MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

AN INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENTS' LOW PERFOMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT 'O' LEVEL IN GWERU URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS.

BY

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APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to the Midlands state university for acceptance a dissertation entitled: **An investigation into students low performance in English language at 'O' level in Gweru Urban High Schools submitted by NOREEN SANDRA MUCHEKE in particular requirements for Post Graduate Diploma in Education.**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Ephraim my husband. Without him I would not have been able to pull through and finish this work.

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ABSTRACT

This study is an investigation into the causes of the low performance in the English Language at 'O' Level in high schools in Gweru Urban. It is guided by the following objectives, to find out factors that contribute to the low pass rate in the English Language at Ordinary level in Gweru Urban Schools. The study seeks to also interrogate the possible remedies that schools could harness to arrest the low performance. To carry out the research, the survey method was used in the selected schools in Gweru Urban and the respondents included headmasters, selected teachers and students in the target population. To make use the research instruments would work, the researcher used them in a pilot project that enabled her to fine tune her instruments before implementing them on the selected case study. The study found out that the major causes for the low performance in the English Language include but are not limited to the following: lack of teaching and learning materials in schools, little exposure to the English Language in the home, teachers giving discouraging comments in their marking of students' work, poverty among students, the teachers' limited teaching strategies and the poor working conditions that characterise Zimbabwean teachers since the crisis decade, (1998- 2008). The study also highlighted the possible measures that could help in uplifting the low performance in the English Language. These included the provision of better learning and teaching materials in schools, greater parents' involvement in the education of their children, varied teaching strategies and improving the working conditions of teachers. From the findings, the study made a number of recommendations to parents, schools and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education among them being that the Government should continue to fund the education sector so that poor children are not disadvantaged.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the background information to the study by examining the background of study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives, significance of study, delimitations and limitations of the study among other aspects.

1.1 Background to the study

The research arose as a result of observing the students' low performance in English Language at ordinary level in Zimbabwe in general and Gweru Urban schools in particular. The ten secondary schools in Gweru Urban are as follows: Fletcher, Senga, Chaplain, Ascot, Mambo, Thornhill, Matinunura, Nashville, Mkoba 1 and Mkoba 3 High Schools. The observation on students' low performance is backed by the yearly statistics that span a period of four (4) years. The statistics for the 2012 to 2014 period suggest that the general performance in English Language at "O" Level is low despite the fact that in Zimbabwe, one is expected to pass the subject with a C or better for him or her to proceed to Advanced level and/ or get a formal job or college place. Although Mathematics and Science is equally important alongside English Language, without Maths and/ or Science one may get a job and/ or proceed to 'A' Level as long as he or she has a pass in English Language at 'O' Level. In Zimbabwe, English is a second language although it is widely used as a de- facto Language of business not only in Zimbabwe but also in other countries whose official languages do not include English.

Despite the central position of the English language in Zimbabwe, it is a subject that students have not performed well when compared to other non- core subjects such as Agriculture, History, Geography and Literature in English among others. The results in English Language in the past four years suggest that students do not perform very well despite the fact that they are expected to have a pass in the subject. Therefore, the study seeks to find out why the pass rate in the English Language remains low in schools despite the fact that one has to pass it as a pre-requisite. Even if one passes with ten 'A' grades in other subjects but without English Language that person will not find a place to do 'A' Level and/ or find a place at a college. As an official Language and Language of instruction, what factors have or continue to debilitate against the teaching and/ or learning of the second Language in Zimbabwean schools? This is what the study seeks to find out.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Statistics have relentlessly shown that students' performance in the English Language at 'O' Level has remained a concern for years despite the fact that the subject is very important as without it, one may not get a form five place, get a place at a college or polytechnic let alone get a job. According to Pflaum (1974) children have a natural ability to learn a language and what is only needed for this to happen is adult- child interaction in the home and/ or in the classroom. If Pflaum's (ibid) assertion is true, the study seeks to ascertain why students perform so lowly at 'O' Level in schools in Gweru Urban.

Aim

The study aims at finding out why students' performance in the English Language remains disappointingly low at 'O' Level in schools in Gweru Urban.

1.3 Objectives

- To determine factors that contribute to students' low performance in the English Language at 'O' Level in Gweru Urban Schools
- To determine if the acquisition of one's first language is similar and/ or different to a student' acquisition of a second Language in the classroom
- To establish some of the corrective strategies that can be adopted by Gweru Urban Schools in improving the pass rate in English Language at 'O' Level.

1.4.1 Research questions

1. What challenges do schools and English language teachers face in the teaching of English as a second language?
2. What forms of school based support are available for English language teaching?
3. What forms of community based support is available for English language teaching?
4. What are secondary students in Ordinary Level's views on their experience of learning English?

1.5 Significance of Study

The findings of this study are potentially significant to the following different groups of people and/ or institutions in Zimbabwe. The educators, who in this case are the English Language teachers and Headmasters, will be able to understand better some of the causes that may contribute to the students' low performance in the subject at 'O' Level. The teachers will improve the pass rate by adopting some of the recommendations that will be made on the strategies that may be used to improve grades in the subject. The policy makers will be informed on what needs to be done to improve the pass rate in the English Language at 'O' Level not only in Gweru Urban Schools but also in Zimbabwe as a nation. Hopefully, parents will also be able to play their own role as parents in their sons and daughters' learning of English as a second Language. This will be important especially if it is proved by this study that reinforcement in the home helps the student in the learning of the English Language.

1.6 Delimitation and Limitations
1.6.1 Delimitations

The study will be limited to ten secondary schools in Gweru Urban only. It will focus on selected students in forms three and four at the ten secondary schools in Gweru Urban.

1.6.2 Limitations

 The study faced the following limitations: financial, time, logistical limitations.

The research was carried out in a limited time frame hence the small sample that will be used in this study. The sample may not be representative enough of all the schools in the Midlands province and/ or Zimbabwe. The small sample was necessitated by limitations in the available

time and availability of financial resources. The researcher is a mere student who has to ask for money from benefactors to carry out the research hence the smallness of the sample.

1.8 Summary

Chapter one introduced the problem statement. It also discussed the background information to the study. The chapter also discussed the significance of the study and the study's limitations and delimitations. The next chapter discusses the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The chapter locates the study in the context of related literature so as derive insights that may clarify certain conceptual issues relevant to the study. Major issues that are going to be considered in the chapter include a review of related literature that will help the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the major concerns in this study which are the causes of low performance in English Language at Ordinary Level in urban schools in Zimbabwe in general and in particular urban schools in Gweru urban. The literature review will also focus on the possible intervention measures that can be implemented in schools to improve the low performance. Coincidentally, English is a second language in Zimbabwe and so, occasionally, the chapter will discuss the challenges associated with learning English as a second language and the strategies that can be employed to improve the performance as discussed by different scholars from around the globe.

2.2 What is Language Acquisition and/ or language learning?

Krashen (1981: 2004) defines language acquisition as a process similar to the way children develop ability in their first language. When defined this way, language is a sub- conscious process as the language acquirer is not usually aware of the fact that he or she is acquiring a

language. What he or she is aware of is the fact that he is using a language for communication. Krashen (2003) further argues that the result of language acquisition is also subconscious as the acquirers are not even aware of the rules of the language being acquired. It is also known as informal learning or natural learning.

The Affective Filter hypothesis explains how language is acquired. The hypothesis as propounded by Dulay and Burt (1977) states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process. Krashen (1981) argues that research over the years confirm that a variety of Affective variables relate to success in the acquisition of English. These affective variables include; motivation, self- confidence and anxiety. Under motivation, performers with high motivation generally do better in the acquisition of English and in a similar fashion, performers who have self- confidence and a good self- image again tend to do better in second language. Finally, low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition whether acquired as personal or classroom anxiety. The Affective Filter hypothesis captures the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition by positing that acquirers vary with respect to strength or level of affective filters. Thus, if one has an attitude towards the acquisition of English, he or she will tend to seek less input.

As opposed to language acquisition, language learning is intended to develop competency in a language. In learning a language, one gets to learn or understand the rules that govern the language. This is also known as grammar, formal knowledge of a language or explicit learning. In language learning there is error correction which is not found in language acquisition (Krashen, 1981, 2003 and 2004). Error correction helps the learner to understand or 'figure out'

the right form of a rule governing a language. In acquisition, parents correct only a small amount or portion of a child's language. Instead, the parents put more emphasis on truth value of what the child would have said rather than the form (Bellugi, 1973).

2.2.1 Effectiveness of Does Language teaching in the classroom help?

In answering this question, Krashen (2003) argues that language acquisition is more central than learning to second language performance. Due to this position that he takes, he suggests that the classroom should only be useful for beginners, those who utilise the formal environment for comprehensible input. It will be of less value to those who have other sources of comprehensible input. Simply put, the argument he proposes is that classroom language learning only helps or is more helpful when it is the main source of low filter comprehensible input. It could be appropriate to those do not have a chance to get the input outside the classroom. This position has implications for the teaching and learning of English in Zimbabwean schools and perhaps the performance of the students. If a student has other sources such as parents who speak fluent English, or have internet services where he or she can have access to websites that coach English, then that student is better off than one that only depends on the school and teacher for the learning of the language. In Zimbabwe although many parents speak and write in English at the workplace, in the home they are most likely not to express themselves in English. In such cases, the learning of English in the classroom may admittedly be the only source of comprehensible input as suggested by Krashen (ibid).

Brieire (1978) investigated factors that affected the successful acquisition of Spanish as a second language among 920 native Mexican children. In his results, attendance in class was very important in addition to the student's father's ability to speak Spanish and third, the parents' need for Spanish. Krashen (1981) suggests that research has shown a large amount of positive correlation between the amounts of classroom exposure to the second language and proficiency. And it is telling that in all these studies, the classroom was the primary source of comprehensible input. Krashen et.al (1978) tested students in a class of students taking English as a second language at Queens College, New York. Again, they reported a high correlation between years of formal exposure in the classroom and performance. Their study concluded that the sources of the students' comprehensible input were the following: length of exposure to the language, age, and acculturation. Those who had longer periods exposed to the language performed better and on age, the younger ones were better in acquiring language (Krashen, Long and Scarcella, 1979). On age, they concluded that acquirers who began natural exposure to second language during childhood generally achieved higher second language proficiency than those beginning as adults. So, the factor of age is not simply that of the younger the better as it has many more dynamics to it as demonstrated above. On acculturation, Schumann (1978) argues in his Acculturation hypothesis that the major casual variable in second language learning is acculturation. The greater the degree a learner acculturates to the target language group, the greater the performance. Lukmani (1972) distinguishes between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to the desire to 'be like' speakers of the target language and instrumental motivation is the desire to use language for practical means only.

2.3 Factors influencing

Language learning and one's socio- economic class

According to Lenneberg (1967) all children have an innate ability for language learning. He argues that language acquisition occurs quite regularly regardless of socio- economic class and/ or language background of the child. Nonetheless, while his argument suggests that the process of acquisition will be similar in children across different socio- economic classes, the learning of a second language at school, in this case, English may be quite different. This leaves us faced with the question; since all normal children probably acquire language through similar process in the natural environment, why is it that some children in secondary school perform better than others and vice versa? What are the variables that account for the low and/ or high performance in the English Language by some students? In other words what are the some of the factors that contribute to the quality and quantity of the English language especially in the classroom? Ginsburg et.al (1969) suggest that poor children are less likely to succeed in the learning of a second language, in this case English, because of their poor background. They argue that the learning of a second language by a poor student is impaired by the student's socio-economic class. They call this view conventional wisdom, "A deprived environment retards children's speech, this inferior speech leads to deficient thought, and deficient speech and thought result in school failure" (p.58). Their narrow view is supported by Pflaun (1974) who in the 1960s examined the question of whether socio-economic class affects the learning of a second language. In his research, he established that middle class students tended to perform much better than poor class students in the learning of a language. His research was limited to students in primary schools. Greene et.al (1967) also argued that students from poor overcrowded and noisy

homes prevent them from adequate language learning in the classroom. Hess and Shipman (1965) analysed verbal interaction between black mothers and their children from four socio-economic groups. They too concluded middle class mothers used more verbal explanation and promoted problem- solving behaviour in teaching a task to their children more often than the lower class mothers.

In another study, Krauss and Potter (1968) found that middle class seven and eight year olds were more accurate decoders than lower class children. These studies seem to suggest that children from a middle class when compared to poor class children tend to do better in the learning of a second language. This view supports the Language- deficit hypothesis which works on the premise that poor students' poor (deficient) language can be traced back to their equally poor or deficient socio- economic background. When one assimilates this information from these scholars, it appears that there is evidence substantiating the view that socio- economic class affects the acquisition and/ or learning of English in and outside the classroom. This evidence needs further scientific investigation. That there is less verbal exchange or interaction among poor class parents and their children is less convincing. The language- deficit theory therefore appears not to be completely true. This is particularly so when one takes into account what Dale (1976) suggests. Dale (ibid) concludes that many of the challenges associated with assessing children's language acquisition and learning such as unfamiliarity with the texts and the testing situation, expectancy effect probably had a bias towards the poor learners and so, the scholars' conclusions are ambiguous and dangerous generalisations. Simply put, one can argue that the language- deficit hypothesis is as simplistic as it is unacceptable as it only points to the socio-

economic class of the student as the only factor that facilitates or debilitates performance in English.

A broader understanding of the many factors at play is needed and is offered by Fox et.al (1966:65). They posit that performance in the acquisition and/ or learning of the English language may be determined by a number of factors, among them the following: Teacher's teaching methods, Mother's attitude and towards the English language, the socio- economic condition of the family, circumstances/ standards of neighbourhood peer group, motivation, socio-economic environment of the community, close friends of the learner, sibling relationship and the exposure of the learner to media such as radio, television and newspapers among others. This is what the study seeks to establish.

UNESCO (2003) commends the strides made by governments, local and international NGOs in the provision of education in Zimbabwe and other developing countries. However, the report points out that when considered globally, there is still low and poor performance in many subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science. Research, the report argues seems to suggest that factors within the classroom are not the only factors that contribute to the low or high performance among learners. In addition to the teacher's delivery methods, school facilities and support to the child, other factors such as household size, parent's level of education, cultural and traditional beliefs should be taken into account when analysing the students' low performance at school (Okeke, 2004). Olayele (2004) argues that education is a human right for all yet many children in Africa do not have adequate learning facilities and a supportive environment at home.

There are many constraints that in the long run become debilitative to the learning of English among other subjects in the school system. He bemoans the fact that some children in primary and secondary schools have to divide their time between learning and begging and hawking to supplement the family income. In some cases, children in school are expected to look for their own fees as parents do not value education.

This can be worse in Zimbabwe where the economy has not been performing as much as it should. Many students are absent from school as they help parents till the land or supplement the family income. Okeke (2004) also rightly points out that some parents may not value their children's education preferring instead to see their children drop out and help the family. In Zimbabwe, many families especially in the southern districts of Zimbabwe encourage their children to drop out of school and go to work in South Africa and other neighbouring countries. If they are girls, they may be expected to get married. Therefore such an unsupporting home environment may lead to low performance in English at school. Likewise if a student is always hungry at school, it means he may not be able to concentrate on the lessons and this will eventually affect his or her performance. Although Oyaleye (ibid) mostly discussed the challenges associated with low performance in a rural set- up, this can also be true of cities and towns in Zimbabwe. Many of the people living in cities and towns in Zimbabwe have been impoverished as the economic plunges each day. Recently many parents lost their jobs as companies took advantage of the Supreme Court ruling that had justified the firing of employees at short notice with little benefits. As a result, many households have turned to vending and others have incorporated their school- going children to join in the vending to supplement family income. Bello (2006) also notes the complete absence of role models in the families and at

school. The students' role models have menial jobs, do not have a full ordinary level certificate with English language, do not speak English and in fact despise the teachers in the presence of the student. Give such a background, they do not see the need or importance of formal education and this affects their performance at school.

The number of schools in most African countries has not kept with population growth (UNESCO, 2003). Pupils sometimes travel over long distances before they get to school and this is not uncommon in towns and cities as well. As families become hard pressed, they may not have a dollar to spare on the child's bus fare to-and- from school. Walking to school decreases the students' productivity since they get to school already tired. The first lesson may be missed and when they get back home the students may be too tired to engage in meaningful studies. Thus, they are not able to engage in private tuition classes held after school or discuss homework (Huck, Helper and Hackman, 1987). The result in some cases is that students fail to go to school, may withdraw from school or become reclusive when they are consistently failing to catch up with expectations at school. In the long run, these breed truancy which eventually results in low performance especially in subjects like English and Mathematics that need consistent practice.

In many African countries Zimbabwe included, the pass rate in English is low because schools are failing to provide learning materials and experienced and qualified teachers. In addition to lack of school facilities such as lack of basic desks, chairs, libraries, computers and internet, some families have been ravaged by the HIV and AIDS scourge and so children who are in school end up dividing their time between heading the families and attending school. This consequently negatively affects the performance of the students (UNESCO, 2003).

2.3 Measures that could improve performance in the English Language

Krashen (2004) insists that there is no way a classroom situation can match the 'natural' world out there. However there are ways in which the learning of the English Language may be enhanced in the classroom. Hatch (1979) summarises these as follows:

- Slower rate of speaking and clearer articulation helps the students in learning English

- The teacher should more of high frequency or common vocabulary and less slang and idioms

- The teacher should simplify the syntax and resort to shorter sentences as opposed to complex syntactic constructions and long and winding sentences.

- Teacher's use of the language should be complemented by non- linguistic means of encouraging comprehension. Extra linguistic support in the form of learning media such as pictures, flashcards should be encouraged as a teaching and learning tool

- Good teachers also take advantage of their students' knowledge of the world in helping comprehension by discussing topics that are familiar to the student. Discussing the unknown will make it harder for the students to grasp. When it comes to error correction, the teacher should know that it puts the student on the defensive if it is needlessly done. Because the teacher corrects everything every time the student completes a task, later the student may try to avoid the mistake by avoiding difficult tasks, he or she may focus less on meaning than form (Krashen, 1980). The teacher should focus on correcting global errors, which are errors that impede the intelligibility of a message. He or she should also focus on errors that appear frequently in the learner's work.

Canale et.al (1980) also argues that another important factor that can help in the learning of English is the approach that the teacher uses in the classroom. He posits that there are two approaches to the learning of the English; the grammatical and the communicative approach. "By the grammatical approach we mean one that is organised on the basis of linguistics in what we will call grammatical forms (ie morphological forms, phonological forms, syntactic patterns, lexical items) and emphasises the ways in which these forms may be combined…" (p.1). On the other hand, a communicative approach is organised on the basis of communicative functions for example, when one describes, apologises or invites someone. This approach emphasises the ways in which particular grammatical forms may be used to express a function in an appropriate manner. The following are the guiding principles of a communicative approach (Krashen, 2003):

- Communicative competence is composed minimally of grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence and communication strategies. The primary goal of communicative approach must be to facilitate the integration of these types of knowledge for the learner of English

- The communicative approach must be based on and respond to the learner's cumulative needs

- The teaching and learning of a second language must happen in a meaningful communicative interaction with highly competent speakers of the language. In other words, the teacher must be highly competent in the English language

- The primary objective of a communicative approach oriented second language programme must be to provide the learner with information, practice and much needed experience to meet the communicative functions.

Felder et.al (1995) illuminate the debate on measures that could be implemented to improve the low performance in English language by discussing the mismatch that often occur between the student's learning style and the teaching style of the teacher.

> … the way in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains and retrieves information are collectively termed the individual's learning style. Mismatch often occurs between the learning style of students in a language class and the teaching style of the instructor, with the unfortunate effects on the quality of students' learning and on their attitudes towards the class and the subject (p.1).

Felder et.al (ibid) further argue that students learn a second language in many ways, by seeing, hearing, reflecting, acting, memorising and visualising. Thus, the teacher's teaching methods should differ from lesson to lesson from lecture method to demonstration to discussion. In some lessons the teacher may emphasise memorising depending on what he hopes to achieve in that particular English lesson. How much a student grasps depends on his or her ability and prior preparation but also compatibility of his or her approach to learning and the teacher's teaching style. If a mismatch occurs then students get bored, become inattentive in class, perform poorly on tests, gets discouraged about the subject and may conclude that he is no good in English. When this happens, the teacher too, becomes critical of the student and may in worse cases even begin to question his or her own competence of the English language. Felder et.al (ibid) realistically realise that one teacher may be able to meet the learning styles of each one of the students. They suggest that the best way to do when confronted with students with many learning styles is to use a multi-style approach to language learning in the classroom. The multi-style approach they propose has these elements:

- That the information taught to the students should be presented in a variety of modes and not in a single mode. Instructional methods should be balanced to try and meet the learning styles of a wide section of students in a class

- As much as possible, the teacher should teach new material (vocabulary, rules of grammar) in context situations to which students can relate in terms of their own personal experiences rather than material to be merely memorised

- The teacher should balance structural teaching approaches that emphasise formal training (deductive sequential) with more open ended instructional activities that emphasise conversation and cultural contexts of the language

- The teacher should make use of visuals such as photographs, drawings, sketches, cartoons, films, videotapes and live dramatisations to illustrate lessons in texts

- The teacher should assign repetitive drill exercises to practise in basic vocabulary and grammar but this should not be over done

- The teacher should not use every available time lecturing and writing on the board. He should use intervals to allow students to work in groups, enact dialogues and engage in mini- dramas and

- He or she should give the students an opportunity to work together on some home work. Active students learn better when they cooperate on their own and interact on their own. This is a learning tool for the student of English.

To summarise Felder et.al's (ibid) recommendations, the teacher must be a communicator, an educator, evaluator and above all, an educated human being. Only when he has these qualities is he or she able to improve the performance of his students in the English language.

2.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter has established the definition of language acquisition and language learning. Apart from this, the chapter has also discussed the various challenges that students in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular face in the learning of English which also happens to be a second language to them. After detailing some of the views on the factors that are either debilitative or facilitative to the learning and/ or acquisition of English, the chapter also dwelt on measures that can be implemented as a corrective measure in the learning of English. Many measures that could improve the learning and teaching of English were espoused by different scholars. The next chapter will dwell on the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The last chapter focused on literature review and the current chapter will focus on the research methodology. The research method used in this study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research methods help one to understand social processes taking place rather than concentrate on outcomes or pre-determined products of research. Qualitative methods direct the researcher to be interested in the ways people make meaning and sense of their lives, experiences and their structures in the world. Using a qualitative approach on data should enable a researcher to

construct abstract concepts and modify, confirm or reject the theories previously used in a field of study. Qualitative research methods also require the researcher to declare that the selected sample is representative of the period being covered, the people whose lives are being studied, as well as being representative of the contradictions in the content under study.

In order to ensure representative-ness, the researcher can consciously select the most productive sample to answer the research questions posed in the study. However, Bradley (1992) suggests that in studying a sample, it is appropriate to explore variation, deviations and critical voices from the same sample, but with different experiences and different interpretations from 'official' perspectives. This ensures that multiple narratives, each suggesting multiple meanings can be secured in the process of analysing the data. Maritz and Visagie argue that qualitative research methods satisfy this criterion of transferability when the findings fit or can be used to explain contexts "outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity or goodness of fit between two contexts (2006: 44).

In light of the observations, qualitative methods will be used in obtaining information on factors that are both debilitative and/ or facilitative to the learning of English language in Gweru Urban schools. Consequently, this information will be used to determine the causes and possibly measures that should be taken to improve the low performance in English language at 'O' Level. The chapter will identify the population, the sample and the sampling procedure that will be employed in the study.

3.1 Research Design

The research design that will be used is a descriptive survey research design that represents the main structure within which all the research components are held. The descriptive research design will be concerned with the current status of the area under study; it describes the existing achievements, attitudes, behaviours and characters of a group of subjects that will be selected to cover the research problem (Leedy, 1995). Blumer (1979) describes a survey as a unique means of getting systematic and anonymous information of considerable complexity. Therefore, a survey is appropriate to an investigation into the possible causes of low performance in English language at 'O' Level.

The study will be carried out in the ten secondary schools in Gweru Urban that include Fletcher, Senga, Chaplain, Thornhill, Nashville, Mkoba 1 and 3, Mambo, Ascot and Matinunura High. The survey is most suitable since the ten schools in Gweru Urban is quite a large pool of students. When compared to other methods, the survey method is an effective way of gathering information from a huge population using relatively fewer and cheaper resources in a relatively shorter period (Bylovell and Lowson, 1980). Thus, the survey method is economic as it narrows its focus to only a representative (sample) of the population. The ten schools in Gweru Urban in this case, become a case that represents other urban schools not only in the Midlands province but also all urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

3.2 Population of Study

Population is the total of all individuals who have certain characteristics and are of interest to the researcher. High school students in rural areas, High school students in urban areas and High

school students in church- run institutions are all populations. The entire population in this study comprises of all High schools in urban areas not only in the Midlands province but in all urban high schools in Zimbabwe. However, it is not possible to study all the urban high schools in Zimbabwe due to limitations of time and resources. The study of the ten high schools in Gweru urban will be representative of the population.

3.3 Sampling procedures

A sample is selected from a population. In other words, a sample is a sub-set of the population. Simply put, a sample refers to a selected few participants chosen to be representative of the whole population. There are many types of samples among them the random sampling, stratified and convenience sampling. This study will use the simple random sampling method. The simple random sampling procedure ensures that every member of the population has the same probability of being chosen or included in the sample. Because sampling is not a perfect science, there are often differences between the values of the population and values of a sample. This is called sampling error and the aim of any researcher should be to minimise this error as much as he or she can. The researcher will assign a number to every one of the ten schools in Gweru urban. Random sampling ensures high participation and is easy to administer. The target of my study will be the teachers, headmasters and school children attending English classes.

3.4 Research Instruments

The researcher will make use of questionnaires and interviews to collect data from the ten schools. The questionnaires will be given to randomly selected students, teachers and headmasters in the sample. Ten participants will be targeted at each school and will be kindly

asked to fill in the questionnaires without necessarily asking them to reveal their identities for confidentiality purposes. Interviews will also be held with headmasters. From the respondents' answers to the questionnaires and interviews, the researcher will make deductions on the causes of the low percentage pass rate in English at 'O' Level in Gweru Urban schools.

3.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires will be used because of their advantages over other collecting instruments. They allow for anonymity which encourages more truthful answers from the interviewees. Burton (2000) suggests that questionnaires are questions that are sent or hand delivered to respondents in order to get facts on specific subjects. The researcher will target ten students and teachers at each of the ten schools. The questions will be crafted in a way that avoids ambiguity and enhances clarity. Leading questions together with clumsy and complex questions will be avoided so as not to confuse the interviewees. Leedy (1995) correctly notes that questionnaires are cost effective while at the same time they yield the much needed answers they solicit from respondents in the comfort of their work place and/ or homes. Most of the questions will centre on the causes of students' low performance at 'O' Level in Gweru Urban schools. There will also be questions on what measures could possibly be taken to improve the low performance. The questionnaires will also have a mix of closed and open- ended questions. Open- ended questions will be intended to solicit answers that may not be obvious and need explanation while closed questions will be easy to administer for the respondents.

3.6 Advantages of questionnaires

Questionnaires have a number of advantages in that with a questionnaire, there is self-completion of questions which reinforce the feeling of confidentiality. Questions that are asked will help the respondent to be focused and answer on specific items sought by the interviewer. Administering questions should be easy as the researcher will hand deliver them to schools and later return to collect them at a mutually agreed date.

3.7 Disadvantages

These include the fact that respondents may connive to answer questions in a similar fashion instead of answering them independent of each other. Others who may not understand the questions altogether may not fill in the blank spaces or tick in the boxes provided and/ or fill in information that may not answer what is asked. This may arise since the interviewer is not available to clarify issues. There is also a likelihood that some respondents may give other people to fill in the answers for them before passing the completed questionnaires to the researcher as their own. This happens because questionnaires are filled in by respondents in their spare time in their offices or homes, away from the interviewer.

3.8 Interviews

Qualitative research is a human- situated act that cannot be confined to one grand narrative that holds priority over others. To insist on using one instrument will most probably produce incomplete results. As a result of this observation, in addition to questionnaires, the study will also make use of interviews. Interviews will be used to corroborate the answers given in the questionnaires. The difference between an interview and a questionnaire is the issue of a face to

face interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. The respondents in this case will be the randomly selected headmasters in the ten schools. The interviews will be targeted at soliciting the opinions of headmasters on the low pass in the English language at 'O' Level. Borg and Gall (1989) argue that interviews allow a researcher to directly elicit information and immediately get feedback from the respondent. Clarification is also sought immediately which enables the interviewer to clarify issues that may be misunderstood. The most important reason why interviews will be used is the researcher's desire to check the reliability of information supplied in the questionnaires. The researcher will compare the answers given to the same question in both the interview and the questionnaire. Thus, the two methods will used to complement each other and improve the quality of data gathered (Borg and Gall, ibid).

3.9 Advantages of interviews

The interviews will enable the researcher to clarify unclear questions from the respondent. During an interview, with the advantage of face to face, the researcher is able to get more information than the one sought on the interview guide. The researcher will also be able to repeat or rephrase questions in the event that a question is not understood by the interviewee. The use of the interview guide will enable the interviewer to ask the same questions from one school to another.

3.10 Disadvantages

Unless the researcher sticks to the interview guide, he or she may elicit different answers in questions that would have been clarified or rephrased. This needs great skill and tact from the researcher. The interviewees may not be available during weekends when the researcher is free from lectures. So, the researcher may have to squeeze into the interviewee's working times for an interview. Unlike questionnaires that are filled in by the respondent in his or her spare time, in an interview one has to be there and so the researcher has to make appointment after appointment with different respondents including rescheduling some for one reason or another.

3.11 Validity and reliability of the instruments

There will be a pre-testing phase or a pilot study that will be undertaken to ensure validity and reliability of the research instruments. The instruments will be tested on selected students in a

school outside of the ten Gweru urban schools. This will enable the loose ends in the interview guide and questionnaire to be addressed by fine- tuning them. The looseness in the questions may manifest itself in ambiguous questions.

3.12 Ethical considerations

The researcher will seek clearance and permission to conduct research from the relevant authorities at the Ministry of Education District offices in Gweru, Headmasters and teachers at the selected schools. The purpose of the study will be explained to these people including the students. The researcher will make appointments with the authorities and students to make sure she interviews or distributes questionnaires at mutually agreed times. After agreeing on dates and times to distribute questionnaires, again the researcher will agree on dates and times of collection. The dates for interviews will be arrived at through consensus. The clause on confidentiality will be strictly enforced by the researcher so that identities of the participants are not revealed.

3.13 Data Analysis

After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher will analyse the data to come up with answers and explanations to the research questions and sub- questions. The information gathered and analysed will also be presented in tables to back the narrative.

3.14 Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed the research design that will be used in the study. The descriptive survey method was chosen as the method to be used. The chapter also outlined the two research instruments that will be used in this study; the questionnaires and interviews. The next chapter will focus on data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data that was collected through the means of questionnaires and structured interviews in schools in Gweru urban. Questionnaires were administered to selected one hundred (100) secondary school students, teachers and headmasters split as follows: one (1) Headmaster per each school, six (6) students at each school and three (3) English Language teachers. The findings are categorised into the following sections:

- The possible causes for the low performance in the English Language at "O" Level in Gweru Urban High Schools
- The impact that this has on the students and in some cases the teacher and
- The interventions or measures that could be implemented to arrest the problem of low performance in the English Language at "O" Level in Gweru Urban Schools.

4.1 Possible causes for the low performance in the English Language at "O" Level

Table 4.1.1 below shows the possible causes of the low performance in the English Language at 'O' Level in Selected High Schools in Gweru Urban

Item	Important	Not important	Total
Lack of teaching/ learning resources such as textbooks, ICTs, stationery and newspapers	80	20	100
Speaking the English Language at home (immersion)	60	40	100
Teacher's comments on students' work (written or oral)	60	40	100
Students' anti- social behaviour	60	40	100
Teacher's delivery methods in the classroom	70	30	100
Socio- economic background of student	80	20	100
Teacher's working conditions	70	30	100

The table above shows that eighty respondents view lack of learning materials in secondary schools as an important factor that affects the students' performance in the English Language at 'O' Level. Eighty respondents out of 100 considered the factor of teaching/ learning materials such as textbooks, newspapers, ICTs and stationery as important. Most of the students that considered this factor to be important come from the high and middle density suburbs of Gweru. Not surprising, all headmasters and most of 80% of the teachers interviewed also considered the availability of learning materials as important, even more important than the teacher's teaching strategies. Most of the teachers interviewed in the questionnaire hold at least a degree and have

been teaching the English Language at 'O' Level for ten years on average. On the other hand 20% of the interviewees consider the availability of learning resources such as ICTs as not important. About 80% of these respondents who think that learning resources are not important come from the low density suburbs of Gweru. This may not be surprising as most of these students have access to a computer and internet connection at home. At their homes, they also have easy access to other media such as newspapers and a variety of textbooks which their parents or guardian can afford. This is not true of students that hail from high and middle density suburbs. Most expect their schools to provide the resources and it is not surprising that even the parents believe that textbooks, stationery, computers and internet should be availed by the school not the home.

The table also shows that 60% of the respondents believe that students with guardians and/ or parents that encourage their children to speak in English contribute to their children's enhanced pass rate in the English Language at 'O' Level. This is also supported by Krashen (1981) who argues that the learning of a second language is more meaningful when it is done in the natural environment, outside the classroom. Thus the home environment is more beneficial to the student of English Language than when the classroom is the only source of the language as is the case in most families in Zimbabwe. Krashen (1981) argues that learners of a second language such as English should immerse themselves in the same way that children do when confronted with the daunting task of learning a second language. This is the natural method that he advocates for in his argument on second language. The methodological approach to the learning of a second language, which is the way we learn a language in the classroom should be complemented by the learning, speaking and writing of a language in the natural environment,

the home. Krashen (ibid) concludes that by integrating both, one learns faster and more meaningfully than a student who relies on the classroom for the learning of a second language. This is corroborated by the view that holds that if one wants to learn a language, he or she should go and live among the people that speak the language. When parents or guardians speak the English language, it follows that the children will most likely learn the language much faster than a child whose parents do not speak the language at home.

The other cause for the low performance was cited as the teacher. This important factor is multi-layered and can be analysed at various levels. About 60% of the students, teachers and headmasters interviewed thought that the teacher's comments on the individual student's performance in both oral and written exercises affect his or her morale, confidence and sense of hope or hopelessness. Thus, many respondents thought that the way teachers correct them is vital and should be done in such a way that students although the learner is being corrected, he is also encouraged to try again next time. Most of the comments such as 'poor', 'wake up' and 'lazy' among other comments are as discouraging as they are negative to the concerned student. Krashen (2004) argues that learners that are motivated tend to perform better than those who are not motivated in the natural environment and/ or in the classroom. If students are motivated, he argues that they consequently have self- confidence which inevitably results in a good self image tied to a desire to perform better in the English Language. As Krashen (1980) suggests, teachers' comments if not thought out properly can result in a student being defensive and hostile. The result is that the next time the student is given work which is 'difficult' he or she may not even attempt to give answers for the fear of adverse comments from the teacher.

The teacher's comments are one aspect, the other one is the variety or lack of it, of the teaching strategies that are employed by the classroom practitioner. From the above table, 70% of the

respondents including some teachers thought the delivery methods of the teacher is a huge factor in the low or high performance of the students. Only 30% of the respondents thought that the teacher's delivery methods mattered much as long as the concerned teacher was following the syllabus. The answers from the respondents back the argument advanced by Felder et.al (1995) that if the teacher uses one strategy daily then the result is that students get bored in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged to learn English and may conclude that they are not good at the subject therefore prefer other subjects at the expense of English. The results as Felder et.al (1995) argue is that apart from the students' boredom, lack interest in the subject and low performance, the teacher too when faced with non- performing students become overly critical of the students and may unfortunately begin to question his or her own competence as a teacher of the English Language. Felder et.al (ibid) advocate a multi- style approach in the teaching and learning of a second language. This is when a teacher uses a variety of methods in delivering lessons to the students. According to the scholars, students learn more when information is presented in a variety of modes than presented in a single mode. The instructional methods used by the teacher should be balanced and varied so that it caters for everyone in the classroom. The same can be said of the classroom media and the group activity.

Although the above factor focuses on the teacher, it is also important to note that about 60% of the respondents thought that the teacher's performance in the classroom can also be improved if his or her working conditions are improved. According to 70% of the interviewed, the teacher's improved working conditions will inevitably result in a higher performance in the English language. Only 30% thought this was not an important factor in the percentage pass rate in the English Language. When analysed further, this group was dominated by headmasters most of

whom though teachers could still do much with the little at their disposal. 80% of the headmasters thought poor working conditions could not be a decider in the student's pass rate. Perhaps, as the local management at schools this suggestion could be expected from the headmasters. All the teachers which is 100% of those teachers interviewed thought working conditions was an important factor in the low or high pass rates in the English Language.

80% of the respondents believed that the socio-economic background of the student mattered in the ultimate performance of the students. This high percentage that thinks socio-economic background matters is not coincidental. Many scholars have concluded in their research that poor backgrounds tend to negatively affect a student's performance. Ginsburg et.al (1969) suggest that poor children are less likely to succeed in the learning of a second language because of their poor background. They argue that the learning of a second language by a poor student is impaired by the student's socio-economic class. "A deprived environment retards children's speech, this inferior speech leads to deficient thought, and deficient speech and thought result in school failure" (Ginsburg et.al, 1969:58). Their view is supported by Pflaun (1974) who in the 1960s examined the question of whether socio-economic class affects the learning of a second language. In his research, he established that middle class students tended to perform much better than poor class students in the learning of a language. Greene et.al (1967) also argued that students from poor overcrowded and noisy homes prevent them from adequate language learning in the classroom. Hess and Shipman (1965) analysed verbal interaction between black mothers and their children from four socio-economic groups. They too concluded middle class mothers used more verbal explanation and promoted problem- solving behaviour in teaching a task to their children more often than the lower class mothers.

Only 20% thought socio-economic factor was not important. Of this 20%, surprisingly all the headmasters thought students could still do well in spite of their socio-economic circumstances. However, 100% of the interviewed students thought that this factor was important in determining low or high percentage pass rates in the English Language at 'O' Level.

The impact that it has manifests itself in two ways. First, the students reported that they are bored when teachers give them adverse comments. This is confirmed by Felder et.al (1995) who argue that apart from boredom, students become inattentive in class, perform poorly in their tasks and that students may not attempt to write or answer questions that they think are 'difficult'. Such a state of affairs also has an impact on the teacher himself who gets frustrated by the 'offending' student and so becomes overly critical and in worse cases comes to believe that he too is not good enough for the student. Thus, the impact affects both the teacher and the student.

4.2 Measures that could be put in place to enhance performance in the English Language

In this section the researcher made further analysis to determine measures that could be put into place to improve the pass rate in the English Language at 'O' Level in high schools in Gweru Urban. The table below depicts the distribution of the responses on measures that could be put into place to improve the low performance.

Table 4.2.1 (below) shows measures that could help in increasing the low performance

Item	Strong	Weak	Total
Provision of learning materials such as ICTs, textbooks etc	80	20	100
Immersion- speaking of the English Language at home and/ or outside the classroom	60	40	100
Teacher's comments	80	20	100
Socio-economic background of student	70	30	100
Teacher's delivery methods/ teaching strategies	80	20	100
Teacher's working conditions	70	30	100

From the above findings, provision of learning facilities such as ICTs, stationery, libraries and furniture and desks among other learning facilities had 80% of the respondents thinking that it is important in enhancing the low pass rates in the English Language at 'O' Level. In many schools in Zimbabwe, the furniture and desks are run down and not suitable for a learning environment. This is so especially after the 2008 crisis. However, the issue of textbooks was attended to when UNESCO donated a number of basic textbooks for all major subjects in most of the country's schools. However, grants given to schools have dwindled and as a result, many schools depend on pupils' school fees which is not enough to meet the infrastructural demands. However, 20% still argued that performance could still be improved without these facilities. They cite the so- called 'Upper tops' that were established soon after independence. Students did

well despite learning under trees and enduring 'hot' seating with some going further to get degrees at universities alongside those that went to former group A schools. However, a strong 80% still believe that improving the learning facilities in secondary schools will greatly improve the pass rate in the English Language. In Boarding schools with slightly better facilities than day-schools, students tend to perform better in the English language because they have access to library facilities, textbooks and above all internet connection. Internet instruction in the learning of a second language is preferred as the computer is patient unlike a human being who may be so frustrated he or she may end up shouting at the student. Another advantage of web technology is that it provides instant feedback to the learner unlike a human teacher who may take a week or days to mark and return the pupils' exercise books. Thus, students who have access to the internet may do better than those without.

Immersion, which is, encouraging students to speak in English at home, is also another measure that could assist in improving grades in the English Language at 'O' Level. 60% believed that speaking the English Language in the natural environment will greatly contribute to better grades in the English Language. The results showed that in many homes, parents and/ or guardians do not speak in English. In some there is a mix of English and Shona or English and Ndebele. However, 60% thought immersion can be one of the measures to that can improve the pass rate in the English at 'O' Level.

One outstanding measure that equals the importance of learning materials is the way the teacher corrects his or her students and the way teachers deliver their lessons. In each case, a strong 80%

of those asked to comment believed teachers could find a better way of correcting students' errors. In the natural environment, parents are not concerned with the grammar or sentence construction but the meaning and this should be encouraged in the classroom especially at lower levels. In fact the communicative approach is one that teachers should adopt in the teaching of English in Zimbabwe. This is supported by Canale et.al (1980) who argues that the communicative approach is most ideal for students of a second language. He argues that teachers should teach the grammatical aspects to be learnt based on the particular communicative needs of a learner. So the communicative approach in the learning of English should be preferred to the grammar- based approach.

Similarly, teachers should use a variety of teaching methods or strategies as much as possible. Again 80% of the respondents thought that 'good' teaching methods are a measure that could help in improving the pass rate in the English Language at 'O' Level in Zimbabwe. The teachers should use a multi-layered approach to cater for a wide range of students in their classes. The average class from the survey is made of up 45 students and what that means is that some students are responsive to seeing more than touch or hearing and vice versa. So, good teachers should use a variety of teaching methods that will cater for that broad section of students in their classes. Although 20% of the respondents believed teaching was teaching as long as the teacher followed the syllabus, this figure was negligible when compared to the strong 80% that argued for a multi- layered approach to the teaching of the English Language.

70% of the respondents thought there was need to improve the working conditions of the teachers in schools so as to improve the pass rates. De-motivated teachers cannot produce results and so there is need to improve their working conditions so that they give their best in the classroom. The deplorable working conditions and low salaries for teachers has led to 'extra-lessons' a phenomenon which was unheard of in the years when teachers were proud to be teachers. Then, teachers could afford basics including buying vehicles and owning a house. Tied to this measure is another one that is closed related to the economic well- being of the teacher. This relates to the socio- economic status of the student. As highlighted earlier on elsewhere in this study, poorer students tend to perform poorly as compared to students from a middle class family. 70% thought parents and guardians could do more in providing students with the necessities so that they are not bullied on the basis of their poverty. Poor students are less confident of themselves and they may actually drop out of school if they are persistently laughed at by their luckier counterparts in class. Uniforms, stationery, textbooks and money for breakfast or lunch should be provided to students so that they do not show that they do not have what others have at their homes.

4.3 Chapter Summary

The chapter established that most of the respondents saw the school itself as a factor that contributed to the low performance in the English Language at 'O' Level. The major reason was that some teachers have to vary their teaching methods or strategies to avoid boredom and inattentiveness among students. It was also established that in some cases, the classroom environment also made the learning of English more difficult than what it is due to the classroom set- up. Many of the schools are nolonger receiving grants from the Ministry and as a result they

rely on fees and the odd donation for new furniture and maintenance of building and other infrastructure projects such as painting of buildings. It was also clear from the findings that Headmasters thought that parents needed greater involvement in their children's learning of the English Language. The home environment should be conducive for the child to learn the language in the natural environment. So apart from the classroom and the school, the home environment has to complement the efforts of both the teacher and the school if students are to perform better in the English Language at 'O' Level. Students' anti- social behaviour did not feature much as a strong factor. Instead it was cited as one of the negative impacts that results when teachers do not teach the student well by varying their teaching methods and teaching grammar based on the communicative needs of the student.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed the findings made from the research, based on data gathered, analysed and interpreted by the researcher. The current chapter focuses on the summary, conclusion and recommendations to various stakeholders in the education system in Zimbabwe.

5.1 Summary of findings

Since 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe has tried to open up spaces in the education system by expanding both the student enrolment and the capacitation of teachers in both primary and secondary schools. The government with aid from NGOs and other countries gave grants to schools which enabled the institutions to function with the bare minimum of textbooks, stationery and other infrastructural developments. However, since the crisis decade 1998-2008, the standards in many schools has been going down and the intervention of UNICEF with

textbooks was a major boost. However, these measures remain a inadequate. There is need for government, private sector, individuals and parents to do more to arrest the free fall in schools especially in the wake of the continued low pass rates in the English Language at 'O' Level. The research found out that there are a number of factors that have contributed and continue to contribute to the low performance in the English Language. The major ones include the following: lack of learning and teaching facilities, limited immersion, the way the teachers correct students' work, the poor teaching methods or strategies employed by the teachers, poor working conditions for the teachers and the socio- economic status of the student.

5.1.1 Lack of learning and teaching materials

From the research data it was apparent that lack of learning and teaching materials was one of the major factors that negatively contributed to the low performance in the English Language. And this is true of not only schools in Gweru Urban, but Zimbabwean schools in general especially government and mission schools. Most of the infrastructure is run down and has not been maintained for decades. With donor fatigue, even church- run schools are not spared. As for government- run schools which happen to be the case with the high schools in Gweru Urban, a lot have become pale shadows of themselves. Basic textbooks, library facilities and ICTs leave a lot to be desired. In some schools, despite the fact that there are no or few textbooks, the classes are as high as 45- 50 students. As result, the student- textbook ratio is very high. And although there is an odd computer the school, it is not surprising that some students go through school without using the computer because either the computers are simply not enough or there is no teacher for the subject. In cases where there is a teacher, the school may not have internet connection and as a result, web instruction especially in English Language lessons is simply not

possible. Students who have to do well in English should read novels, newspapers and magazines on their own. However, this is not possible as the libraries are simply not stocked with novels, newspapers and magazines. The odd newspaper comes once in a while and may not go round all the students before it is torn apart. In some schools, the library is manned by a teacher who does not even teach English and as a result students are not guided properly when it comes to what to read in their spare time.

5.1.2 Speaking and writing in English only at school

In most cases students speak in English only when they are at school. In some cases, schools insist that students speak in English as long as they are on the school grounds inside and outside of the classroom. However, there should be more to it than this arrangement. As the Heads of schools intimated in their responses, there is need for the parents and/ or guardians to help in their children's acquisition of the second language. When students are in their homes, they should try to speak in English but this is not possible as in most homes, parents speak Shona or Ndebele. English as one headmaster put it is only spoken by the father when he is drunk. Admittedly, there is a mixture of English, Shona and Ndebele but English is the least spoken as parents expect their children to learn the language at school and not in the home. However, this view is contrary to Krashen (1980, 1981) who counsels that the learning of a second language, English included, should be carried out in the natural environment. The natural environment in this case is the home. However, from the findings, many of the students learn English at school despite the fact that their parents and/ or guardians can speak and write in English. They simply do not view it as their duty to help in their children's language development. This failure has contributed to the low performance in the English Language at school.

5.1.3 The teacher correction method

All the English teachers in the selected schools have a degree and a diploma in Education. They have taught for an average period of ten years. When their experience and qualifications are taken into consideration, they are more than qualified to teach English Language at 'O' Level. However, it emerged from the findings that the teachers still have to learn that they way they correct errors in students' written or oral work leaves a lot to be desired. Pupils complained that they receive comments that discourage them to try again in future. Comments such as 'poor' and 'pull up your socks' discourage students to an extent that the affected students begin to resent English lessons. Some end up skipping lessons and or not attempting to answer questions given by the teacher. The result is that teachers themselves end up frustrated by the students' 'anti-social behaviour' to an extent that they too begin to question their effectiveness as English teachers. Thus, there is need for teachers to know how to correct their students' errors. If not done properly, correcting students may produce an unintended effect in that it breeds truancy in the students. This has been cited as a major factor that contributes to the low performance in the English Language.

5.1.4 Limited teaching strategies

There is need to look into the teaching strategies that are employed by teachers. However, from the findings teachers complained that this is tied to the availability of teaching resources in the school. One teacher asked what he is expected to do if he cannot get the projector that he wants to use. Improvisation, he argued can be done but it has its own limitations as well. It therefore, came out clearly that teachers know exactly what they are expected to do but that they do not

have adequate teaching resources at their disposal. In one of the schools, one female teacher complained that even pieces of chalk are sometimes hard to come by which shows the challenge that the teachers have in delivering to the students. Some teachers complained that stationery was so scarce to the extent that they bought their own to be able to scheme their work when the school should provide the exercise books and textbooks to the teachers As result of lack of resources, teachers end up limiting themselves to what is available. Thus, there is a direct relationship between the availability of teaching resources and teaching strategies. However, there is still a lot that teachers can still. For example, it should not need a computer or projector to vary teaching methods such as pair work, group work and asking students to do an assignment at home in groups among others. Thus, lack of a variegated teaching approach remains one of the factors that impede high performance in the English Language in schools in Gweru Urban.

5.1.5 Poor working conditions for the teachers

Zimbabwean workers have had to contend with poor working conditions for a long time. During the 198- 2008 period, many teachers trekked down South and other countries to look for work even as maids and gardeners. Those who remained have continued to get poor salaries, live in ramshackle houses and fail to send their children to good schools. As a result, the teachers are de-motivated and find no reason to work harder. This has given rise to the so- called extra lesson which were officially banned by the government but still exist to-date. Extra lessons are a way of raising the teacher's salary and before incentives were also outlawed by government some teachers employed in schools that they could afford them felt a bit cushioned. However, these have also been banned and teachers' only source of income remains the meagre salary that is not enough to meet the daily needs of the average teacher with a family. As result instead of

teaching, teachers supplement their income by selling sweets and chocolates to their classes instead of teaching the students what they come to school for. Thus, unless the working conditions of teachers are improved, the low performance in the English language will continue to persist for some time to come.

5.1.6 The Socio- economic condition of the student

From the research there appears to be a correlation between poverty and performance. Poor students make up the bulky of the student population in Gweru Urban high schools. What this means is that students a large percentage of students may not afford to carry lunch to school, have a clean uniform everyday and pay school fees on time. Most of the students may actually help their parents sell airtime or other commodities instead of going to school. As a result when examination comes, the student may not do very well. So, poverty accounts for some of the low grades that we have seen in the English Language over the years. Poor students do not have enough textbooks, stationery and uniforms. They are also unlikely to afford internet services.

5.2 Measures that could arrest the low performance

From the findings, it is clear that there is need to tackle the six major areas that have been identified as contributing to the low performance. To start with, there is need for government, individuals, multi-lateral organisations, the private sector and parents to come together and provide the basic learning and teaching materials in schools such as ICTs, textbooks, newspapers, novels, magazines and stationery. Apart from these there is need to occasionally budget for new furniture, paintings and other infrastructural needs in the schools. Students need an enabling environment so that they can write and read well.

One other important measure that parents could take is to encourage their children to speak in English at home. Unless the parents take the lead, children may not be motivated to speak in English at home. So, there is need for parents to create an enabling environment and this also

includes buying computers and having internet services in the home for the sake of the children. Of course, we all know the internet can also be misused by the children so parents and/ or guardian should monitor internet use in the home so students do not spend all their time on pornographic sites and other undesirable sites as well. The teacher and the classroom should be conducive for the student. Teachers should use a variety of teaching and learning materials in order to cater for every student. However, this is also not possible unless schools buy the projectors and other media for use in the classroom.

5.3 Conclusion

Having presented the summary, it is time to conclude the study. The study found out that the major causes for the low performance include but are not limited to the following: lack of learning and teaching materials, absence of motivation to speak in English at home or outside the classroom, poor working conditions for the teachers and the teacher's teaching strategies in the classroom. The other factor revolves around the way teachers correct students' errors and of course the socio-economic status of the student. The above are some of the major factors that were cited as contributing to the low performance in the English Language at 'O' Level. These factors can broadly be identified as evolving around the classroom, the home and the student's environment among his peers.

As for the measures, there is need to provide more learning facilities in schools, encourage parents to speak to their children in English at home and improve the working conditions of the teachers. Some of the measures include improving the way teachers comment on students' work and varying the teaching strategies of the teacher. The last one that emerged is one that surrounds the class of the students. It was found out that students that come from poor backgrounds tend to

perform dismissally as compared to those from middle class background. Therefore parents should try to make sure their children are provided for materially before they set their foot in school.

5.4 Recommendations

The following suggestions and recommendations have emerged from the study. The suggestions and recommendations are meant for various stakeholders in the education system.

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should make sure education is affordable to everyone by continuing with the BEAM programme
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should continue to insist on uniforms so that students from poor background do not stand out from students from rich backgrounds
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should continue to improve the working conditions of the teachers if not through salaries then through other non-monetary means such as provision of stands, duty- free vehicle imports etc
- The Government, private citizens, NGOs and other institutions should strive to help schools equip themselves especially when it comes to textbooks and ICTs. UNICEF showed the way during the life of the Inclusive Government in Zimbabwe when it donated textbooks throughout Zimbabwe
- Parents should play their role by encouraging their children to speak to them in English at home

- Teachers should learn to correct their students' errors in such a way that the corrections do not frustrate or make the student defensive and truant

- Teachers' teaching strategies should meet the students' learning expectations by varying the strategies they use in the classroom and

- Parents should try by all means to provide the basics to their children so that they are not segregated against on the basis of their poor backgrounds

5.5 Further Research

This could be conducted to determine the relationship between a student's socio- economic background and his or her performance. Another area that could be investigated further is one that could determine the role played by speaking English in the home and the student's performance in English Language in the classroom at school.

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