tool as it has a direct link to the stated policy formulation around the reform process in Namibia. This also means that by going through the syllabus and the Day By Day prescribed textbooks, in use, for grade six and seven in search for answers to questions raised by the research assignment.

3. The Analysis

3.1 Observations

This instrument of information gathering was employed to get a feel on the teaching methods teachers use.

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Learners exercise books, note books and tests sheets were examined to find out about the general assessment procedures and techniques teachers use on the whole. I decided to observe teachers at two Senior Primary Schools in the Rundu Circuit.

Classroom observations revealed that in teaching reading, emphasis is on remembering facts from the passage and identifying parts of speech from the passage. They reported that their learners have difficulty in reading for comprehension and writing coherently. This is not surprising since the skills being emphasized cannot foster reading and writing in any effective way. There is very little focus on meaning by teachers as the syllabus itself is communicative oriented and many teachers as was evident find it difficult to implement the communicative approach to language learning and teaching. While language skills are appropriately isolated and dealt with, there is need to integrate them at some point, so that what children read about, they could also talk and write about to facilitate further skill development. Many teachers find it difficult to use the integrated approach as prescribed by the syllabus.

Topics are taught in such a way that every item is isolated and not related to one another. In other words, the syllabus does not provide room for ideas to be developed from "whole to part", instead everything is "part". For instance, a reading passage should be read first with a focus on meaning and the leading questions should be those asking the learners to relate what they have read to their lives or experiences. This will assist learners to read holistically. In another observation, the teacher introduced the lesson with good preparation, by reading a passage to learners, prior to grammatical structures. Attempts were made to place these in context of sentences, but following this, the typical method observed in the classroom was the use of closed questions, recitation and choral responses. There was almost no opportunity for learners to express their own ideas.
This limitation on opportunity to use English to verbalise thought is considered to be the major reason why learners find it difficulty to re-tell a story as required by the syllabus objectives.

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Though the learner-centred approach to teaching and learning has been around for sometime now in the country, only a small percentage of teachers are competent in this method. It is evident that teachers lack the appropriate skills to teach language. They also lack the theoretical understanding of what language is and how it is best learned, due to a lack of guidance how to teach it.

Assessment was examined in a number of ways: looking at children's exercise books, at the monthly tests they write, at questioning techniques used in the classroom and at final examination papers of Senior Primary level. A closer analysis of the final examination papers revealed that the examination does attempt to test the skill stipulated in the syllabus such as reading for comprehension and language usage and grammar. However, what is lacking in the examination is the reflection of the content of Day By Day, as no questions are meant to reflect the skills that the book fosters such as writing reports, book reviews and summarizing. It was also noted that some of the examination and test questions do not reflect the learners' cultural perspectives. An analysis of learners' compositions indicates that teachers are interested in testing for form and not meaning. For instance, even when a learner has expressed an idea correctly, the teacher would insist on his or her way of expressing it.

An analysis of the tests learners wrote indicates that most questions are knowledge oriented, they require learners to recall what was taught, for instance, a wedding, and not necessarily what they know, think, like and dislike about it. A review of the syllabus, teaching materials, teaching methods and assessment strategies for the Upper Primary Phase indicates that the teachers find it difficult to implement the syllabus' content. Teachers have limitations in language teaching methods. They continue to employ rote learning in the syllabus, materials and assessment procedures. While some teaching materials are communicative in intent and nature, their assessment techniques tend to be structural in orientation.

3.2 Interviews

This data collection technique was used (on a small scale) to solicit responses from the participants on the syllabus and teaching materials. I thought of some relevant questions that might reveal and give insight to the evaluation of this particular curriculum:

3.2.1 Evaluation of the Syllabus, its Goals and Suggested Activities:

(a)   Are the goals clearly stated?

(b)   Do they address the needs of learners and users in and outside the classroom?

(c)   What other goals and aims need to be added in light of the reform process?

(d)   Are the activities in line with stated goals, that is, is there compatibility between the goals and the activities meant to achieve them?

The above questions were used during the interviews with the teachers. The following were the findings:

Teachers interviewed confessed that they feel that they are competent in the content of the syllabus (which focuses on descriptions of language) but very weak on the methodology aspect. They further reported that they do not have a reservoir of strategies for teaching the various language skills. Teachers further complained of a lack of teachers' guides at their schools, which could assist them on the methodologies to be employed in the learning process. They obviously believe that such teachers' guides will clearly state the skills, knowledge and attitude to be fostered. It was also noted that teachers want the reintroduction of activities or aspects such as poetry and literature into the curriculum. Teachers felt that by doing so goals such as 2.4, 2.7 and 2.8 (see appendix 1) will better be realised as poetry and literature can assist learners in the development of a wider general knowledge, critical abilities, moral values and above all about their cultural heritage.

3.2.2. Evaluation of the Materials:

(a)   Are materials appropriate to achieve the syllabus goals?

(b)   Are they appropriate for the grade level?

(c)   Are they culturally relevant?

(d)   Is there compatibility between syllabus goals, materials, goals and activities?

The Day By Day recommended textbook:

The above-recommended book was reviewed in terms of the above questions of this particular aspect. Both teachers and learners felt that this recommended teaching material is difficult for learners given the learners' socio-historical backgrounds. They expressed that the material lacks the cultural relevance of many learners in Namibia. Teachers felt that the textbook is not closely linked to the syllabus activities and the teacher has to decide how to fit them in. In other words, its relationship to the syllabus is not obvious in terms of the organisation of teaching. While both teachers and learners expressed the opinion that the book does have study or guiding questions that lead discussions or bring out the message of each story, the limited content on the various aspects of the Namibian culture militate against this intent. In that sense the textbook fails to match one of the syllabus objectives that calls for the study on the various cultures and traditions of ethnic

groups represented in the country.

While its main focus is not necessarily on teaching the four language skills, it does have some lessons on organizational skills. The Day-By-Day textbook also covers a variety of skills such as following directions, reading a table and using the dictionary. The book includes some contemporary topics which appeal to the youth such as 'music-makers'.
A further analysis of the textbook however indicates that the book in question lacks some language features teachers need to instill in children.

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For instance, this prescribed textbook was described by teachers as not having synonyms and antonyms. One of the weaknesses of the material is its limited attention to provide opportunities for sustained silent reading, self-selected reading or report writing. As the topics are interesting, some exercises should require learners to do further reading on the topic and write a report as a way of developing the skills. By using the project method learners can find more information from parents and write such reports.

3.3 Document Analysis: the Grade 5-7 English Syllabus

According to White (1986) a syllabus is a programme for teaching. It states both the aims and the content of what a teacher will teach, and may also say something about the methods and textbooks that the teacher and learners will follow. Traditionally, language syllabuses have been structurally organized. Thus, the syllabus consists of a list of structures and vocabulary, carefully graded and sequenced (White 1986). In support of White's idea, Richards and Rodgers (1986) perceive the term 'syllabus' as the overall organizing principle for what is to be taught and learned. They further describe it as a general statement as to the pedagogical arrangement of learning content.

Identifying Strengths, Weaknesses and Gaps within the Syllabus:

3.3.1 Syllabus Goals and Aims

In examining the goals and aims for Ten Years of Basic Education, it is noted that the teaching of the English language in the curriculum becomes more apparent. The syllabus concentrates on the execution of the aim 2.2 (see appendix 1) with a strong emphasis on learning across the curriculum. As English is the medium of instruction, conscious attention to language will and must be the concern of all teachers, not only the English teachers.

This aim of the subject curriculum is welcomed, but the danger exists that teachers in other school subjects may not have the subject knowledge to use the language correctly, as I believe that speaking a language is one thing, but to use it correctly is another.

This scenario may lead to the confusion of learners when it comes to language usage. None of the stated aims relating to English places emphasis on building self-confidence, pride, cultural identity and patriotism in Namibian children and a cultivation of love for their nation. This is an important aspect of a language syllabus in a democratic society. As it will become evident when I reflect and evaluate the syllabus content and the recommended textbooks in my latter analysis, none of the aims emphasise knowledge and appreciation of the diversity of cultures making up the total Namibian culture. The syllabus has clearly stated goals which address the need of the learners only in as far as schooling is concerned at the expense of the world around us. It does not provide enough guidance for teachers to teach and evaluate the learning process effectively. Whilst the goals could be compatible with the activities, sometimes the goals are insufficient and the activities are not clearly focused.

3.3.2   Syllabus Content and Activities

In examining the syllabus content, it is noted that the main skills to be taught in the programme are those of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and language usage. It clearly indicates the competencies each is supposed to foster. The syllabus rationale does not clearly refer to the communicative language teaching of English. It just refers to what it calls an 'integrated approach' to teaching these skills. However, when experienced enough or if initiative is shown the two links up very well. The communicative language teaching approach however is predicated on the belief that "form can best be learned when the learner's attention is focused on meaning" (Beretta 1989:233).

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According to this approach the learner's communicative abilities are developed not so much by the " time they spend rehearsing grammatical patterns but on the opportunities they are given to interpret, to express and to negotiate meaning in real life situations" (Pica 1988:2). This is the key concept of communicative language teaching which should influence our classroom activities because as learners express themselves and negotiate meaning, they are generating input which facilitates acquisition. Again, this approach emphasizes exposure to language as a communicative tool rather than on conscious knowledge of the rules. Knowledge of a rule is demonstrated by using the rule in a communicative situation rather than by stating the rule (Pica 1988). In a communicative approach, rules of grammar are discovered as language patterns as the child interacts with the language.

The suggested activities in the syllabus are not clearly focused to guide the teacher on the teaching strategy they could employ, except in a few cases. During interviews, teachers expressed this as one of the most frustrating aspects of teaching English. The syllabus is supposed to provide a frame of reference on the kinds of activities a teacher can do while providing for flexibility and innovation. The heavy emphasis on grammar takes the focus away from the development of the skill to a mere grammatical description. For instance, on page 14, the objective is "write creatively using parts of speech these are listed in the next column as "pronouns, adverbs and prepositions". It is clear that once the restriction of speech is imposed, the idea of creativity is automatically limited. The sequential development of topics by level of difficulty in the syllabus within a grade level seems appropriate but not so between grade levels. For instance, the level of difficulty increases from the first lesson in grade six to the last one. In Grade seven, instead of a further increase, in the first lesson it decreases to the level of lesson one in grade six and then starts increasing.

The progression is therefore within grades and not in between standards. To make this point more concrete,

1.1   In the Grade Six (p. 36) "listen to oral instructions and carry them out" is not only at the same level of difficulty as 1.1 in Grade Seven "listen to oral instructions and carry them out correctly" but are exactly the same. The suggested activities in the next column of the two textbooks are also exactly the same. The ideal would be for Grade seven to build on what has been learned in Grade Six. The progression as is in the syllabus can thus be conceptualized as:

Grade 6: 1.....................................10
Grade 7: 1.....................................10
Instead of
Grade 6: 1.....................................10
Grade 7: 3.....................................13

In this way the syllabus can be seen to be a recursive loop of learning and teaching activities that is trying to build on the existing knowledge of the learner.

The other area or aspect are the sub-topics under each skill should be greatly improved as they leave out key sub-skills. For instance, under "Reading", such sub-skills as inferring meaning, identifying cause and effect are not included. The learning activities in the prescribed textbook do not reflect more on the customs and beliefs of the Namibian traditions which make the activities more difficult for the learners to identify and deal with. To support the above argument (Bruner and Haste 1987:9) argued that "if there are disparities in the language use among contexts such as home, the school and in a learner's community, learners may have difficulty moving into the pattern of language use expected at school. When the child arrives at school, he /she encounters people (teachers) who use different forms of language for seeing the world".

And so, it may be difficult, if not impossible, for a child to develop a concept that does not have expression within his/ her culture of origin, either specifically in language or within other means by which communication is enacted.

3.4 How the Curriculum Addresses Issues Related to Democracy, Equity, Access, Redress and Quality

Schooling in this country was once the privilege of the few. Before independence, few children went to school, of those who did go to school, most did not go far. Initially, education for black Namibians was justified in terms of its vocational utility. For the most part, its task was to prepare people for the specific jobs that German and the South African rule required.

After Independence in 1990 the new democratic government deemed it important that education must be provided to the people on equal footing. Education has thus come to be understood as an investment in human capital (MEC 1993). To this end the government and the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture in particular set up four major goals inter alia: Democracy, Equity, Access and Quality to redress the imbalances of the past. I will now attempt to evaluate how each of the goals are addressed in this Upper Primary Phase English Syllabus.

3.4.1 Equitable Access to Schooling

The first commitment of the ministry is to provide equitable access to education and its benefits. Equity means that learners are not only treated equally, but that where there is inequity, measures are taken to redress it. Particularly in terms of race, gender and social class.

This does not only mean that the teacher treats the learners equitably, but also teaching the learners to treat each other in the same way as the policy document Toward Education for All (MEC 1993:37) espouses "Indeed, we cannot be sure that all learners have equal opportunities unless we have looked carefully at the outputs. For example, do girls stop their schooling more than boys? Are completion rates systematically and consistently higher in some regions than in others? Are race and ethnicity visible in the examination results? Achieving equity in results is far more complex and difficult than achieving equality of access."

To ensure equity, the Ministry of Education has at independence started to allocate additional resources to particular groups of people. In other words, the ministry did not nor does it accept a school system in which some children have sufficient textbooks in every subject as well as well equipped libraries and laboratories,

While other children sit on the floor in large classes, copy their texts from what the teacher has written on the chalkboard, and have neither libraries nor laboratories.

The goal of the ministry is therefore to enable the children between 6-16years to have access to a classroom. This can only be realized through equity, where no individual child is discriminated against because of her or his background or social status. The curriculum content is now the same for both the previously disadvantaged and the privileged few learners. Equity thus proposes that every Namibian child has a fair chance at succeeding in school. The training and placing of qualified teachers and efficient teaching personnel in both rural and urban centres is imperative to realize that goal. The upper primary curriculum targets to address all ability groups of learners in what they are able to do rather than what they cannot do.

3.4.2 The Goal of Quality

Curriculum reform is an on-going process. Society is dynamic and there are always changes in the knowledge, skills and values required by the employers of those leaving school and other levels of education for those continuing in school. Quality as a goal for Basic Education reform refers to how well our schools equip our children with the skills and knowledge they need to compete and co-operate with their counterparts around the world. Given the new curricula in the schools or particularly the Upper Primary level, one of the tasks is to establish which of the current objectives are being well achieved. Remedial action is urgently required to change some of the current teaching materials or make appropriate adjustments in order to ensure that poorly achieved objectives become at least average achieved objectives. To this end syllabus development and revision in English is needed as the current recommended textbook does not bring about the quality intended as it is evident in my analysis section of the syllabus content.

The drafting of teachers' guides complicate matters as these teachers' guides have become 'recipes' for some teachers who have found some kind of refuge to use it year in and year out with no or little regard for self-creativity and adjustment.

This scenario can be regarded as practicing behaviourism that is seen as negative in the sense that it is based on the notion of transmitting knowledge from the one who "knows" to the one who does not "know". The issue of drafting teachers' guides is also seen as coming from the so-called 'experts' who possess ultimate knowledge that can not be questioned is tantamount to the practice of behaviourism. Therefore, teachers need to be epistemologically empowered so that they can be an authority and in a position of authority.

3.4.3 The Goal of Democracy

The fourth major goal of Basic Education reform at the time of independence has been that o f d eveloping d emocratic e ducation a t a ll l evels. T he U pper P rimary Curriculum Guide (see appendix 2) had been developed through a process of consultation. The system of curriculum panels to develop the subject syllabus has involved practicing teachers, teacher educators and subject specialists, in the development process. This system has done much towards bringing curriculum development close to the grassroots. However, the unevenness between some of the syllabus content between grades raises the question as to whether the members shared the same understanding of the underlying principles and philosophies. In most cases, learners are not involved in the whole process of curriculum development so that they can also give their views and ideas as to the type of learning support materials they want and ought to use. It became clear during m y interviews with learners that the activities in the prescribed textbooks are in most cases not compatible with the aims and goals of the syllabus.

The syllabus document calls however for consensus and democracy for teaching and learning where activities to be taught and learned are to be determined by the involvement of both the teacher and learners. It was evident during my class observations that many of our teachers lack the audacity to consult learners about the activities to be taught and learned which will make the goal of democratic education a far-reaching reality.

3.5 Epistemology of the Curriculum

During the latter part of the last century cognitive psychologists were concerned with how the mind works, the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is acquired during any process of learning.

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According to Bodner (1985:875) "Knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner". The new reform process is based on the above phrase of the way knowledge is viewed and acquired. Thus, it is based on the learner-centred approach to teaching and learning. Learner-centred education is seen as a social process and emphasis in this process is on collaboration and the exchanging of ideas, experiences, values and attitudes. Learning is a negotiated process where learners' understanding expands through interaction and active engagement with others.

The English Syllabus calls for teachers to consider learners' ideas as useful starting points in the process of learning. The syllabus goal and syllabus aims 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.8 (see appendix 1) could be achieved if, every school day should have time in which learners voice, through talking or writing, what they already know and how that links with what the school wants them to know. The language which children acquired is, in part, dependent on the social and cultural contexts surrounding them, that is at home, at school and in their community. The English Syllabus is designed in such a way that its objectives aim to achieve the content to be taught but not on how it is to be organised.

The Upper Primary syllabus for English places its main focus on the reading, writing, speaking, listening and language usage in a learner-centred approach. The theory of language teaching and learning in a second language calls for approaches to be used to effect such teaching and learning. The Upper Primary syllabus encompasses the communicative approach to literacy. The approach emphasises the following elements as favourable to language acquisition: Language is learned and acquired through communication and interaction with less emphasis on memory but on usage and negotiating meaning, an emotionally relaxed, joyful and non-threatening atmosphere is appropriate for acquisition (Nyati-Ramahobo:1995). The rationale for the Upper Primary phase is calling for enhancing proficiency in English.

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What then is proficiency? Carrasquillo (1994) views language proficiency as the ability to use the language for both academic purposes and basic communicative tasks. This implies that there is a strong relationship between language proficiency, academic and cognitive variables across all four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. On paper at least, the syllabus strives to be leaner-centred.

In delivering the curriculum the emphasis is on quality and meaningful learning. However, the way in which it is interpreted and implemented differs in many cases from the way in which it is intended. The practices in many classrooms of those I observed during this research are still very teacher-centred, even while teachers profess that they have changed towards a learner-centred approach of teaching and learning. The assessment procedures and examination system, although the intentions of the syllabus are quite different from those before, still bind teachers to old ways of executing the process of assessment. Many times it was evident during this research that teachers tend to retreat to the narrowness of testing and check listed skills and facts and then call that continuous assessment. Prior to education reform in Namibia assessment was predominantly formal examination oriented.

As part of the reform process, the dominant role of examination was de-emphasized while formal and informal continuous assessment strategies which are more criterion-based were sought after and embraced. Thus aspects such as competencies and positive achievement have become key buzzwords in the reformed version of the assessment policy (MEC 1993). Continuous assessment tasks and activities inter alia include: tests, homework, projects, examinations and practicals. It is worth mentioning that learners do some of the work individually, in pairs and/or in groups.

However, I could not clearly see where the themes and competencies are shared across other subjects. The topics or themes for various skills are given and predetermined, and hence I tend to agree with Eisner, as cited in Stenhouse (1975) who described such curriculum as instructional objectives which underpin the behavioural epistemology, because such curriculum will develop forms of behaviours in learners whose characteristics are known beforehand at some point and time of the school programme.

3.6   The Learning Area of Developing the Conceptual Understanding , Values, Attitudes and Skills

The rationale of the English Upper Primary Syllabus is very clear on the values and attitudes it is supposed to inculcate in learners as future senior citizens. One of the stated goals (see appendix 1) is to foster the development of wide general knowledge, conducive attitudes, critical abilities, moral values and the aesthetic sense. This curriculum is concerned with competence in the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.   The fifth language skill is the language usage.   All those parts involve knowledge of the rules, structures and use of English to some degree.   Therefore, the learning area does not call or require an over-formal separate programme of work on language structures.

The learning methods selected contribute to a non-authoritarian learning environment which builds learners' self-confidence.   The teacher is seen to be the senior partner in the learning process rather than a taskmaster.   The curriculum has activities that aim at expressing approval or disapproval, disagreeing politely; apologizing as well as paying compliments and responding to compliments.

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3.7   The Socio-historical and Economic Situation Analysis

Most Countries in Africa have been under colonial rule and Namibia is no exception. Before independence, the education system in Namibia was modelled on the system of education of the colonial masters. There were predominant features which characterized schools and school curriculum before independence. For instance, schools were organised and run on a racial basis, which means that there were separate schools for Whites and Africans. Schools for black Namibians were less equipped and understaffed, and had poor classroom facilities. The curriculum content was also foreign as it was developed in South Africa and the curriculum materials were mainly examination driven.

Likewise, the textbooks and other teaching materials were designed to suit the colonial master's ideology regardless of relevance to Namibia. The Upper Primary Curriculum for English was no exception to the above ideology. Under the previous education system, there was a uniformity of topics for writing activities as topics such as "My cat", "My dog", "My school", "My village" were routinely covered. Learners knew the contents by heart, as they wrote down what they had memorized into their composition exercise books. The philosophy on which the curriculum was based regarded knowledge as collections of given facts. In order to acquire that knowledge, learners needed to memorise the facts. In that way, imagination and creativity were stifled.

Bean and Wagstaaf (1991) strongly criticized writing activities in primary schools that were routines with a limited range of purposes and type; they also criticize the uniformity with which writing is imitated, the lack of variety in the way writing is related to teaching and learning and, finally, the failure to offer learners experiences of writing as a process. Writing, speaking and reading skills were taught in isolation, whereas the skill of listening was not part of the subject curriculum.

The teaching and learning of literature and poetry was part of Upper Primary Level. One positive aspect about the previous prescribed textbook is that it had activities for grammar (Language Usage) purposes, whereas the current recommended textbook have few clear grammatical activities that can enhance learners' use of language in formal and informal situations. The syllabus content however, stresses the fact that language is not acquired or learned in any sequence as structural approaches suggest, rather, that language is learned as a whole through a language rich environment, a literature based environment. It deals with how best to teach grammatical structures, which is through texts which have to be read, talked and written about, then elements of language in these texts can be pointed out and described without emphasizing memorization but rather usage in order to maintain meaning.

At Independence the Ministry embarked upon an exercise to review the backlogs that still persisted the theoretical and practical thinking of many about education. One of the tasks was and is the empowering of teachers and other involved stakeholders to support aspects of education reform that are already in place, for example, policy documents, syllabuses and certain institutional structures. However, the present socio-economic picture still demands much of what the Ministry of Education has set out to achieve. Practitioners within the Namibian Education System are not necessarily empowered to implement the reform policies.

This is a major stumbling block in the education reform process, and therefore empowerment and capacity building in the individual schools and at regional and national level should form much of our future efforts. Van Harmelen (1999:16) rightly points out that "Teacher empowerment will in the first instance provide teachers with the capacity to critically analyse the curriculum and to view it not as a prescription for education based on 'given truths' that cannot be challenged, but as that which is located in a particular value system." As such any curriculum must be subjected to the same sort of critical questioning that is given to all value-systems.

Through this teachers will be able to evaluate and understand what they are expected to teach and if need be to challenge the perspective of knowledge that the curriculum presents. The delivery of services, pre-service training and in-service training should be improved in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. The current curriculum for Upper Primary Phase needs well trained teachers, well informed curriculum planners who will design, p lan and implement the syllabus in accordance with the Ministry of Education and Culture's advocated values, focusing on the learner-centred approach.

3.8 An Analysis of the Learners

The Rundu education region has approximately 18000 learners at the upper primary level (see appendix 3). The languages spoken in this region are Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu, as well as other dialects not used in school.

Before and after independence, the linguistic background of learners at the upper primary level can mostly be described as that of Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu as well as other dialects and Afrikaans. At the time of education reform there were problems and challenges such as learner participation, lack of resources, language problems, over-crowded classrooms, lack of motivation and discipline problems, and how these problems and challenges could fit in the new learner-centred approach of education.

The general obeservations at the two schools where I did my interviews and classroom observations give a picture of boys who are older than girls as they tend to come to school later (see statistics of sample taken on ten boys and ten girls of appendix 4). The reason for this is that boys at an early stage of their lives are given responsibilities to look after their parents' livestock before starting school for the first time. One point of interest is that these age levels of both girls and boys should be 13years of age by the time they reach grade seven.

The attached figures (see appendix 4 again) tell a different picture about learners' age levels. Girls as was evident tend to withdraw from participating in lessons due to a cultural belief that girls should be reserved persons in their society. The other reason could be due to shyness.

The pass rate for boys tends to be higher than that of girls (see statistics of appendix 4). Learners' performance in examinations is also a concern. While they perform poorly in examinations and class tests, their promotion to the next grade is mainly determined by the continuous assessment marks that contribute 50% of the total marks. The subject policy states that learners cannot fail even if they do not get at least 50% for each component (viz. Examination and Continuous Assessment).

3.9 The Analysis of the Learning Environment

With Independence in 1990, Namibia's Education System was a legacy of colonial education. It was based on authoritarian prescriptive principles that operated within a rigid racially segregated framework. Inequalities were systematically built into every level of curriculum provision and basic facilities such as classrooms, water, toilets and learning resources. Some schools, because of a lack of resources and in some because of poor management, could not implement the curriculum. There were no laboratories, specialist rooms equipment, inadequate or no library facilities and low teacher qualifications.

A child is always exploring his/her social and material environment. Through communication with others, playing, experimenting, experiencing things, and by reflecting on them, the child learns.

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It is well known that the school represents the hidden curriculum, and that is a powerful arena of learning. Any discrepancy between the intended and hidden curriculum weakens the learner's trust and confidence in the intended curriculum and the school as a learning organization. Learner-centered education will not be consistently implemented unless each school has a supportive environment for learner-centred education. A learner-centred school will be democratic in its ethos and organization culture. This means that learners will be trained for and given responsibility gradually, as they are able to take it on. If learners are being taught well in a learner-centred way, they will work hard, discipline problems will be minimal because learning will be meaningful, relevant and challenging for them, and they will be developing personal and social skills.

The learner does not come to school like an empty bucket to be filled with information. He/she has had many experiences and is constantly learning. Teaching which ignores and does not build on that experience and learning will limit the learner's thinking, and the learner will not see the connection between the world outside school and what is taught and learnt in school. This requires from the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture to improve supply of learning materials, to create school libraries, to supply teacher reference materials as well as to bring about an improvement to laboratories and supply laboratories. Co-curricular programmes such as clubs and social projects should be encouraged to support the rationale of the curriculum.

4. Synthesis

This assignment resulted in two main tasks: 1) provided and set the scene which guided the rest of the tasks; 2) an analysis of the Upper Primary Phase Curriculum/Syllabus and its supporting materials. The evaluation process involved the following: a) an analysis of the syllabus' goals and aims, the syllabus' objectives and content, of the materials in terms of suitability, compatibility with the syllabus and relevant to learning needs;

b) interviews with teachers and learners; classroom observations and analysis of learners homework books, test sheets and examinations as well as; c) other criteria given such as the socio-historical, economic situation and the learning environment analyses (see table of content).

The analysis of the Upper Primary English syllabus and its supporting materials revealed that the communicative nature of the syllabus does not permeate the teaching methods, assessment techniques and materials. Those teaching materials that are structured in intent are used in communicative oriented activities. Although the teaching materials and the syllabus do provide learners with the necessary communication skills , their content does not concentrate on the portrayal of the traditions, practices and beliefs about indigenous speaking groups in Namibia. It further revealed that teachers are not well vested with the theory of language teaching and learning and language teaching methods. Rote learning is over emphasized even in the teaching of reading and writing.

The nature of the syllabus which is communicatively oriented in terms of its objectives and content sees the role of the teacher as presenting content, designing and directing activities which focus on developing the communicative abilities of the learners and assesses such abilities with a concentration on the experiences of the learners as building blocks for skill development. The instructional materials are also supposed to provide relevant and interesting issues for learners to read write and talk about, including gender issues, their surrounding environment and AIDS. Materials should capture and preserve the traditions and cultures of all Namibians and utilise such knowledge to develop the language skills. Assessment is another crucial aspect of any progamme and one of the central roles of the teacher. Examinations of a certain type tend to make teaching go its way. The ideal situation is that what is taught and how it is taught should determine how it should be assessed.

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As stated in section 3, the structural nature of the teaching methods has persisted even in the assessment procedures of communicatively oriented materials.

Teachers need to pay attention to individual learners and diagnose their problems. Can Nangura read, can she read with comprehension as much and well as Carl?

In terms of assessing the learning process, the teacher has to do so at a minute to minute basis, through weekly and monthly tests; end of term and final examinations. In a language programme, teachers should monitor on a daily basis, the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Developing an assessment system which is congruent with each skill is necessary. For instance, how do you assess whether students can read? The specific objectives and the skills learners are expected to demonstrate should direct the assessment process.

The socio-historical and economic imbalances of the past need to be redressed in order to empower teachers to be masters of their subject with a host of teaching strategies at their disposal and with skills to develop relevant teaching materials to foster the skills learners need both for academic and communication purposes. This will make the teaching of English purposeful and positively motivate both learners and teachers toward English as a subject and an official language worth nurturing, developing and preserving.

The curriculum can be regarded as having opened up to many more learners in terms of accessibility in line with the goal of access. But is it open in terms of equity and equality? Are we meeting every learner's educational needs through this curriculum? Is it really equitable when we expect the same results from learners with very different starting points, very different resources at their disposal and very different backgrounds?

In order to achieve the four national principles of education, in-service and pre-service training is necessary. Curriculum developers, language panel members and teachers should h ave a c lear u nderstanding o f t he t heory o f l anguage t eaching a nd learning, its implications for classroom practice, methodology and for material development. These three aspects should be part of the course modules. As Apple (1993:50) reflects, "Textbooks, for better or worse, dominate what students learn. They set the curriculum, and often the facts learned, in most subjects. For many students, textbooks are their first and sometimes only early exposure to books and to reading. The public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate and necessary. And teachers rely heavily on them to organise lessons and structure subject matter".

Textbooks can provide teachers with stimulating ideas and can encourage teachers to explore the subject matter. However, all too often, teachers as was evident during my classroom observations, use supporting materials not as supporting materials but as the only subject matter. Some textbooks are written in a style that does not encourage teacher initiative and exploration. If we want to encourage certain attitudes in teachers then textbooks must be written in a style that will foster such attitudes. The question that arises here is: Are we pouring new wine into old bottles? The teaching and learning of English need to be grounded in a theoretical framework that explains why certain strategies are better than others in the teaching and learning of language and that this is linked to the social constructivist approach of learner-centred education through both the teaching and assessment of the subject.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to evaluate the Upper Primary English Syllabus. I have tried to sketch how this syllabus/curriculum is organised and implemented in the classrooms. The paper relates the scope of the problems between the syllabus content, goals and aims and with the activities intended to achieve them. It provided a theory of language teaching and learning. The theoretical framework also served as a guide to the evaluation of the curriculum. I have also raised the need of adequately equipping our schools with libraries and with textbooks, as well as indicating the need for in-service training of teachers in English.

While there is evidence of recognition of the constructivist view of knowledge on which the reform is based and the philosophy in practice of this view, these ideas remain relatively new to most Namibian module writers and teachers to accommodate their learning experiences under the previous regime. Education through the syllabuses, teachers' guides, learners' reading texts has become the key element in preserving and imparting cultural values for individuals and communities.

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The Upper Primary Syllabus

2.RATIONALE

2.1 As the national official language of Namibia, English occupies an important position in the citizen's life. This is reflected in the position of English as one of the compulsory subjects in the curriculum. Through the curriculum and the efforts of the teachers, the Namibian education system must meet its constitutional obligation to "ensure proficiency of the official language."

2.2 English has important contributions to make both among Namibians and internationally. Among Namibians, English will operate as one of the most important languages of national unity and identity, by virtue of its being the one language all Namibian learners will study. In the wider sphere it is a language of access to the international community and a world-wide information network.

2.3 English has the same potential as any other language to act as a catalyst of personal growth and to assist in the development of wide general knowledge, attitudes, critical abilities, moral values and the aesthetic sense. This potential is enhanced by the rich and varied heritage of literary and scholarly work that has accumulated in English.

2.4 English has an interdisciplinary role in supporting learning across the curriculum. As English is the medium of instruction, conscious attention to language will be the concern of all the teachers, not only the English teachers. English teachers, however, have a special responsibility to assist their colleagues

effectively in other subjects.

1. Syllabus goal

Learners should develop the ability to communicate effectively in all four skills for the following reasons:

- as the medium for learning in school.
- as a means of communication in and beyond school.
- as an essential part of their personal development.

2. Syllabus aims

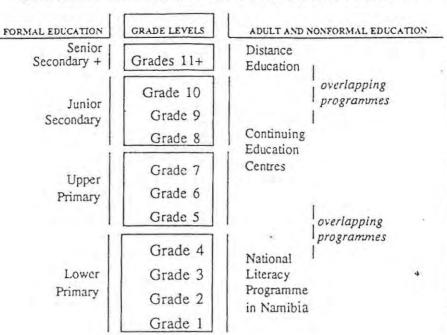The aims of the syllabus are to:

2.1 encourage interest in using English.

2.2 provide a foundation and support for learning across the curriculum and thereby enable a smooth transition from the primary to the secondary phase.

2.3 encourage the use of English inside and outside the classroom as an essential part of the development of life skills needed in multi-lingual and multi-cultural society.

2.4 encourage a sense of curiosity and spirit of enquiry in learners.

2.5 increase learners' participation in their own learning and their acceptance of responsibility for learning outcomes.

2.6 encourage learners to use sensitive language (e.g. gender, race, religion) where appropriate.

2.7 encourage learners to read widely for information and pleasure in English.

2.8 develop the learners' critical and independent thinking.

Appendix 2

COMPARABLE LEVELS IN FORMAL AND NONFORMAL EDUCATION

FORMAL EDUCATION	GRADE LEVELS	ADULT AND NONFORMAL EDUCATION
Senior Secondary +	Grades 11+	Distance Education
Junior Secondary	Grade 10	*overlapping programmes*
	Grade 9	
	Grade 8	Continuing Education Centres
Upper Primary	Grade 7	
	Grade 6	
	Grade 5	*overlapping programmes*
Lower Primary	Grade 4	National Literacy Programme in Namibia
	Grade 3	
	Grade 2	
	Grade 1	

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Source: Towards Education for all: MBESC

COMPARATIVE ENROLLMENT FIGURES OF FIFTEENTH SCHOOL DAY STATISTICS AND ANNUAL EDUCATION CENSUS PER GRADES YEAR 2001

INSPECTION CIRCUIT	15th school day statistics			Annual Education Census			Difference		
	M.	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1	5755	5773	11528	5357	5368	10725	-398	-405	-803
2	4261	3937	8198	4094	3928	8022	-167	-9	-176
3	3761	3870	7631	3646	3746	7392	-115	-124	-239
4	3864	3780	7644	3809	3793	7602	-55	13	-42
5	3919	3994	7913	3672	3585	7257	-247	-409	-656
6	2849	2851	5700	2753	2767	5520	-96	-84	-180
7	2676	2592	5268	2383	2192	4575	-293	-400	-693
8	2216	2087	4303	2171	1896	4067	-45	-191	-236
9	1937	1779	3716	1895	1626	3521	-42	-153	-195
10	1295	980	2275	1234	905	2139	-61	-75	-136
11	544	375	919	546	363	909	2	-12	-10
12	492	281	773	474	282	756	-18	1	-17
Junior Primary enrolment	17641	17360	35001	16906	16835	33741	-735	-525	-1260
Senior Primary enrolment	9444	9437	18881	8808	8544	17352	-636	-893	-1529
Junior Secondary enrolment	5448	4846	10294	5300	4427	9727	-148	-419	-567
Senior Secondary enrolment	1036	656	1692	1020	645	1665	-16	-11	-27
Total enrollment	33569	32299	65868	32034	30451	62485	-1535	-1848	-3383

(-) shows decrease and (+) show increase in number of learners between 15th school day statistics and Annual Education Census for 2001

_3_

Source: Annual Education Census Rundu Education Region.

Appendix 3

Pass / Failure Statistics

English Grade 7

2000

Boys		**Girls**	
Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
47	0	44	8
100 %	0 %	84.6 %	15.4 %

2001

Boys		**Girls**	
Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
45	3	51	4
93.7 %	6.3 %	92.7 %	7.8 %

Learners' Ages

Boys	Girls
1. 19 Years of age	17 years of age
2. 17 years of age	17 years of age
3. 17 years of age	17 years of age
4. 17 years of age	16 years of age
5. 16 years of age	16 years of age
6. 16 years of age	15 years of age
7. 16 years of age	14 years of age
8. 16 years of age	14 years of age
9. 16 years of age	13 years of age
10. 14 years of age	12 years of age

Source: From one of the school where part of the research was conducted

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ASSIGNMENT NO. 2:   **Epistemological foundation of the reform process.**

ASSIGNMENT TOPIC: **Critically discuss the Epistemological bases that underpin the theories of Behaviourism and Constructivism.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract: There are two primary schools of thought that influence learning theories adopted by education. The first of these is located in behavioural theories which is linked to behavioural psychology and continues to be linked to positivism (logical empiricism). The second of these is located in cognitive psychology. Just as there area many interpretations of behavioural psychology, so too a number of theories have developed within cognitive psychology (Van Harmelen 1999).

1. Introduction

The current educational reform processes are a feature of Southern Africa's attempts to develop educational systems to provide new opportunities for our learners. These educational visions can be realised if educators are prepared to grapple with the epistemological bases o f b ehaviourism and constructivism. T his paper attempts to explore the theory of knowledge that underpins the practices of b ehaviourism a nd constructivism. The following is an attempt to critically engage with the various epistemologies in terms of how they work as theories of knowledge, their perceived worldviews, orientations and assumptions about the nature of and purpose of knowledge.

2. The roots of Logical empiricism, Behaviourism, Materialism and Realism: Theories of knowledge – their methods and perspectives on knowledge and learning.

2.1 Behaviourism and logical empiricism: methods and perspectives on knowledge and theory of learning.

According to the Compton's Encyclopaedia (2000 volume 3) behaviourism is an outgrowth of the field of psychology, which developed from research on learning. It has its roots in several philosophical traditions. It is related to realism, because of the realists' belief of independent reality which is similar to the behaviourists' belief that behaviour is caused by environmental conditions (Ozman and Craver 1986).

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Behaviourism also owes its final interpretations to materialistic philosophy, such as that promoted by Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes who held that all reality is matter and motion. Knowledge to these philosophers is restricted to sensation. Reason operates on dividing and composing concepts mathematically (O'Donnell 1985).

These philosophers believed that human rationality can only be accounted for in a universe in which immaterial abstract entities exist. According to (Moreland 1987: 96) "physicalism denies the existence of propositions and non-physical laws of logic and evidence which can be in minds and influence".

Behaviourism as developed by Watson reflected the thinking of Comte (1778 - 1857), who held the view that all social phenomena should be seen in he same way as physiological or biological laws and theories that can be investigated empirically (Oldroyd 1986).

The early positivism of Comte links to the study of human behaviour which held the classical empirical belief that all genuine knowledge is or ought to be based on sense experience and can thus be advanced by means of observation and experiment (Van Harmelen 1995). Because of that development behaviourists rejected the notion of concepts and inner states as a way of generating knowledge. John B. Watson an American psychologist in the early 1900s felt that psychologists should study only observable behaviour rather than states of consciousness or thought processes. He believed changes in behaviour result from conditioning, a learning process in which a new response becomes associated with a certain stimulus.

Watson's approach to behaviourism was strongly influenced by the research of the Russian Psychologist Ivan P. Pavlov during the same early 1900s. Pavlov's experiments with animals proved that certain reflex actions could become conditioned responses to entirely new stimuli. Thus, Watson based his psychology on the observation of overt behaviour of an organism, holding the belief that behaviour is caused by stimuli from the environment.

Watson claimed and thus believed that the senses were not only the means by which knowledge is acquired but were the instruments which "guide activity in the successful maintenance of life" (Ozman and Craver 1986:168). Watson vehemently rejected the notions of inner states or mentalistic concepts such as intention or feeling because they cannot be 'proved' scientifically.

This was then the premise on which the objectives model for curriculum was based. By selecting the kind of behaviour to be developed in the student and the desirable content or area of life in which this behaviour is to operate the outcome would be assured. Learning would be precise as desired. This means that one can define an objective with sufficient clarity if he can describe or illustrate the kind of behaviour the student is expected to acquire so that one could recognise such behaviour if he saw it. To increase the effectiveness of such a conditioned process of responses a schedule of learning are seen clearly, precise and error-free. This reflected Watson's claim that a controlled environment was one in which a child could be engineered into any kind of person desired (Ozman and Craver 1986).

While the model of behavioural objectives and curriculum was based on the above example, Stenhouse (1975) proposes a curriculum that is based on the consideration of the learners themselves, the life outside the school, psychology of learning and a set of values. However, behaviourism as a theory of learning sees the learning content as value-free. As Apple (1990:90) demonstrates: "because knowledge according to the positivistic ideal links validity only to empirical verification, it ignores the personal of the student". Through this model we teach students to approach knowledge as a non-problematic correspondence of perceptions and reality.

Apple (1990) further levels his critique at the methods used in designing a curriculum which he sees grounded in a behaviouristic picture of science that is directed at control and uniformity.

However, what social objectives cannot be characterized in terms of control and certainty? In so far as we have goals, we want to be clear about them and create conditions for achieving them. Apple (1990) is right in pointing out further that science, as traditionally understood, cannot take account of these interests, but it is misleading to suggest that we could ever really give up certainty or control as ideals. We may want to create a classroom where teacher 'control' is minimized, but our desire to 'control' the environment of the students is still at work in this 'Learner-centred' classroom.

Let me for a moment link logical empiricism with Skinner's operancy taking into account the whole theory of positivism as Skinner's theory provides a relevant example from which behaviourism and logical empiricism can be discussed.

2.2 Skinner's operant conditioning and logical empiricism.

According to the Compton's encyclopaedia (2000 volume 7) empiricism is a philosophical approach that views experience as the most important source of knowledge. Empiricists try to answer as many questions as possible by using information gathered by the senses. They therefore reject attempts to decide issues on the basis of pure reason, religion or political authority.

This view developed from the philosophies of Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), John Locke (1632 – 1704) and later elaborated by the members of the Vienna circle, who met in Austria with the aim of confirming that all knowledge of the world is indeed derived from sense experience and observation, that science, with mathematics as its hand-maiden, is not only the best but the only way of bringing about knowledge (Aspin 1995). Skinner's operant conditioning was seen as a solution to the empirical problem on how they viewed knowledge. As he put it: "The experimental analysis of behaviour has improved education by clarifying its objectives. suggesting new practices in classroom management, and introducing instructional programming texts and other materials" (Skinner 1978: 10).

It is thus important for the purpose of this essay to put his theory into perspective and therefore will be the substance of this subsection.

According to Bennett (1990:28-32) Skinner's work with radical behaviourism and operant conditioning was innovative and significant. For Skinner (1986:3) behaviourism is "the philosophy of the science of human behaviour". Considering what behaviourism teaches "A person's behaviour is determined by a genetic endowment traceable to the evolutionary history of the species and by the environmental circumstances to which as an individual he has been exposed" (Skinner 1971: 96).

For an educator behaviourism is applied by shaping the learner by controlling stimuli and conditioning responses to bring about the desired outcomes of behaviour. Skinner calls this "scientific" saying that the view that man is free to deliberate, decide, and act, possibly in original ways, and is to be given credit for his successes and blamed for his failures, is a prescientific view (Skinner 1971).

According to Skinner (1974) a person can learn new behaviour if such a person is provided with instruction or opportunity to practice new behaviour, and reward or punish new behaviour. To ensure permanence of such behaviour and thus knowledge, a schedules of reinforcement is necessary. For a behaviourist such as Skinner, one is regarded to have acquired knowledge "through observations and controlled scientific experiment that yields effective results" (Skinner 1974: 235). Man is considered to be a machine subjected to a 'conditioned' or 'reinforced behaviour' practice for it to respond to a desired outcome. With this insight Skinner was able to do amazing things with pigeons (e.g., "teaching them to play ping pong").

However, behaviourism as advocated by Skinner is logically bound to material or physical determinism, which would mean that every effect is produced by a material cause which is linked together in an unbroken chain. In such a behaviouristic world a person's behaviour as well as everything else is predetermined by this cause/effect series. If everything is materially predetermined, however, how can we decide whom, how, and what is to be programmed by stimulus/ response conditioning?

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Since making value judgements and truth claims requires that someone be able to stand outside what is determined and arbitrate is rejected by behaviourism what better moral judgements can it put forward? As Harper (1981:157-158) puts it, "… even if the behavioural scientist can control human behaviour, how does he, being limited by his own frame of reference, know what human behaviour ought to be?".

Thus, the behaviourist on his own cannot know the truth of his system, nor can he decide to implement his principles to change the world for the better, since he cannot arbitrate good and evil being, himself, predetermined. Some programmed learning today is however an educational outcome of behaviourism. Learning is broken down into steps and at each point the correct behaviour (e.g., a learning step) is reinforced and the incorrect behaviour is discouraged. This according to Skinner (1986) can be done with a teaching machine, computer, a well-designed lesson or simply, a book.

The main thesis of the behaviourist and empiricist theories is that they want to work with scientific methods where they can measure, observe and prove. As van Harmelen (1999:10) puts it: "Because knowledge is 'out there' it can be discovered through the use of our senses or through experimentation". As she again put it: "When it is 'known', in order for someone else to 'know' then all that is necessary is to transmit the 'knowledge' from the one who knows to the one who does not" (van Harmelen 1999: 11).

The following are the theories developed along with modern science and are regarded as philosophical roots where behaviourism emanated from and acquired its various interpretations in education:

Although their deeper interpretations of how the two theories view knowledge has been demonstrated in the preceding section, a brief explanation on their perceptions about knowledge is necessary and goes as follows:

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2.3   Materialism and Realism

According to Ozman and Craver (1986) materialism has its roots in Greek philosophy. In its most extreme form materialism is the belief that all of reality consists solely of matter. It denies the existence of spirits, souls and gods, and it insists that all activities of mind and motion are based on physical properties. Throughout its long history, materialism has been closely associated with, and supported by, investigations into the physical sciences. These sciences have long been based only on studies of matter, of physical bodies and their properties. Because of its emphasis on matter alone, materialism has often been considered antireligious.

We can thus see that behaviourism is definitely a kind of materialism, for most behaviourists view human beings in terms of their neurological, physiological and biological contexts. For the materialist, human beings are not partially supernatural beings above nature, but rather, they are a part of nature, even though they are one of the more complex natural organisms, they are capable of being studied and are governed by natural law just as other natural creature. (O'Donnell 1985). The growth of christianity as Europe's dominant religion sidetracked materialism for several centuries. Denial of spirit as the basic reality was condemned by the church.

In the 17th century, however, materialism was revived by among others Thomas Hobbes. For Hobbes, an individual's make up can be explained in mechanistic terms. We experience objects by their qualities through sensation. Even imagination, according to Hobbes, is motion.

The same can thus be said about thinking. Therefore, all that truly exists is matter and motion, and all reality can be explained in terms of mathematical precision. According to Ozman and Craver (1986) behaviourism's close affinity with materialism lies in several areas. For example, both materialists and behaviourists believe that we behave in certain ways according to our physical make up. They assert that: "Bodily functions occur in certain objectively describable and predictable ways. Because of this make up, we are capable of numerous motor responses.

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The significant thing is to observe behaviour (motion) of a body in an environment (supporting material conditions)" (Ozman and Craver 1986: 3-4).

According to Ozman and Craver (1986) behaviourism's connection with realism is primarily with modern realism and its advocacy of science. Among the ancient philosophers, the leading realist was Plato. He believed that reality consists of eternal ideas, or forms, not the observable world. Every separate object in the world is only an expression of possibilities inherent in a form. These forms were also called universals.

Opponents of realism however, said that universals are only concepts in the mind people use to classify objects. In modern philosophy realism refers to the belief that the world of physical objects exists independently of human observation. Some critics have asserted that reality cannot be experienced at all: what is seen is only an appearance perceived by the senses. The central philosophical base of realism is that once you have experienced reality it is concluded that you have eventually acquired knowledge. As Ozman and Craver (1986:2) put it: "... what is real is external, factual, and observable behaviour capable of being known".

Thomas Kuhn (1962) provides a theory in which he states that scientists need to construct, not to discover, "What is really there" by means of persuasion and social justification. Therefore according to Kuhn reality is understood as a "community - generated and community maintained entity which constitute the communities of knowledgeable peers generating them" (Kuhn 1962:5).

3.   Constructivism and its Radical, Social and Critical versions: The theory
       of knowledge and learning.

Schools are expected to transmit knowledge to younger generations. They are, however, also increasingly criticized for distributing so called inert knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is accessed only in a restricted set of contexts even though it is supposed to apply to a variety of domains.

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The cause of limited knowledge transfer is attributed to learning situations in schools. Instructional procedures that result in learning to recall relevant information do not provide any guarantee that people will use it later. Underpinning these reform proposals is not only a concern with efficiency, but is also a new epistemological theory, labelled as constructivism. This subsection of this paper will focus on the diverging perspectives within the constructivist tradition in education. One indication of the growth of constructivism in education is its perspectives and positions. (Von Glasersfeld, as cited in Steffe and Gale 1995:13) distinguish in a reader entitled *constructivism in education* six different "core paradigms", viz. social constructivism, radical constructivism, social constructionism, information- processing constructivism, cybernetic systems, and social cultural approaches to mediated action. All of these so-called paradigms reject traditional epistemological claims about knowledge as an objective representation of 'reality'.

For the purpose of this paper 1 shall limit my discussion to the three versions of constructivism. The first version is the radical constructivism of Von Glasersfeld (1990), in which cognition is considered adaptive in the sense that it is based on and constantly modified by a learner's experience. A second 'mild' version of constructivism originating in the work of Piaget holds that the learner actively constructs knowledge and not passively transmitted by the educator. Beyond that, is the social constructivist version of Vygotsky, who in an effort to challenge Piaget's ideas developed a fully cultural psychology stressing the primary role of communication and social life in meaning formation and cognition (Vygotsky 1986).

I will now attempt to look into these theoretical streams of constructivism as follows:

Radical constructivism is derived from the epistemology of constructivism, which contends that knowledge does not exist outside of a person (Etchberger and Shaw 1992). This is an earlier constructivism of Von Glasersfeld who felt that true knowledge could only exist when it is constructed within the mind of a cognising being. In Etchberger and Shaw's work they pointed out how Von Glasersfeld contended that, "Children, we must never forget, are not repositories for adult knowledge,

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but organisms which, like all of us are constantly trying to make sense of, and to understand their experience" (Etchberger and Shaw 1992:12). Thus such making sense of information and experience is the construction of knowledge. This constructivism is again seen to have a number of flaws that are ascribed to flaws that exist in Piagetian theory about the adaptation between an organism and environment, making us to almost link Von Glasersfeld's radical constructivism to behaviourism. Von Glasersfeld's information processing constructivism recognises that knowing involves active processing, that is individual and personal and that is based on previously acquired knowledge. His second principle is based on the function of cognition as adaptive and experiential underlies the metaphor for the mind or organism undergoing Darwinian evolution for it to acquire knowledge.

Remarkably, one of the most important implications of radical constructivism challenges the processes by which individual student actively construct their own knowledge. For example, it was suggested that more attention has to be given to the interpersonal or social aspects of learning, i.e., to what appear to be at least temporary states of intersubjectivity (Cobb et al 1991). Proceeding further, Cobb (1990) calls for constructivist mathematics educators to develop a new 'mathematico-anthropological context" in order to refine and apply their ideas to mathematics classroom environments.

Ernst von Glasersfeld is one of the leading advocates of a radical version of constructivism both as a theory of knowledge and as a guide for science education. Asked about the difference in the various versions of constructivism he said: "A few years ago when the term constructivism became fashionable and was adopted by people who had no intention of changing their epistemological orientation, I introduced the term trivial constructivism. My intent was to distinguish this fashion from the 'radical' movement that broke with the tradition of cognitive representation" (Von Glasersfeld 1992: 170).

The radical constructivist movement abandons the traditional philosophical position of realism according to which knowledge has to be a representation of an essential

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reality, i.e., an 'out there' world prior to having been experienced. On the contrary, it adopts the relativist position that knowledge is something that is personally constructed by individuals in an active way, as they try to give meaning to socially accepted and shared notions. As von Glasersfeld (1990:37) himself says "knowledge is the result of an individual subject's constructive activity, not a commodity that somehow resides outside the knower and can be conveyed or instilled by diligent perception or linguistic communication".

According to von Glasersfeld (1990: 37) all good teachers know that guidance which they give to students "necessarily remains tentative and cannot ever approach absolute determination", because in constructivism there is always more than one solution to a problem and different solutions might be approached from different perspectives.

All these imply that knowledge cannot simply be transferred by means of words. Von Glasersfeld holds: "Verbally explaining a problem does not lead to understanding, unless the concepts the listener has associated with the linguistic components of the explanation are compatible with those the explainer has in mind. Hence, it is essential that the teacher have an adequate model of the conceptual network within which the student assimilates what he or she is being told. Without such a model as basis, teaching is likely to remain a hit-or-miss affair. From the constructivism perspective, 'learning' is the product of self-organization" (Von Glasersfeld 1989: 136).

To understand social constructivism one has to fully understand the historical dimension of epistemology in relations to two major and competing intellectual traditions. This tradition can be largely be distinguished in terms of knowledge.
Thinkers such as Locke, Hume, and various logical empiricists have regarded the source of knowledge as being 'out there' and exogenic (Gergen 1985) thus viewing knowledge as a pawn of nature. In contrast, philosophers such as Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche as well as theorists such as Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky have tended to adopt an endogenic perspective regarding the origins of knowledge.

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In this case, knowledge is seen to depend on processes endemic to the organism. These psychologists and philosophers felt that a human being have various tendencies to think, categorise, process information, and it is these tendencies that are paramount in fashioning knowledge. A less individualistic, more interactional analysis of the process of teaching and learning and thereby acquiring knowledge has been emerging recently in developmental psychology, a field that has been dominated by the theoretical influence of Jean Piaget. It tries to reduce the binary approach of radical constructivism.

According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969:27) "The natural progressive development of children's thinking, from the most primitive early stages in the first years of life through to the emergence of such sophisticated abilities to make logical deductions, to formulate and generally to reason abstractly, is first and foremost a consequence of children's direct involvement with physical reality". The development of the intellect is an adaptive process in which an intelligent organism comes to terms with a complex environment. As Bruner (1985: 26) puts it: "In the Piagetian model ... a lone child struggles single handed to strike some equilibrium between assimilating the world to himself or himself to the world". Language is thus not given particular weight in this account. Action is primary, with language abilities and other ways of using symbols (as in play activities) following on from the development of more general cognitive structures. The extended experiments into children's reasoning abilities carried out by Piaget confirmed his beliefs that thought preceded language and was not determined by it. The evidence provided by these careful studies was seen as convincing by many other developmentalists and seemed no other theoretical framework alternative could be considered.

The discovery of the work of the Russian developmental psychologist L.S. Vygotsky had a formative and profound influence on developmental psychology. Like Piaget, Vygotsky studied the development of cognitive processes. He also agreed that reasoning could develop independently of language, with language and thought having their own, separate mental origins.

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But, in strong contrast to Piaget, he proposed that language and thought come together, that they are combined to create a cognitive 'tool' for human development, such that "children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands" (Vygotsky 1978:26). Moreover, for Vygotsky the child was not the 'lone organism' of Piaget, with each new generation acting out its rediscovery of knowledge. Instead, "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky 1978:89). In other words, Vygotsky was attempting to provide a theory of intellectual development, which acknowledged that children undergo quite profound changes in their understanding by engaging in joint activity and conversation with other people.

In this respect, theorists on education and computing often employ Vygotsky's ideas to see the computer as a cognitive tool guiding and supporting the novice as he or she undertakes complex tasks by emulating processes and behaviours typical of an expert (Papert 1993). Hence, the role of the computer is considered as one of a partner in the learner's construction of knowledge – a cognitive tool to be used to facilitate cognitive processes and thereby help build understanding.

Vygotsky's works, along with Piaget have had a formative influence in the development of Bruner's psychology. Bruner's ideas are increasingly in close association with that of Vygotsky, however Bruner has gone beyond Vygotsky's interpretation of the dynamic nature of culture in a broader sense.

It is from these formulations of social constructivist philosophies that social constructivism emerged as an alternative approach to behaviourism. Social constructivism proposes that the individual learner's purposeful and subjective interpretations of his or her experiences of the physical and social world constitute the genesis of the individual's knowledge. This knowledge results, therefore, from a process of making sense of experience, and is seen as an inherently purposeful problem posing and problem-solving cognitive activity.

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Firstly, classrooms are regarded as communities of practice, directing collaborative research programmes that are characterised by social practices of negotiation and consensus building. Secondly, the principle of social constructivism acknowledges the central role of language in knowledge construction and of making meanings.

Critical constructivism unlike radical and social constructivism theories of knowledge is a post-modern critical perspective that is evolving in education to try and respond to teacher-centred, knowledge-transmission culture of traditional science and cultural constraints which underpin much of post modern education. It tries to combine the radical and social constructivist perspectives on learning. As Taylor (1993:2) puts it "… entails the establishment of critical discourse that aims to make visible and subject to critical scrutiny the hidden frames of reference which constitute the dominant ideology of traditional teaching".

Positivism has been portrayed as 'unreflective' and 'uncritical' for a very long time in educational discourse. According to McCarthy (1988:139) "If the appropriate general laws are known and the relevant initial conditions are manipulable, we can produce a desired state of affairs, natural or social". Again as he puts it: "To test a hypothesis, we apply deductive logic to derive singular observation statement whose falsehood would refute it" (McCarthy 1988:139). For McCarthy standards amount to a method for arriving at true propositions. Yet, the above principles of positivism appears problematic that even though "we can produce a desired state of affairs" there is nothing in the theory to tell us what kind of affairs should be reproduced.

It is from such positivistic principles that critical constrructivism suggest that we need to revise the way we think about knowledge. As Geuss (1981: 28) puts it: "Science excludes normative and metaphysical beliefs, preferences, attitudes, from the realm of rational discussion and evaluation, the critical theory has a more ambitious project than traditional science: it must move beyond 'methodology' to provide standards for the critique of values and norms as well as facts".

The central tenets of positsivism identified by McCarthy look problematic as positivism makes no reference to values. T he t esting of p henomena o nly r equires "observation statements" that can be shown true or false. It is therefore unclear how this hypothesis could handle the evaluation of attitudes and beliefs that cannot b e observed.

Henry Giroux (1981) however provides a richer account of positivism and its shortcoming in his account of ideology in education. His critique focuses on the narrowness of the scientific method and its ignorance of its own ethical commitments. He argues that, "the prevailing positivist consciousness has forgotten the function that theory once served. Under the prevailing dominant ideology, theory has been stripped of its concern with ends and ethics" (Giroux 1981:43). Giroux makes clear that he wants to preserve a sense of objectivity that includes normative criteria, placing standards for purely empirical claims in a larger context. However, Giroux fails to articulate n ew criteria for k nowledge. H e r ecommends t hat new k inds o f critical questions be asked about traditional subject matter, for example, (1) what counts as social studies knowledge? (2) How is this knowledge produced and legitimized? And (3) whose interests does this knowledge serve?" (Giroux 1981: 59).

These questions dislodge knowledge from an unreflective account only, as they do not demonstrate how an alternative epistemology will avoid a relativism and fully respond to the normative context of knowledge.

Critical constructivism will serve no purpose as long as the questioning remains within t he p ositivism model w hen it d oes not explicitly refer t o normative c laims. This will lead to the extent that the theory is only critical and poses questions. If there is an ethical claim in the act of questioning itself, it remains to be unpacked. The normative claims implied in this theory are the notions of freedom, justice and equality at work in some institutions and educational practices that contribute to unequal division of knowledge.

Jurgen Habermas attempted to address this problem directly by providing an account of epistemology that is integrally linked to both its social context and a set of normative claims. Habermas describes his own approach to epistemology as "universal pragmatics" the task of which is "to identify and reconstruct the universal conditions of possible understanding" (Habermas 1979: 1).

What Habermas mean by 'pragmatics' or logical analysis of language toward a consideration of the actual roles and purposes that language fulfils is the study of the truth and logical sense o f s entences for e xample, has t raditionally been divorced from the purposes language serves in particular contexts. By bringing the pragmatic dimension o f language u nder reflection, Habermas change the way we think about truth and directs our attention from logical rules of sense to the social context of speech.

Habermas (1979) distinguishes between three kinds of validity claims that a speaker makes: (1) we make claims of truth for the propositions that we used; (2) we claim rightness about the norms or values at work in the specific interpersonal context; and (3) we claim truthfulness in our own attitude in the speech act. He believes that each of these different validity claims corresponds to a different part of our experience. The first of these claims is directed at the objective (external) world; the second claim is directed at the social world and the third claim is directed at the subjective world.

Although these three claims are at work simultaneously in our speech, Habermas explains that 'only one of the claims is the explicit focus of communication' (Habermans 1979:66). For example, when I define the slope of a line for my students, I as the teacher provide definitions of such things as slope is a social norm that could be challenged (by the students or myself) and the act of challenging it would thematize the social norms instead of the objective definition. The relationship between these three kinds of claims about what is true and right in communication demonstrates Habermas' epistemology.

The first dimension in his theory tells us the way in which all our knowledge is created, that of course include empirical truth claims. According to McCarthy (1988:299) Habermas sees truth as a function of consensus "claim something as true if I think that anyone else who would enter into dialogue with me would make the same claim". Against the empiricists, he assumes that we achieve truth through critical thought and discussion rather than sense experience. As McCarthy (1988: 306) puts it: "In attempting to come to a rational decision about truth claims, we must suppose that the outcome of our discussion will be (or at least can be) the result of the force of the better argument and not of accidental or systematic constraints on communication". Knowledge created under these constraints (whether in the form of physical violence or oppression) must be re-examined.

For Habermas, all knowledge is a product of societal development. All knowledge and norms of behaviour are embedded in what Habermas refers to as the "life world", "the culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns" (Habermas 1987: 124).

The above points in this section are the tenets on which constructivism is based in terms of how it sees knowledge and learning in comparison to behaviourism.

4. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the philosophical bases of behaviourism and constructivism. The theories developed by these many scholars have made an important contribution to our current understanding of these theories and therefore impact on the current reform drive in education. To declare which of the two theories is more appropriate for our education system will be a mistake. Each of the two has flaws. Behaviourism for example is linked to negativism, as children are not allowed to use own experience. Behaviourism need reinforcement of schedules for it to work.

But some evidence that goes with behaviourism is still evident today. Therefore our education system can be locked within the theory of behaviourism and still make reform and change. The theory of constructivism on the other hand provides us with good prospects for countering any of the traditional pedagogy practices. But the same theory needs to be subjected to further scrutiny through research in teacher education.

However, I personally feel that there are adequate, if not compelling reasons to reject behaviourism. We may be able to utilize some components of behaviourism in practice if we do not reduce people to chemically ordained animals that may be manipulated to our design. The theory of constructivism on the other hand provides us with good critical lenses to better make informed educational choices. It challenges the assumptions and practices of reductionism that have pervaded our educational practices for generations. Finally, I think that we should seek to balance our behavioural techniques with recognition of the other aspects of constructivism such as attitude, reason, truth, freedom and values. Educators need a philosophy of education, which can account for the things it seeks to propagate.

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ASSIGNMENT NO: 3 (A Literature Review)

RESEARCH TOPIC: An Examination of the Effect of Methodology
in Teaching ESL in Primary Schools.

Due date: 29 October 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the effect of methodology in teaching English as a second language in primary schools. It is to find out the ways of teaching English that can produce good results. It is also to find the styles of teaching English as a second language that make some teachers less effective so that such teaching styles can be discouraged. When English was introduced as the medium of instruction in Namibian schools, primary school teachers were retrained and upgraded.

Thus, having run for about ten years now it is appropriate at this point to take stock of the extent to which the subject has established in terms of the teachers' mastery of the subject matter of English as a second language and the appropriate methods that are compatible with the nature of the subject.

According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:82) "the literature review helps the researcher to locate the proposed research within a broader conceptual and theoretical framework. It makes it possible to broaden and refine existing knowledge; to highlight gaps and under-researched areas; to clarify theoretical and analytical issues; and to identify current debates, controversies and common themes. After identifying the common themes, the researcher can then relate these back to the research questions".

My literature review of this study will therefore attempt to clarify some theoretical issues regarding methodology in teaching a second language as well as the role and importance of such methodology can play/ have on enhancing learner performance. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the steadily growing literature on effective teaching in Namibian primary schools. My review goes as follows:

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2.   What is a Second Language?

According to Gibbons (1996) a second language is a language spoken by children or adults other than their home language at home. Other authors like Legere et al (2000) have defined it as a language learnt in addition to the mother tongue or home language. In Namibia, the concept of a second language in this case English, is used as the medium of instruction and learning in grades five to twelve besides the national languages such as Oshikwanyama or Rukwangali. Thus it is a language or linguistic variety, which at a certain point in time replaces the mother tongue or home language, and becomes more prominent for classroom interaction by teachers and learners.

3.   What is a Teaching Methodology?

Language teaching came into its own as a profession in the last century. The notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning according to Rodgers (2001) is a powerful one, and the quest for better methods preoccupied teachers and applied linguists throughout the 20th century. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986:28) "A methodology is a system of methods more often supported by a common theoretical framework or approach. It includes specified teaching strategies, step-by-step techniques, practices and behaviours employed by the teacher to foster content. It also encompasses classroom resources such as time, space and equipment or teaching aids used by the teachers and classroom interactional patterns".

Brown (1994:51) defines methodology as: "the study of pedagogical practices in general (including theoretical underpinnings and related research). Whatever considerations that are involved in "how to teach" are methodological".

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The methodology recommended for the Primary School Syllabus in Namibia is that of fostering the national principles of among others democracy and life-long learning. In other words, teaching techniques should aim at developing individuals with the ability to think independently, with a sense of freedom to express their own opinion and respect for the opinion of others. The methodology as stipulated in the English language policy for Namibian schools (MBESC:1998) is based on the communicative and holistic approaches of learner-centred education.

4.   Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Over time research has managed to answer the fundamental question "is learning the mother-tongue like learning a second language"? The answer to this question is yes, the processes are basically the same. In other words the cognitive/ mental processes a child learning the mother- tongue goes through are the same processes as an adult or another child from another language learning that child's language would go through. This is evidenced in the fact that both the L2 child and the L2 adult will go through the same stages and make the same errors the L1 child would make.

Richards and Rodgers (1986) discuss a language teaching method as having an approach, a design and a procedure. According to these authors, an approach is a theory of the nature of language and of language learning. In other words an approach is a belief of what language is, and how it is best learned. The design is an inventory of what is to be learned (content) and why (objectives). It also stipulates the role of the teacher, the learner and of instructional materials. The procedure, according to Richards and Rodgers refers to classroom techniques, practices and behaviours employed to foster content.

In the following sub sections the most popularly accepted theories of language acquisition are discussed.

4.1 Traditional Language Teaching

A glance through the past century or so of language teaching will give an interesting picture of how best a second language could be taught and upon which to base teaching methodology. According to Bowman et al (1989) traditional language teaching is divided into the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, and the Audiolingual Method.

4.1.1 The Grammar Translation Method

This is the oldest approach in language teaching when Latin was the language of education. There was very little research in how language was learned especially how people learn to communicate. The understanding was that language is a system of structure and therefore to know a language meant to describe these structures (Nyati-Ramahobo 1995:4). The focus of this method was on grammar which was taught through presentation and study of the rules, followed by practice through translation, exercises and memorization.

Richards and Rodgers (1986:4) criticise this method as follows: "It is remembered with distaste by thousands of school learners, for whom foreign learning meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose".

It is ironic however that this method has until very recently been among many competing models. On the other hand though, one can understand why grammar translation is so popular. It requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers as tests of grammar rules and of translations are easy to construct and can be objectively scored. However, given the nature of the Namibian language teaching approach of learner – centred education, this method does virtually nothing to enhance a learners' communicative ability in the language.

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4.1.2   The Direct Method

According to Brown (1994) the basic premise of the Direct Method was similar to that of Gouin's series method, namely, that second language learning should be more like first language learning. What this means is lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no emphasis of grammatical rules.

4.1.3   The Audio lingual Method (ALM)

According to Bowman et al (1989) this method was influenced by behavioural psychologists who believed that foreign language learning is a process of mechanical habit formation. In the Audiolingual Method, skills are taught in the natural order of acquisition, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Audio lingual classes begin with a dialogue which introduces the lesson's sentence patterns. The students will then memorize this dialogue, and then practice grammar patterns in drills such as listen and repeat. Accuracy in pronunciation is emphasized.

However, this method permits very little use of the mother tongue by the teacher. There is always a great effort to get learners to produce error-free utterances as their "success" could be overtly experienced through practice. According to Bowman et al (1989) the learner role was seen as that of organisms that can be directed by skilled training techniques to produce correct responses as classroom materials were primarily teacher oriented.

4.2   Communicative Language Teaching

The late 1960s saw a shift in focus from the traditional language teaching methods like the Audiolingual and its prototypes to communicative language teaching. This shift evolved partly as a result of people beginning to question teaching methods that advocated "over learning" through classroom drill and memorization (Brown 1994).

According to Bowman et al (1989) the emphasis on form, on explicitly learning grammar rules or practicing grammatical patterns, was downplayed in favour of an approach designed to meet learners' needs when using the language in daily social interaction. What follows are the most currently accepted approaches of Communicative Language Teaching.

4.2.1 The Communicative Approach

As language began to be viewed as a tool for communication, language-teaching syllabuses began to change from structural or grammatical to notional-functional, situational and communicative syllabi (Yalden 1983). Notional-functional and situational syllabuses were based on the understanding that language is used to perform certain situations (Yalden 1983). And therefore to learn language you need to learn to use language to perform such functions as greetings, apologizing, asking for permission as appropriate for those situations. These functions can for instance be used in the courtroom, in the home, at the store and so on.

The evolution of the communicative approach was sparked by the debate between Noam Chomsky (1965) and Dell Hymes (1972) at the University of Pennsylvania (Nyati-Ramahobo 1995). For Chomsky all that linguistic theory has to inform us about is how rules of grammar are learned in an ideal homogeneous society. For Hymes, a child would be regarded a monster if he or she knew all the grammatical rules of his/her language and ignored all the sociolinguistic rules of the society in which they live, which is, in reality a heterogeneous one. For Hymes therefore, it is not enough to know the grammatical rules, but also more important to know the cultural rules or norms of the society, that is, what is socially appropriate, when to say what to whom and how. Since this debate, communicative syllabuses have been designed. As Widdowson (1978:3) claimed "knowledge of language is now understood not only as the knowledge of grammatical rules but also of the appropriateness of utterances to meet communicative purposes".

4.2.2   The Total Physical Response (TPR)

This method is based on the theory that children at home acquire language through the use of command by parents.   Children demonstrate comprehension by physically responding to commands.   In a classroom situation, the Total Physical Response method was developed in order to create a low anxiety atmosphere and provides comprehensible input for acquisition. This approach is frequently used for second language speakers of all grades (Nyati-Ramahobo 1995). The major technique in its use during lessons is the use of commands to direct behaviour. However its emphasis on exposing the learner to hearing and understanding the language before requiring the learner to speak is problematic as it focuses on the importance of listening comprehension as the basis for language acquisition.

4.2.3 The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach is based on the input hypothesis which tell us that we acquire language in a very simple way, through exposure to language data that is understandable and contains information or expressions which the learner could not understand before, that is information which is a little bit beyond the current competence of the learner (input + 1) (Larsen-Freeman 1986). It aims at creating a home-like environment in which a child is always surrounded by input (language) from members of the family.

In the classroom, children spend a lot of time discussing ideas, solving problems and performing tasks.   All these activities require oral communication and generate language for acquisition and facilitate the development of all language skills. The teacher uses the target language (the language to be learned) as a way to provide comprehensible input.   This means that when the teacher presents new materials learners have to be prepared to speak, draw or use real objects to get their meaning across (Bowman et al 1989).

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It is thus clear that this method was based on the theory of behaviourism as it attempts to teach language through physical activity. Only when the teacher is satisfied that her/his students understand and are ready to speak does she/he ask them to do so.

4.3   Content-Based Instruction

Content-based instruction (CBI) has been used in a variety of language learning contexts for the last 25 years and its popularity and wider applicability have increased dramatically in the past 10 years or so.

There are numerous practical features of CBI that make it an appealing approach to language instruction. As Stoller (1997:2) puts it: "In a content – based approach, the activities of the language class are specific to the subject matter being taught, and are geared to stimulate students to think and learn through the use of the target language. Such an approach lends itself quite naturally to the integrated teaching of the four traditional language skills". The consistent set of descriptions by CBI practitioners has come to appreciate the many ways that this approach offers for language learning. As Brinton et al (1989:2) put it: "In this approach, students are exposed to study skills and learn a variety of language skills which prepare them for the range of academic tasks they will encounter".

Four other findings from research in educational and cognitive psychology have also emphasised the benefits of content- based instruction as an ideal approach. Two of these are worth noting here. Singer (1990) claimed that thematically organised materials, typical of content-based classrooms, are easier to remember and learn.
While Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) have emphasised that expertise in a topic develops when learners reinvest their knowledge in a sequence of progressively more complex tasks, feasible in content – based classrooms and usually absent from more traditional language classrooms because of the narrow focus on language rules or limited time on superficially developed and disparate topics.

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These empirical research findings, when combined with the practical advantages of integrating content and language learning would provide persuasive arguments in favour of content-based instruction.

5. Factors which Influence Second Language Acquisition

There appear to be different beliefs pertaining to whether good methodology used in teaching a first language is linked to good performance in a second language. One theory, called the separate underlying proficiency (SUP) theory, maintains that under certain conditions, the content and skills learned in the first language cannot be transferred to a second one. The common underlying proficiency (CUP) theory, on the contrary, posits the idea that the first language does facilitate the acquisition of the second language (Cummins and Swain 1986).

The latter viewpoint (CUP) seems to enjoy credence over the first one (SUP), as research conducted into second language acquisition seems to support the latter viewpoint. Ellis (1994:347) suggests, "Learners lacking skills in the first language, are bound to lack the same skills in the second language".

5.1 The Role of Skills Acquired in the Home Language

Gibbons (1996) support the idea that levels of skills in the mother tongue, particularly when these include literacy, greatly facilitate the learning of English. It is also Ellis' (1994) belief that second language learners make strategic use of their first language in the process of learning the second language provided that the same effective methods of teaching are used in both first language and second language classrooms. Gibbons (1996:6) further states that "if one has sorted out the world in one language, it becomes much easier to sort it out again in a second language". She believes that in such a situation learners are adding on a second language what they already have in the first language. The key factor however is the degree to which the first language is continuing to develop throughout the school system.

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Vygotsky (1978) also claimed that children learn both spontaneous and scientific concepts. He said that the spontaneous concepts are learned unconsciously through experience enriched by culture, whilst scientific concepts are taught. However, he claimed that if children have to learn in a second language, they lose the richness that spontaneous learning gives, and this can affect both the quality of that learning and also the further development of spontaneous concepts. To help prevent this and enhance concept development, it is important to allow learners to talk together about what they are studying, and to write it in their own language. This has implications for education, since it means that learners need to be given the opportunity to verbalise and to be scaffolded by the teacher into higher levels of intellectual development.

5.2 Teacher Effectiveness

Yoder (1990:73) describes three broad areas of concentration that interest researchers when they address the question of teaching effectiveness. One such area is what he calls "instructional matter and methodologies". Here the position is that in order to increase teaching and learning effectiveness, attention needs to be given to instructional techniques and methods of teaching in order to ensure that they are productive in so far as they produce good results. The general assumption appears to be that the better teacher is the one who has chosen and implemented the best method.

The second of such areas of concentration, as seen by Yoder (1990) is classroom management. As he points out "… improvement of teaching is represented by focussing on techniques for classroom management, discipline and establishing a positive environment" (Yoder 1990:75). He goes on to note that while this tradition does not discount the importance of good instruction, it nevertheless assumes that the climate that prevails in a classroom will have a determining impact on the effectiveness of the instruction which takes place there (Yoder 1990:75-78).

What we gather from this is that while good instructional strategies and methods may be essential for effective teaching and learning to take place, the effectiveness of such strategies and methods can be further enhanced by the creation of a positive classroom environment that result from sound classroom management.

The third area of concentration as perceived by Yoder (1990) is teacher personality. He points out that "the working premise of this tradition is that the teacher as a person and the relationship which he/she develops with the students is a critical component of effectiveness" (Yoder 1990:75).

Citing a number of research findings Yoder indicates that in addition to good instructional strategies and methods, and good classroom management, there is also a way in which a classroom is a mini society characterized by 'social bonding' between the teacher and his/her students, which adds to effectiveness of teaching and learning. He further points out, for example, that research has shown that social bonding in the classroom can improve the performance of low achieving students somewhat. Thus the essence of his exposition in this particular regard is that the personality of the teacher has a long way to go in impacting upon the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Yoder points out from the very beginning however, that the three areas should not be seen as contradicting positions as they are in fact complementary to each other. He notes that these traditions are not mutually exclusive and there is considerable overlap between them. It seems helpful, nevertheless, to consider them as representing differing emphases (Yoder 1990:73). In other words the differences between them are in emphasis rather than in them being different positions of contradiction and the combination of all three would enhance a teacher's effectiveness in teaching.

Mautle (1989) also highlights characteristics of an effective teacher which are also equally helpful and can be itemised as follows:

- Commitment to work;

- Interest in the learners as individuals;
- Teaching styles in which children are given challenging work;
- Availability and willingness to assist when pupils need help;
- Making and using learning resources;
- Ensuring that pupils understand how to use learning resources meaningfully;
- Helping students to learn how to learn.

The above points are very useful to this paper too in that they help focus attention regarding what it is that one should be looking for in trying to determine teacher effectiveness. They are self explanatory in themselves that they may not warrant much elaboration at this point. It is logical, for example, that a committed teacher would devote quite a substantial amount of his/her time and effort to work much more than a less committed one. It is also logical that a teacher who has genuine interest in his/her learners as individuals stands a better chance of helping them in their own terms, than a teacher who sees his/her students as aggregates or cluster of classes. The same can be said of all the above points.

Again, beside teacher effectiveness, the theory on which to base sound pedagogy should according to Barrow (1990) be a thorough grounding in Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology on which teachers can draw in order to develop truly educated persons. Prawat (1992:356), like Barrow (1990) agreed that teachers' views of teaching and learning influence their classroom practice, and that to get teachers to change their classroom practice requires three criteria. They must be dissatisfied with their present beliefs; find alternative meanings and forge a link between the old and the new.

Etchberger and Shaw (1992) described an example of how a teacher can change from a positivist outlook on education to a constructivist one.

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They pointed out that teachers go through a series of changes as they begin to explore how students learn. Therefore teacher education ought to be concerned with the development of individuals with worth, dignity and creativity, not with trained technocrats, serving the national economy. To this end, teachers need to learn how to use their education to arouse their learners' curiosity, develop judgement and independence. They need to be reflexive with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of the nation.

6. Current Status of Teaching ESL in Namibia

The nature of the subject English as a second language, to a very large extent, dictates the way it must be taught. A cursory look at the Namibian primary programme/ curriculum for English as a second language provides two approaches which, it is hoped, could serve to guide those who handle the subject regarding the way the subject must be treated. These approaches as suggested in the programme are as follows: Firstly, the Upper Primary Syllabus calls for the communicative approach to the teaching of English. This approach matches the demands of learner-centred teaching by focusing on what the learners are going to do in order to reach communicative competence. The approach is mainly concerned with the learners' ability to transmit information, ideas, thoughts or feelings by speaking or writing, and their ability to receive these through listening or reading (English language policy for Namibian schools 1998:10).

In general, the ESL curriculum emphasizes the communication functions of language, its practical use for real life situations. For example, keeping diaries and journals; project based work to promote independent learning and pair and group work allowing a high degree of learner involvement are among others recommended for this approach.

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Secondly, the Upper Primary Syllabus calls for an integrative approach to teaching English. In the past, language teaching in Namibia emphasized the separateness of the different skills by having different lessons for oral, for comprehension, for grammar and so on. It is expected that the four constituent skills, including language usage be integrated and treated as one body of knowledge which should not be taught in isolation from each other. However, analysis of the syllabus reveals that it is not sufficient for the full realization of learner potential. No mention is made of literature, an important source for developing language skills. Relying on the texts and other materials alone leads one to conclude that ESL is not intended to be the means to read critically, nor to write analytically.

It is clear from the above approaches as to how the new methodology in teaching English as a Second Language should be treated. Doll (1989) questions the claim that the curriculum ought to be fixed and mastered according to predetermined criteria. He sees the curriculum as a network of important ideas to be explored. This means that there is a need for an open system whereby learners can reflect on their actions; explain what they did and why they did it. Therefore teachers should set broad goals to structure the process.

Teachers need to understand the implications of the policy and approach shift for classroom teaching. Postmodern education theories reject the closed system of modern education, stressing instead that: "...Curriculum planning should be a two - tier or hierarchical process. The first tier would involve broad, general goals, set by the teachers as the expert in the field – or done in collaboration with other experts in the field. The second tier would emerge as the particulars of the curriculum began to take shape. This tier would vary from class to class and would involve the class – teacher and students working as a group or community" (Doll 1989:251).

These words encapsulate the philosophy behind learner-centred education where certain learning outcomes are expected, but which allow for individual teachers to have the freedom to choose what else goes into the learning programme and what specific outcomes are to be achieved. Therefore there is a need for Namibia to concentrate more on re-educating teachers in postmodern theories, and less on simply training them in the use of the new learning programmes.

7. Summary on these Traditional and the Communicative Language Teaching Approaches

One of the traditional beliefs of language acquisition as stated above states that language is learned through imitation (based on the behaviourist view).

All learning, whether verbal or non- verbal, is believed to take place through the same underlying process, habit formation. Learners receive linguistic input from speakers in their environment and positive reinforcement or their correct repetitions and imitations. This belief in language learning led to drill-type approaches to second language teaching (the Audio-lingual approach).

Students memorize vocabulary and dialogues and reproduced them. Stress is/was placed on correct pronunciation and accurate production of the target language. This language learning theory, however, is/was incomplete as it was located in the theory of positivism. As is the case, behaviourists would set objectives, give the learners habit formation "experience" suited to their developmental stage, and make sure that the learners achieved the objectives by testing them scientifically.

This method has not met with success. Behaviourism fails because it aims to change the learner's behaviour, and not the inner person.

An early constructivist, Vygotsky (1978), writing in Russia at the same time as Piaget expounded his theory of cognitive development, put forward a theory that children learn by talking their way through the process.

He claimed that at first this was done by the child talking out aloud to herself/ himself, as her/his hands were busy carrying out the task. As the child matured, he claimed, the speech became internalised, but whenever new learning took place, the learner would revert to verbalising. In other words, new thoughts and ideas (knowledge and concepts) are formed by a process of verbalisation.

It is thus important to state that children do not pick up their mother tongue for example by imitating their mothers. If this were the case, then why do children say things like *Don't giggle* me! or *we holded the baby rabbits* (Pinker 1994). This cannot be an act of imitation, as it is doubtful that children have actually heard those incorrect grammatical phrases. Second language researchers had to move on to other theories to explain how languages are learned.

In reaction to the behaviourists' theory, language acquisition beliefs then gravitated toward the development of communicative language teaching. In this language teaching approach, communication of meaning is at the centre of the language learning process. An emphasis is placed on learning through interaction in the target language.

Interaction is so important in language learning situation as according to through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material. Even the output of their fellow students in discussions is beneficial. In interaction students can use all they possess of the language – all they have learned or casually observed in real life exchanges where expressing their real meaning is important to them. Through interaction, the language learner is provided with many opportunities to practice the target language rather than the behaviourists' theory in which it believed that children are biologically programmed for languages (Rivers 1987). The peer group, who will "language" at the level most appropriate to the group, then does scaffolding.

Farnham-Diggory (1994:464-469) claimed that users should apply skills as they acquire them, and therefore the learner should be presented with situational learning - much like an apprenticeship whereby learning is embedded in real-world activities. The social context is important because learners need time to explore ideas together, to question and discuss, but emphasised the learning experience to the 'truth' within a desired time frame, so that learning does take place, not just debate and conjecture (Farnham-Diggory 1994:471).

Research seems to indicate that constructivist learning theories such as the communicative language learning approach offer a more appropriate approach to bringing about change. An important part of constructivist teaching is to give learners the necessary experiences and skills to enable them to construct socially acceptable meanings. Constructivist teaching relies on giving learners extensive sensory interaction with the external world. The development of critical thinking skills and effective communication of experiences are central to successful learning. These can effectively be achieved through group work, problem solving and hands – on testing.

8.   Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to review the effect of methodology in teaching English as a second language at primary schools. The various traditional language-teaching approaches were explored as well as the more contemporary approaches being used to effectively teach English as a second language. The study also provided the theories of language teaching and learning. I have also raised the issue of an effective teacher who can realise the envisaged methodology needed to teach ESL. The primary curriculum was briefly discussed to evaluate its intended goals and teaching approaches. Whilst the focus of this literature review was on the effect of Methodology in teaching ESL, it gave me insight into what might help teachers to make the call for paradigm shift from the familiar transmission method to the post modern constructivist methods of learner centred approach.

The current model of the BETD INSET makes the assumption that teachers fall into one of two groups. Either they are seen as having sufficient training and therefore in need only of enrichment, or they are assumed to be "below standard" and in need of some sort of intervention training to bring them up to standard. Neither the enrichment nor the deficit model can develop the quality of teacher envisioned by the government documents relating to teacher education.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to re- educate English language teachers in the philosophy, and related methodologies underpinning the acquisition of English as a second language.

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RHODES UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH PROPOSAL
Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION
(GENERAL EDUCATION THEORY AND PRACTICE)

CANDIDATE: F. Mungongi
No. 699M4472

SUPERVISORS: U.van Harmelen
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PROVISIONAL TITLE:
An Investigation of learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities at a selected school in the Rundu Education Region.

Research Proposal

Field of Research: General Education Theory and Practice.

Provisional Title: An Investigation of learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities at a selected school in the Rundu Education Region.

1. Context and background to the study

Everyday, ESL teachers make many decisions in their classrooms about language teaching and learning processes. These include decisions about which activities their learners might possibly enjoy, which are most effective, and which would provide learners with skills that they could use for academic and communicative purposes.

The learners, however, are seldom involved in this decision - making process. Language learners are hardly ever asked in any overt systematic way about their language learning experiences.

Allwright (1984:167) suggests that "very many teachers seem to find it difficult to accept their learners as people with a positive contribution to make to the instructional process" and Rudduck (1991:30) refers to ignoring learners' views as " our blind spot". One often hears teachers commenting on a lesson that their learners enjoyed or on a unit of work that their learners found irrelevant. These types of comments raise three questions. Firstly, how do teachers know what their learners think or feel? Is it simply intuition, or is some evaluation procedure used? Secondly, How does one know whether the teachers are accurate in their assessments? Research has shown that perceptions of teachers and their learners do not always match (e.g., Block 1994; Kumaravadivelu 1991). Thirdly, what do teachers do as a result of their observations? Do they make any changes, or do they just repeat what they have done and hope that the same or different learners will respond differently next time?

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In the past, second language teachers were often perceived as mere implementers of various language-in-education policies and of various teaching methodologies. More recently, however, teachers have been portrayed as experts who not only are supposed to be able to make informed decisions about effective classroom practice (Clarke 1994; Wright 1990), but who also have the ability to undertake reliable research in order to facilitate such decisions (Ellis 1993). Furthermore, as Cray and Currie (1996:114) point out, "to deal effectively with individual language classrooms, they should be able to take into account not only the pedagogical but also the social and personal complexities influencing classroom processes".

I would thus, include here learners' perceptions of their experiences in these classroom settings.

With the advent of learner-centred teaching approaches, a greater emphasis has been laid on learners' perceptions of classroom aims and events. Nunan (1989:177) claims that "no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centred unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account".

In order to take learners' perceptions into account, teachers need to discover what they are. Kumaravadivelu (1991) says that both teachers and learners bring with them their own perceptions of what constitute language teaching and learning, and Breen (1989:205) states that " all learners already critically evaluate the tasks they undertake".

Learners therefore interpret tasks and other classroom events from their own perspectives. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993:9) have concluded in their study on language attitudes and motivation that "Teachers, instructional aids, curricula, and the like clearly have an effect on what is learned and how students react to the experience…non-linguistic outcomes are expected in turn to have direct effects on language attitudes, motivation and language anxiety".

2

It is this variable, attitude as a non-linguistic outcome that is the focus of this study. It is to investigate ELS students' perceptions of their experiences of learning and being taught English at school, specifically the language teaching and learning activities they are encountering in their classes.

1.1 The Goal of the Research

The aim of the proposed study is to explore a selection of learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities. Through this it is hoped to cause greater illumination on the nature of learning and teaching English.

1.2 Research Questions

The study will explore and investigate on Upper Primary School ESL learner's perceptions of their experiences of learning and being taught at school, specifically the language teaching and learning activities they encounter in their classes.

The following questions will therefore be asked:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of learners towards the learning and teaching classroom activities?

2. To what extent does communicative language teaching approach characterises classroom activities?

The above questions will hopefully capture the different aspects of interest in capturing the perceptions of Upper Primary learners.

1.3 Significance of the Study

An Impact study of was done to evaluate the extent of change the Life Science project has gone through since its implementation in Namibia (Van Harmelen et al 2001). In the study, however, there was no mention about the nature of learning and teaching English across the curriculum since independence.

An English Language proficiency survey (MBEC 2000) of teachers teaching English was conducted. Again, the survey fell short to do an assessment study on learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities. It is hoped that this interpretative study can contribute to a fuller and more realistic understanding of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities.

2. Research Methodology

Fien (1992:2) notes that " ... Methodology provides the philosophical framework that guides the research activity". Burgess (1985:2) argues that 'Methodology' involves consideration of the research design, data collection, data analysis and theorising together with the social, ethical and political concerns of the social researcher. Methodology therefore provides the theory behind the cluster of techniques that comprise a research method.

In this section I will analyse and present the paradigm and approach which I find are most appropriate for my research question and discuss shortcomings and features of the selected paradigm and approach. According to Bassey (1995:12) a research paradigm is: "a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and the functions of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpin their research actions".

I believe that it is important to be aware of the distinction Bassey makes between the ideas related to the underlying assumptions of the paradigm, and the research actions which is more related to methods to be used during research. The assumptions, which are ontological and epistemological, have to do with beliefs which will guide the researcher through the whole research process. The methods used in research processes are multiple and can be used under different paradigms.

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Connole (1993) points out that it is important researchers recognise that their research is embedded in a paradigm and stresses that the research design has to be coherent.

According to van Rensburg (2001) Social sciences went through a period influenced by the research models of the positivist paradigm, which is rooted in the Natural sciences. It was regarded as "the" scientific method. The thinking and purpose of research in this paradigm according to Cantrell (1993:83) is to "Discover laws and generalisations which explain reality and allow to predict and control".

The ontological assumptions as characterised by Cantrell (1993) is a belief of a single reality that can be divided into fragments. These fragments can be measured and described through scientific methods. The epistemological assumptions a re that e vents are based on facts and that there is a cause - effect relation between facts. The researcher is seen as independent, separated from the researched and the researcher as value-free.

In arguing for a paradigm shift away from the dominant social paradigm founded on scientific materialism and mechanistic world views (Guba 1991), Educators and others working in social contexts argued that many aspects of social life cannot be measured, but are still important to research (Janse van Rensburg 2001). As Wals (1993) observes "What you can't measure still exists".

With the above in mind symbolich science researchers came up with a different framework in which research can be conducted. They called this " the interpretive paradigm". Cantrell (1993:83) describes the purpose of research within this paradigm as to "Understand and interpret daily occurrences and social structures as well as the meanings people give to phenomena". The underlying ontological assumptions of the paradigm Cantrell (1993) describes is that there are multiple realities, it is constructed in the mind through human interaction, it is holistic and divergent.

5

The epistemological assumptions are that events are understood through the individual's interpretation derived in a social context. The researcher is part of the research process participating in a dialogic situation with the researched. It is recognised that the research process and that of the researcher is value laden.

Even though the interpretive paradigm is seen at times as a 'new' way of doing research, replacing positivism, its underpinnings according to Janse van Rensburg (2001) are not novel. Van Rensburg (2001:18) points at one of the criticisms levelled against interpretivist research in that it can promote a relativist perspective, a view that "everyone makes their own meaning and all views are equal". And thus can fail to provide a basis for decision-making.

However, Van Rensburg (2001) further contends that this paradigm with its emphasis on rich contextual detail and close attention to individual life experience and meaning making can produce a wealth of descriptive data that highlight complexity and promote broad insights into situations.

With these assumptions in mind I decided to conduct the research within the interpretive tradition. Bassey (1995:12) describes the tradition as: "Interpretation is a research for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities, but not certainties, as to the outcome of future events".

The paradigm affords a researcher an opportunity to understand the situation of the phenomenon by putting himself / herself in the shoes of his / her subjects, in their life world, thereby learning through the process of interpretations and the meanings which they give to their actions (Cantrell 1993).

It will thus allow me to describe learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities at the selected school and it can provide data which add to the overall understanding of the research.

My method and approach to this is in a form of a case study in which I hope to raise issues which could then be researched further in Namibia. Stenhouse (1988:49) describes the case study method as involving the "collection and recording of data about a case or cases, and the preparation of a report or a presentation of the case".

With the above definition of a case study in mind, the case study method will allow me to work closely with a small group of learners, become part of their world, as a friend, and so hopefully gain an understanding of their perceptions with regard to ESL classroom activities.

The case study also allows the collection of detailed information specific to the case for the generation of theory, not to test a theory (Hopkins 1985) which is what I intend doing. The methods and techniques that I have chosen can be described as eclectic as the criteria of choice being to select those methods and techniques that seems most likely to provide most insight into the research questions (Lotz 1996).

However, a case study according to Hopkins (1985) has its limitations in that feedback is only available to the researcher after considerable lapse of time and is time consuming in its preparation and writing.

2.1 Research Design

In order to discover the perceptions of the learners, I will employ a multimethod, qualitative approach to data collection and analysis.

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

Case study research has no specific methods of data collection or of analysis. As Bassey (1999: 69) illustrates "It is eclectic and in preparing a case study researchers use whatever methods seem to them to be appropriate and practical".

The following are a number of research techniques to be used:
- Questionnaires
- Observations
- Interviews
- Interactive workshops
- Focus group discussions

2.2.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire will be designed and randomly distributed to 10 students from each of grades 5 – 7 at the school. Questionnaires have the advantage of being easy to administer and allow the respondents time to consider their answers. However, other valuable information is lost, such as body language, tone of voice and facial expression. (Cohen and Manion 1994). They are useful for gathering factual information, which can be coded for easier interpretation, but not as useful for collecting more insightful knowledge. To overcome this limitation, I will use open-ended questions.

The intention with open-ended questions is to get underneath the surface of things, so that the richness and wealth of information could resurface. Questions to be asked will be about some of the activities learners do in their classes.

2.2.2 Observation

Three English classes will be observed in action, one each in grades 5 – 7 over a period of two weeks of which I hope to obtain a detailed account of classroom events through qualitative field notes, audio recordings, copies of all instructional materials, and samples of students' written work.

2.2.3 Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews with all three English teachers will be conducted. Teachers will be generally questioned about English teaching in the school, their teacher education, and their approach to teaching English and their familiarity with the ESL syllabus, and specifically about the language teaching / learning and testing activities in their classes – what their perceptions of activity types were and what they thought their students' perceptions of the various activities were.

As Cantrell (1993:87) observed, "interviews allow for the collection of data in the subjects' own words, thereby affording the researcher an opportunity to discover subjects' perceptions, interpretations and the meanings which they give to their actions". The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.

2.2.4 An Interactive Workshop

Due to the nature of my study and the level of learners (Grades 5 – 7) as the main target group from which I have to gather the data I need, the appropriateness of taking a rigorous qualitative approach and spending time in deciding on the appropriate methods are necessary. I therefore decided to use an interactive workshop approach for data gathering.

According to van Harmelen et al (2001:36) "a structured interactive workshop is seen to provide opportunities for data gathering in a 'natural' setting in the sense that the data is captured in a learning and teaching situation". Again, van Harmelen et al (2001) contend that the interactive workshop is intended to give a sense of ownership and participation of the researched target group. The workshop will be of particular value as it will provide insights regarding the perceptions of learners about the ESL classroom teaching and learning activities they encounter / experience. As van Harmelen et al (2001:36) puts it: "a particular advantage of interactive workshops is that the activities can be specifically designed and developed to focus on particular sets of outcomes, they can as easily focus on individual learning as on group interactions". As part of the interactive workshop learners would be asked to write a one-page composition about what they like and dislike about English.

In selecting this tool, it will be used to crosscheck the data gathered during questionnaires, observations and interviews. Only one such workshop will be held with a relatively large group of learners.

2.2.5 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are chosen as one of the data collection tools because the learners selected for this exercise will be able to give their experience and perspectives on the nature of ESL classroom activities. According to van Harmelen et al (2001:28) "focus groups can provide a good means of analysing how people interact and discuss issues". They are thus useful as they combine elements of participant observation and individual interviewing. Group discussions with +- 4 - 5 students from each of grades 5 – 7 will be conducted. Besides engaging in general discussion about learning English and the types of activities they experience in their classes, this focus group will be asked to elaborate on some of the points to be raised in the compositions. These discussions will also be audio taped and later transcribed.

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Research Time Table

Month	Activity
February – March 2003	Selection of the school where the study would be conducted. Permission sought from the Regional Education authority. Approach principal and teachers: negotiate access and a research contract with respective roles, the process obligations and benefits clearly stated.
April 2003	Contact school again and confirm Grades 5,6 & 7 learners and teachers participating. Visit school for pilot data collection (1 week).
June 2003	Visit the selected school for data collection
July 2003	Completion of data analysis and reflection.
August – October 2003	Write up.

Dissemination

The researcher will write up the paper on the research for national as well as international journals.

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An Investigation of learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities at a selected school in the Rundu Education Region.

(Research Paper)

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By

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ABSTRACT

At independence in 1990 Namibian education was in the process of undergoing what has become known as a "paradigm shift", requiring a change from the familiar transmission method to learner-centred approach (LCA) founded on social constructivist theories of learning and teaching. In the past teachers were often regarded as implementers of various languages in education policies and learners as mere recipients of such instructional programme. Learners were never asked about their perceptions of classroom aims and events such as the activities they do in their classrooms. Research on learner's perceptions, the focus of this study, became an area of interest in the mid 1980s. Researchers began to investigate the importance of asking learners about their language learning experiences (Nunan 1989). Most recently, Block (1994), for example has found that learners do have an awareness of what goes on in class and that teachers should make an attempt to adjust or align their orientation to that of learners.

This interpretative case study hoped to find out from learners themselves about their perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities. A variety of research tools were used, including questionnaires, interviews, observations, interactive workshops and focus group discussions, all of which provided a rich source of data for interpretation. The research findings of this study clearly indicated that there is a mismatch between the teachers and learners' perceptions about the language skills and tasks encountered in the classrooms. From what was gained from the participants in this research, tentative suggestions are made.

Like any study, this has certain limitations. This does not mean that there is nothing to be gained from a study of this nature. Rather, the aim is to challenge more researchers to take up this issue, so that generalisability across case studies can be achieved.

1. Introduction

In the last 15 years educational research has provided ample support for the assertion that teachers' classroom practices are determined to substantial degree by the learners' needs and perceptions. Cray and Currie (1996) pointed out that to effectively deal with individual language classroom, teachers should be able to take into account not only the pedagogical but also the social and personal complexities that influence classroom processes. Kumaravadivelu (1991) says that both teachers and learners bring with them their own perceptions of what consistitutes language teaching and learning, and Breen (1989:205) states, "all learners already critically evaluate the tasks they undertake". The research covered in this paper therefore, attempted to provide a perspective on learners' perceptions and beliefs about the classroom learning activities.

The setting chosen for the research was an Upper Primary school in the Kavango education region in Namibia. The language of learning and teaching in the school was English although this is the second language. The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the second trimester (June 2003) and lasted for two weeks. The aim of the study was to explore a selection of learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities. Through this study it is hoped to cause greater illumination on the nature of learning and teaching English. In order to discover the perceptions of the learners, I employed a number of different research techniques.

2. Research Methodology and Procedures

The research I present here was conceived within the interpretive paradigm (Cantrell 1993). Within this framework, the goal of research is to understand the inner perspectives on the meanings of the actions of those being studied. It is characterised by a conceptual framework which focuses on the meaning of particular events.

By its aim to generate rather than to verify theory. Therefore, it does not set out to test a priori hypotheses. This approach to research views knowledge not as an objective reality that the researcher describes scientifically; rather it acknowledges the personally constructed nature of all knowledge (Bassey 1995). A consequence of this epistemology is that research is seen as a task of interpreting human action by understanding why people behave in the way they do. Applied to the study of ESL, this paradigm allows an exploration of learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching and learning activities.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

This enquiry took the form of a case study. I employed a multimethod qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The study w as not linear but cyclical, which called for a sequential form of analysis (Lotz 1996; Delamont 1992). In practice this means that data were c ollected and analysed t hroughout the period of fieldwork, with each successive stage of data collection being influenced by the analysis of the data already collected. Therefore, the researcher decided to first administer the questionnaire, observations and interviews during the first phase of the research process. During the second phase an interactive workshop and a focus group discussion were held to reinforce responses/data that emerged during the first phase of the study.

Below is a description of the procedures I followed.

3.1.1 Questionnaire

The questions in the questionnaires were semi structured and basically asked learners what their perceptions of activity types were (see appendix A). The questionnaire was randomly distributed to 10 students from each of grades 5-7 at the school. The response was so overwhelming which contributed to the richness of the data gathered.

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3.1.2 Interviews

I then conducted forty-five minutes preobservation interviews with the teachers in order to establish a profile of their educational backgrounds, experience of teaching, and general views about ESL teaching. The interviews were semi structured (Kvale 1996), and focused on particular themes (see appendix C) without being rigidly structured and in which my role was to interact with the teachers in order to explore in as open-minded a manner as possible about their educational and professional experiences in their lives.

In both cases the interviews were face-to-face and individual encounters. Each interview was recorded on tape and later transcribed. As the researcher I cannot help wondering whether I have not misrepresented what the interviewers were saying. It is possible that, in the process of smoothing over rough spots in an attempt to present a coherent account of the data under examination, some details were left out or others added. Again, there is a possibility that as the researcher I may have given an inadequate description of the teachers under observation, Moreso because it is not possible to directly observe features of the tasks written by the learners and when the writing took place.

Concerning these possible problems, Ball, as quoted in (Bryman 1988:73) adds:

> Access to a world of fleeting, contradictory, murky, incoherent realities demands selective attention from the field-worker. For everything that is noticed, a multitude of other things go unseen, for everything that is written down a multitude of other things are forgotten. Great parts of the real world experienced by the participant–observer, probably the greater part, are 'selected out'.

3.1.3 Observation

As mentioned previously, three sessions of classroom observation (one for each grade) were conducted after the interview phase of the study. The duration of each observation lasted approximately one hour and observations were recorded in note form. A fairly flexible schedule was followed, which focussed on particular issues, relating to the classroom environment (see appendix B).

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The purpose, therefore, was to observe the provision of language learning opportunities in the classroom, particularly the nature of activities, language use, interaction, and teacher and learner roles. This enabled the researcher to gain first-hand experience of the kind of activity types offered to learners.

Nevertheless, although classroom observation enabled the researcher to explore certain features in the learning environment in a focussed way, it also had its limitations. Firstly, as Bell (1993:118) comments, the use of observation schedule mean that, "… you will be mainly depend on the decisions taken before you begin your period of observation for the type of data you eventually gather".

In other words, in spite of helping one to stay focussed during an observation session, a pre-planned schedule may prevent one from observing and recording significant events that are not 'covered' in this schedule. Bell (1993:109) however, points out that one cannot record everything that happens in a classroom and hence it is difficult to avoid bias influencing the observer's decisions about what to record and what to omit. As part of the observation learner's written work were collected for analysis. The number of written pieces collected varied from learner to learner.

3.1.4 Interactive workshop
Due to the nature of this study and the level of learners (Grades 5-7) as the researcher's main target group from which the researcher had to gather the data needed, the interactive workshop provided the dimension of a teaching and learning situation (Van Harmelen et al 2001). Activities were specifically designed and developed to focus on particular outcomes as to what learners' perceptions were on these activities.

Participants were also requested to write a one–page composition about their likes and dislikes of the activities they encounter in the classroom.

One particular advantage of interactive workshops is that they can as easily focus on individual and group interactions (Van Harmelen et al 2001). Van Harmelen et al (2001) further stress their flexibility that allows for a broad range of situations and outcomes in a relatively short time frame. The only real problem I had was that not every participant was 'heard' in the initial course of the proceedings, the researcher eventually addressed it by having a mix of individual and group activities to reinforce interaction. Only one such workshop was held.

3.1.5 Focus group discussion

A focus group discussion was then held with about 5 learners whom the researcher wanted to give their experience and perspectives on the nature of ESL classroom activities and at this stage to elaborate on some of the points raised in the compositions and during the proceedings of the interactive workshop as well as on the data that emerged in the questionnaire.

3.1 The use of different techniques

The ideas of triangulation prompted the researcher to use a multiple of data gathering tools to address the issues of reliability, credibility and validity. The reasoning being that perspectives, approaches and data sources bias from any of these could be offset by the application of another approach.

4. Discussion of findings

4.1 Communicative Language Teaching

The 2000 Upper Primary phase syllabus for use in Namibian schools introduced the idea of teaching English for communicative purposes. It states,

> The emphasis throughout the syllabus should be on the practical, communicative use of English in the daily lives of Namibians, for communication, nation building, employment and as a window on the world. ...Is concerned with developing learners' communicative competence. ... This will involve knowledge of the rules, structures and use of the language in context throughout the five domains, i.e. speaking, listening, reading, writing and language usage (Upper Primary Syllabus 2000:1).

The syllabus does not refer directly to the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. The syllabus only espouses what Howatt (1984:279) would call a weak version of the communicative approach, one that "stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically attempts to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language teaching". In spite of the discussion that CLT has received in Namibia and particularly in teacher education colleges and language classrooms, the implementation has been even weaker. One of the grades 7 teachers in the school for this study, for example, told me what she thought about CLT.

> I must say that a lot of this stuff regarding CLT, I actually haven't been trained how to do it, and I haven't read much literature about it ... a lot of it, I've arrived at conclusions on my own, through experience ... but it is an evolution, I will have to pick that up as I go along.

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This comment suggests that the teacher's personal pedagogical system is being informed by her perceptions of what worked well in her classroom.

The two other English teachers in the school shared her opinion. None had done a course on communicative language teaching, although all had heard of it (usually through the syllabus). Their approach, instead appeared to be one in which, in the words of the subject head, "we are all doing what we think should be done". Firstly, " teach the way we were taught and, secondly teach the skills and the prescribing activities in an integrated w ay a s p rescribed b y t he s yllabus". An a nalysis o f t ranscripts o f c lassroom activities and interaction tends to confirm this confusion.

Classroom observation data also confirmed that some teachers talk far too much, 'lecturing' r ather t han ' teaching'. T wo c ases w ere c ited w here t he t eachers e ffectively talked for the whole forty minutes, i.e. the learners did not say one single word. There were obviously different kinds of classes in the school. But as a general rule, communicative language teaching approach is one in which active participation from the learners is essential, whatever the subject matter and whatever the class activity. As stated above possible causes for this state of affairs is that the teachers do not know how to involve the learners and as a result learners become bored and demotivated or leads to zero involvement, with the result that learning, whether of subject content and/or language skills, does not occur. And because of this learners miss out on a vital area of learning and communication. Seeking and giving information and opinions with questions is an important element of the communicative language teaching approach.

However, there is an awareness of CLT, some teachers made attempts to include more CLT-type activities (e.g., class discussions and debates). They also encourage their learners to speak as much English as possible through the English–only policy.

4.2 Grammar Rules

Apart from the brief flirtation with functional-notional syllabi in the 1980s (Nyati-Ramahobo 1995), English as a Second language is still shackled to a largely grammatical curriculum. The phenomenal success of grammar books sold to date and those being used by classroom teachers indicate the extent to which the ELT industry has colluded in maintaining the view that language learning means learning the grammar. This was evident as two of the three teachers observed based or spent their period teaching grammatical structures. Of the classroom activities learners were asked to comment on, there was a clear feeling that they liked learning about nouns, verbs, adjectives and tenses more than writing summaries, having class discussions and debates as well as reading aloud in class. As this finding, together with the following remarks by students in their compositions about likes and dislikes in ESL classes confirms.

a) I do not like writing summaries because I always have a problem with spelling and punctuation marks (Grade 6 learner).

b) I do not like discussions in the class because other learners would laugh at me as my English is not good (Grade 6 learner).

c) I like reading silently as no one would here me how I am pronouncing words (Grade 5 learner).

These findings are compatible with my observation that the learners in this school were exposed to a more traditional or mechanical rather than a communicative or critical approach to teaching English. During the research, some instances were noted of teachers not being able to make any adjustments in the methodology they employ and in the content of their teaching.

Possible causes for this could be that teachers are not trained well enough or teachers do not know how to adjust their methodology to suit different learner abilities. Another reason perhaps could be that teachers choose to focus on the majority group in the class. This is unsurprising, because a closer analysis of the materials revealed that the purposedly communicative intent of the syllabus does not permeate its teaching methods and materials.

As Willis (1990) has pointed out, there is a basic contradiction in a methodology that is organised around a syllabus of pre-selected, discrete grammatical items while purporting to be driven by the meanings the learners wish to express. As was evident, the impact on learners who do not 'like' the content being taught is serious, as they were excluded from everything that was happening. Shy learners who could not voice their dislike of the content retreated into a shell, did not participate and learnt very little or nothing.

Classroom observation revealed that teachers seem to be more comfortable with mechanical teaching in the classrooms. As the following remark by a grade five teacher suggests. "I am a product of grammar teaching. As learners those days, we spent most of our school hours learning about grammar aspects. So I have no problem teaching grammar as it requires one to just memorise the rules of what you are going to teach".

This remark by the teacher clearly could be, in part, due to the very teacher-centred, rote-learning methods the teacher himself experienced as a learner and he continues to use it in his teaching. This kind of teaching focuses not on understanding but on memorisation and recall of terminology or facts. This scenario clearly militates against the intention of the new Upper Primary Syllabus that calls for an integrative approach to teaching language skills.

4.3 Reading Activities

The suggested activities in the syllabus clearly call for reading extensively and for pleasure about a variety of texts. However, no literature was read and studied even for enjoyment and personal reaction at this phase. This is a weakness as the only book learners read is their textbook, which is limited in providing opportunities for silent reading or report writing as espoused in the syllabus.

As the following comments suggest:

a) The textbook we use is boring and I don't like its short stories (Grade 7 learner).

b) I like fiction books with this textbook I do not understand it. I just read through, because I have to. Its stories are not interesting (Grade 7 learners).

c) When I read through it I come across words I don't know (Grade 6 learner).

These comments were echoed as both teachers and learners felt that this recommended teaching material is difficult for learners given the learners' socio-historical backgrounds. They expressed that the material lacks the cultural relevance of many learners in Namibia. While both (teachers and learners) expressed that the book do have study or guiding questions that lead discussions or bring out the message of each story, the limited content on the various aspects of the Namibian culture militate against this intent.

To support the above argument (Bruner and Haste 1987:9) argued that: "If there are disparities in language use among contexts such as home, the school and in learner's community, learners may have difficulty moving into the pattern of language use and its meanings expected at school. When the child arrives at school, his/her culture of origin, either specifically in language or within other means by which communication is enacted".

Some teachers seemed unable to apply flexibility in their planning and teaching. For a number of reasons, teachers were unable to deviate from or adapt activities in the textbook even when these were inappropriate or unhelpful. Teachers did not often recognise that particular activities were 'wrong' for their learners.

Teachers never asked their learners to find out if their learners enjoyed what was being taught. They assumed that the learners liked and enjoyed what they were reading. All reading observed was done through listen and repeat, so learners do not develop proper reading skills. The English Language Proficiency survey (2000) found that 40% of Upper Primary teachers fail to achieve the level required to teach reading skills effectively.

The study also found anecdotal evidence that the standard of reading amongst Namibian learners is weak, and these results seem to reinforce the findings of this particular research study. Since reading is a vital ingredient of studying, poor reading skills affect all areas of teaching and learning. It affects the learners' ability to understand what they are studying and to make any real academic progress.

4.4 Oral Activities

The opinion poll of the listening and speaking or oral communication activities shows that learners do not enjoy these exercises. The research data gathered from the learners' compositions, focus group discussions and from the interactive workshop reveal obvious reasons for this. Teachers made attempts to organise class discussions and holding debates to try and make them practice in English. This was evident during the researcher's focus group discussions and the interactive workshop where only a handful of learners actually participated in the activities; the others sat back and enjoyed the show.

Doing orals, like speeches and reading aloud in class also ranked low in terms of responses received from learners' compositions and the interactive workshop.
As the following clearly reveals:

a) I don't like to read aloud. When you read and there is a difficult word and you can't say it, everybody will look at you and start laughing (Grade 6 learners).

b) If you talk in front of the whole class and you talk wrong they began to laugh at you. It is my most problems in English (Grade 7 learner).

c) I like the English class, because when it is oral I like to listen to other learners how they are making mistakes (Grade 7 learner).

Similar sentiments were repeated over and over again during the interactive workshop. One of the teachers expressed similar sentiments when he said "Doing oral presentations, or any oral activity is quite traumatic for learners. The bigger the classes are the worse it is". Horwitz et al (1986) described anxiety in the language classroom as a complex experience related, in part, to communication apprehension and test anxiety.

The learners in this study were certainly concerned about the accuracy of what they might say and read aloud. Because the learners experienced such high levels of anxiety, it is not surprising that they did not enjoy oral activities. There was statistical evidence that suggests that the senior grades were more willing to take the risk of publicly humiliating themselves in class.

4.5 Writing Activities

During the interactive workshop, a number of students indicated that they enjoyed writing compositions. One said "they are interesting because you don't have to tell the truth," and another said that when teachers corrected their errors, "We learn from our mistakes".

The Upper Primary syllabus compels teachers as to the number of written tasks that must be given to learners per trimester. The research data collected revealed that not enough time was spent on writing activities in class.

One learner remarked, " I like writing compositions, but the fact that we must write about topics we don't relate to upsets me". Another remarked, "We don't get topics that suit our lives". The remarks by learners are good points to take note of. When it comes to the question of choosing one topic among a number of given topics, Hamp-Lyons (1991:52) believes that writers create a 'fit' between their world and the world of the essay topic. According to her, this is because each writer has a complex of experience, knowledge, ideas, emotions and opinions; and these are what the writer brings to the essay test. Hartog, according to Hamp-Lyons, suggests that "the 'familiarity' or 'unfamiliarity' of a topic affects writers' performance" (Hartog, as cited in Hamp-Lyons 1991:54).

One teacher complained of large classes, and the Grade 7 teacher said that she hated reading and grading written work: "It's really a nightmare. But I have no choice".
Learners indicated that they don't like the way teachers assess their written work with red pens indicating spelling, wrong word and grammar errors. Some linguists seem to agree on the point that good writing does not necessarily mean 'perfect' or 'flawless' text.

Gungle and Taylor, as cited in (Johnson and Roen 1989) argued that grammatically perfect sentences have little power if they do not clearly and forcefully express intelligent ideas. This confirms the idea that intelligence does play a part in writing. It is their opinion that there is: "No reason to expect the study of grammar or mechanics to have any substantial effect on the writing process or on writing ability as reflected in the quality of the written products" (Gungle and Taylor, as cited in Johnson and Roen 1989:235). According to Gungle and Taylor (1989), if we can pick out in red all the mistakes we find within a piece of writing, we shall be doing harm by showing interest solely in the product and not in the process of writing, even if this has errors.

5. Analysis of Results: Conclusions and Reflections

Although comparing the perceptions of ESL learners with those of their teachers was not the aim of this study, the results clearly indicate the learners' perceptions did not always match that of their teachers. The teachers obviously were surprised to learn about the thoughts and feelings of their learners. Kumaravadivelu (1991:107) says that "the more we know about the learner's personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive our intervention will be". By this he means that if we, as teachers, are aware of our learners' learning experiences and how they act or react upon these feelings, we will be able to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom.

The Pilot Curriculum Guide for formal Basic Education (1996), clearly describes the relationship between the teacher and the learner as well as about the view of the learner the teachers are expected to have. It states that "… natural curiosity and eagerness to learn to investigate and make sense of a widening world … children learn best when they are actively involved in the process …[they] respond best when they are interested in the things which they are learning" (Pilot Curriculum Guide for formal Basic Education 1996:23). Learning is thus seen as an interactive, shared and productive process, where teaching creates learning opportunities that will enable learners to explore different ways of knowing.

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The view of the learner and learning described as above in the curriculum guide is within the broad parameters of social constructivism. Again, according to Ellis (1994) Language learners are said to manifest different attitudes towards the target language, the target language culture, the social value of learning the second language and towards the classroom environment and the teacher. Some of the teachers seemed to harbour certain misconceptions concerning the communicative approach. The approach is not a 'holy cow' it is purported to be. The problem is that the communicative approach is 'not practised', as the 'vast majority of teachers' continue to teach 'grammar for the sake of grammar'.

The teachers' feelings regarding the communicative approach to language learning and teaching in the ESL class were two-fold. Teachers felt that the approach facilitated communication on the part of the learners and that it was a good thing in that sense. But, in another sense teachers said that it lacked emphasis on rule-formation or grammar, while emphasising 'quantity at the expense of quality' and required a lot of teaching aids in order to be effective. One teacher seemed to feel that the approach was not entirely suitable for the ESL class.

It is important to remember that all learners critically evaluate what they do and learn. Teachers can investigate their own classroom either informally by simply trying out new ideas or systematically through action research, using their own practical knowledge of teaching. Action research according to Clarke (1994) is seen both as a way of improving teaching. Through this, a knowledge base pool can inform and improve language pedagogy and thus helps teachers to adapt to different situations.

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During the same episodes, poor elicitation is one example of how teachers do not get learners sufficiently involved in activities. There are, however, other manifestations of this weakness. One of the most common is a serious misunderstanding of how to use pair and group work as a technique in the learner-centred classroom. Simply dividing the whole class in groups of 5-8 is not enough. It is what happens in these groups which define whether successful pair / group work is being done.

Learners should be given a chance to decide if they want to do a certain class activity in pairs or groups. I have come to realise that learners in general have the potential and ability to participate in activities as long as there are clear guidelines, teacher encouragement, learning opportunities that are negotiated between the teacher and learners. I suggest that teachers allow learners to express their perceptions overtly.
By doing so, learners will get an opportunity to consider why they are participating in certain activities and how these activities help them learn English.

The Broad Curriculum for the BETD (1998) outlines what is expected of teachers in terms of learner-centred education. It states, "Learner-centred education presupposes that teachers have a holistic view of the learner, valuing the learner's life experience as the starting point for their studies. Teachers should be able to select content and methods on the basis of a shared analysis of the learner's needs" (The Broad Curriculum for the BETD 1998:1) In order to take learners' needs and perceptions into account, teachers need to discover what they are, as they certainly do exist. This would enable teachers to reflect on, critique and situate their own practice.

Once teachers are aware of their learners' perceptions, they can plan and implement alternative behaviours and activities in their classes (Fanselow 1992). As learning and teaching is a negotiated enterprise teachers could get together with their learners and negotiate/discuss alternatives. By so doing learners develop positive attitudes towards their work.

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Areas that could change and improved upon include the content of lessons and materials to be used; teaching methods and techniques as well as affective factors that bring anxiety in learners. The data gathered clearly shows that learners interpret tasks and other classroom events from their own perspectives. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993:9) have concluded in their study on language attitudes and motivation that "Teachers,

instructional aids, curricula, and the like clearly have an effect on what is learned and how students react to the experience ... Non-linguistic outcomes are expected in turn to have direct effects on language attitudes, motivation and language anxiety".

The study found clear mismatches between learners' and teachers' opinions about which activities w ere i mportant f or e ach o f t hem i n t he l earning p rocess. T his m ismatch h as significant implications for curriculum implementation. Statistically significant differences existed between grades as well as between learners and teachers' perceptions about the classroom learning and teaching activities. The teacher must learn and be able to decide when it is best to convey content, when it is best to let learners discover or explore information for themselves without any teacher intervention during the teaching/learning process. Taking the data that emerged into account I argue that ESL teachers should be encouraged to constantly explore and examine the perceptions of the learners in their classes and, when necessary, implement alternative practice.

6. Suggestions

The research findings of this study do not attempt to provide a basis for proclaiming solutions to theoretical and practical problems. Rather, as Cronbach (1980) has argued, such findings, particularly on this one should be used interpretatively rather than applicatively. However, the findings of this study clearly indicate that teachers need to consider their learners' attitudes towards the activities they do in class.

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There are a number of ways in which teachers can become aware of their learners' perceptions of their learning experiences in ESL classes. The following are my suggestions:

a) After an activity, ask the learners if they enjoyed themselves. Through that the teacher would be aware of his learners' needs / feelings and then adjust his lesson planning. For example, ask learners how they enjoyed the group work.

b) Ask learners to write compositions about their language learning experiences.

c) Organise Action Research that investigate the various units of work a teacher deals with in class. For example oral discussions, reading aloud, etc.

d) Ask learners about their feelings toward writing activities such as letters, summaries and reports.

e) Listen for suggestions from the learners. One of the learners in this study suggested during the focus group discussion that one-on-one orals be conducted in a more private place with the teacher instead of in front of the whole class.

f) Teachers should administer course evaluations at the end of each unit of work covered. By doing this, teachers would be aware of their learners' beliefs and perceptions, and as such make some changes and modifications to their classroom practice.

It was clear during the interactive workshop that learners somehow enjoy writing. As such they should be encouraged. Some linguists seem to agree on the point that good writing does not necessarily mean 'perfect' or 'flawless' texts, but rather on the good points in their writing; starting learners off on smaller pieces of work at first, building on their confidence, giving them interesting topics to write on and sometimes allowing them to choose their own topics, etc.

7. Conclusion

This research paper has discussed learners' perceptions of ESL classroom activities.

Since both teachers and learners bring with them their own perceptions of what constitutes language teaching and learning, the findings very clearly indicate that ESL teachers should be encouraged to explore and examine the perceptions of the learners in their classes. By doing so, teachers can improve their practice and the ESL results in schools. It is the belief of the researcher that by investigating the perceptions and attitudes of ESL learners an understanding would be enhanced of the challenges facing schools in Namibia. The findings of the study have highlighted particular features in the learning experiences of children, which need to be addressed for successful teaching and learning for both teachers and learners.

Engaging theory and practice is necessary. This study enables us to see some important differences between the ways some classroom activities are perceived by learners. The study has raised some pertinent issues about the extent to which classroom practices and proper lesson planning can give learners sufficient opportunity for extended output and for the negotiation of meaning, all of which are important for ESL.

I believe this research has been useful in raising my own consciousness about the perceptions of learners.

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Rhodes University
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Learners' Perceptions of ESL Classroom Teaching and Learning activities.

Please answer all the questions as accurately and as honestly as possible. The information provided here will be used in strict confidence for the sake of research only.

Section A (Biographical data)
Provide the following information about yourself as appropriate. You <u>do not</u> need to write your name.

1. Male/Female_____   2.Grade_____
3.Number of year in this grade_____ 4.Current position in the school_____

Section B (open- ended)
Answer the following questions as best you can.

1. How do you feel about learning English? and why?

_____

_____

2. What do you enjoy the most about English lessons?

_____

_____

3.What are the kinds of interaction that occur in your classroom?

_____

_____

4. How much does that happen?

_____

_____

5.What learning and testing activities occur in your class?

_____

_____

6.What is your view on these activities?

_____

7.Do you participate in deciding what you must learn in English? If yes, on what?

_____

_____

8.What problems do you have with ESL content/activities?

_____

_____

9.In your opinion, how can one learn English?

_____

_____

_____

10.Did you ever have to debate on a topic here in class? If yes, what was the topic? And how did you like it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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School: _____ Year: _____ No. of children _____

Teacher: _____ Date: _____ Duration: _____

1. Lesson topic and activities:
What is the lesson about and what activities are learners involved in?

_____

2. Language use and skills development:
What language is used? What skills are emphasized?

_____

3. Interaction:
What kinds of interaction is used occur and how are groups organized?

_____

4. Teacher's roles:
What roles does the teacher play?

_____

5. Children's responses:
How do the children respond during the lesson? Do they appear to understand the lesson?

_____

6. Encourages accepts and makes use of learners' ideas.
Comments _____

7. Uses English adequately in teaching.
Comments _____

8. Resources:
What resources are used and how are they used?

_____

Rhodes University
(Faculty of Education)

Respondent: _____ School: _____ Date: _____

1. ' Warm up' questions:
a) What grade do you teach?
b) What are your qualifications?
c) What is your experience in teaching?
d) What current position do you occupy in the school?

2. The English syllabus favours a communicative approach to language teaching and learning. What do you think of the approach?

3. In your opinion, how can a language best be acquired?

4. What in your opinion are the most effective activities for developing learners' language skills?

5. Which skills do you emphasize on and why?

6. What are the kinds of interaction that occur in your classroom?

    a) How much interaction occurs and who is it between?
    b) How are groups organized and for what purpose?

7. What teaching/ learning and testing activities occur in your class?

8. What is your perception of these activity types?

9. What do you think are your learners' perceptions of the various activities they do in class?

10. What problems do you have with ESL content?

  ❖ Any other comments, questions?

CONCLUDING STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This concluding statement is an attempt to reflect on my experiences and feelings of the M.Ed (GETP) course that I started with in 2002. I t is a reflective journey to look back with some critical lenses at my development as a masters student. It is therefore intended to give an overview, analysis and critique of the process by looking at the outcomes, my struggles with the readings, what skills it has taught me and most importantly how I have grown in my particular professional world. My concluding statement goes as follows:

The degree first of all was designed with a focus on general education theory and practice. It aimed by its very nature and scope to assist participants to develop a clear conceptual framework from which to understand the education reform and transformation in relation to our world of work through a research portfolio. The first year of the course amongst others introduced and explored some of the reform issues and ideas of the Namibian reform process with particular reference to learner centred education, access, equity, quality and democracy. The business and philosophy of education was rigorously unpacked by looking at how education works, what is syllabus knowledge and curriculum knowledge. This outcomes explored the epistemology of the philosophy i.e. beliefs and ideals of the Namibian reform process. The readings by Prawat, Cornbleth and Splitter in particular aided my understanding about the whole curriculum concept.

The presentation on the concepts of reform and transformation served its intended purpose, as I came to realise and understand what it is meant by the concepts reform and transformation. I am now of the opinion that it is good to keep the system and only change a few things. Transformation on the other hand means to step over into a different situation towards creating new skills, knowledge and consciousness. It also entails opening up for varieties of ways of knowing.

That as a starting point brought us to the next level of analysing the different systems of behaviourism and social constructivism which in the latter is driving our reform process. Social constructivism came to be embraced because of the antithesis created against positivism. I came to realise however during the course of the programme that social

constructivism has got its flaws and problems as well and thus not entirely perfect. The first year of study centred on the key epistemological positions and learning theories that have informed education in Namibia and Southern Africa, how they have informed education policy and practice, and their impact on curriculum, assessment, evaluation and research in education. Assessment and evaluation issues were clearly unpacked as it opened my 'eyes' on the strategies that are available and how to apply them. This was the case as the presentations were done through discussions and seminars. These approaches adapted by the Tutors made things easier for me as I had the opportunity to contribute freely in my assigned small groups. The readings/papers by various authors with their variant language discourses used was problematic at times, but the modelling, apprenticeship and most importantly the scaffolding by the Tutors made my readings of most papers easier to understand.

When the contextual analysis assignment was given it provided me with the opportunity to contextualise my world of work. First of all, I had a feeling of ownership in the whole exercise. The study gave me the opportunity to unpack the various theories of language teaching and learning. This theoretical framework gave me an understanding of the language learning process and could serve as guide to the development and revision of relevant teaching materials in Namibia. Because of my earlier exposure (in the programme to issues of assessment and evaluation techniques about learning and support materials the review of the syllabus/curriculum revealed that the structural nature of the syllabus permeates the teaching methods, and assessment techniques in the classrooms. At a time when Namibia is examining its teacher development and education, there is a need to revisit the curricula process and to reassert their purposes within present and future contexts. This contextual analysis task did just that. Curriculum developers should take cognisance of Stenhouse's (1981) and Doll's (1989) views on the foundations for a postmodern curriculum. Recognition is given for learning to be integrated rather than to be fragmented, and to be concerned more with "how" and "why" than with "what". This supports the principle of educational theory and practice as an integrated entity where the practice is at the centre and the theory is there to place and name the practice.

The second epistemological task assignment also enabled me to unpack the various epistemological bases that underpin the theories of behaviourism and constructivism. What I have learned from this study is that behaviourists would normally set objectives make sure that the learners achieved the objectives by testing them scientifically. It aims to change the learner's behaviour and not the inner person. Constructivism on the other hand is a socially critical theory that questions the positivist claim that what counts as worthwhile knowledge is that which is value- free. Constructivism sees knowledge as value-laden. It claims to liberate and empower by allowing the person or group to form their own realities, it does not dictate whose realities are right or best.

The literature review assignment was one of the difficult ones I went through. When I started writing, I had a problem of getting the correct materials that were relevant to the topic that I selected. This exercise took me two weeks before I could make up my mind to start drafting. I read the materials that I could find by employing the academic reading strategies and skills that we were advised on how to read an academic paper. I wrote a synopsis/abstract about the paper and eventually saw that things were moving smoothly. This piece of the research portfolio made me to understand what a literature review is and how to articulate any educational or social research topic/subject by using multiple sources of distinct authors. The above research portfolio tasks prepared me well for the eventual research proposal and report. The research methods course in Grahams town prepared me significantly on the various research traditions. Although this was not my first attempt at interpretative research, coming as I do from a scientific background I found this particular study (the empirical research) challenging in the sense that it might not reveal any "worthwhile" information which could be applied generally. I wanted to know lerners'perceptions, and could not possibly get the depth that I felt I needed from a single case study. I feel that I should have done a comparative case study to see if the same or different perceptions could emerge from learners of two different schools.

My experience through this case study has however led me to accept that when people are the subjects of the research, interpretative research is by far the superior method. I was to learn that qualitative research, unlike a scientific experiment in a laboratory, could

not be planned and executed when it suited me. People are not laboratory animals. I could not always get to see my participants when I wanted to. On the positive side though, I could never have found out as much as I did if I have simply done experiments, and used only my own interpretation of events.

There are a number of constraints to interpretative research, as I experienced it. One constraint I found was that the research seems to take a life of its own and grow bigger, requiring constant reflection on what could be achieved within the time constraint of a half thesis resulting in tension between a need to control the research and a desire to be flexible. The use of my research tools at times proved problematic as well. In the questionnaire, I had left a lot of space for written responses. I was disappointed in the sparseness of the replies, and in the fact that where feelings were sought, the respondents gave clinical answers as though they were answering exam questions testing their knowledge. The other tools proved more useful in getting the data, as they were face to face encounters with my participants and could always clarify issues through conversations. All in all the research process was a valuable learning experience.

The use of journals during the course sessions was helpful as it gave me an insight into the meaning I was making of the course outcomes and content. The fact that course presenters/tutors read the journals regularly and commented on this gave me a feeling of succeeding. The journal served as a tool for reflection about the objective, the content, methods, materials, and my own role for each day. My reflections were thus more based on critical incidents of each learning day. I saw the journal as a valuable tool for helping me to internalise new ideas about the 'ought' of teacher education in general and having shared them with others, and so began to make new constructs.

The research portfolio as a tool for coursework provided an added dimension within this particular masters programme. The portfolio that contained a diverse set of learning contents provided me with the opportunity to always reflect and contemplate on each piece of task done. In developing the research portfolio, it guided me through a process of selecting a sample of drafts over a number of times and occasions. One particular and

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interesting dimension of the portfolio is its emphasis on writing, editing, revising, reflecting and rewriting. Using the research portfolio gave me a clear focus to both assess my own progress and boosted my confidence to strive for success. The element of learning as a continuous process came to the fore and was well depicted during the use and development of the research portfolio. This tool (Research Portfolio) logically then demonstrated a different assessment strategy that was employed to assess different competencies as it was an integral part of the learning process, and not an add-on or a separate event with a life of its own. Continual assessment based on a variety of criteria, which were negotiated with the participants within a frame decided by the course presenters, was necessary as well in order to fulfil university requirements. Sharing ideas with others and learning to adapt where necessary added another dimension to my personal growth.

Finally, one important aspect that positively struck me is the emphasis throughout the course on the relevance of content to my professional life and development. The fact that the programme was based on a recursive spiral model made my learning and readings easier as contexts were always revisited and constantly critiqued and taken to another level of understanding. I have been much inspired during this course from what I have learned and shared with other participants. I am confident and proud of both my professional and personal growth this course has illuminated in me.