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FEATURE

**TEACHING AIDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
IN ZIMBABWE: THE CASE OF GWANDA DISTRICT**

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Abstract. *The study investigated teaching aids in English language instruction in secondary schools in Gwanda South District, Zimbabwe. Out of 83 secondary schools with a population of 128 English teachers in the district, the researchers conveniently selected 6 schools from which a sample of 48 teachers were purposefully selected. The collected data using questionnaires was analyzed through description. Findings showed that teachers in secondary schools rarely use teaching aids when teaching the English language. Most teachers were not competent in using the teaching aids. The schools do not also have enough teaching aids for effective teaching and learning. The study therefore recommends workshops and staff development sessions for English teachers in order to emphasize and encourage teaching aids utility in the schools in a bid to improve students' performance. The responsible authorities and the schools are also encouraged to equip the English language teachers with the teaching materials necessary to achieve the objectives in English language.*

Keywords: Teaching aids; student's performance; secondary schools; English language; Gwanda South District; Zimbabwe.

Introduction

The end of the 20th century saw a great improvement in the development of the teaching fraternity. This includes the development of student centered teaching-learning strategies and teaching technology. Outstanding contributions include the set-up of the Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1956) with six knowledge learning levels—namely, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Today, “SMART” lesson objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time oriented (Wayne LEADS, 2017) are in use in schools as well as teaching aids that are utilized in most subjects, including the English language for effective teaching and learning.

Commenting on effective learning in Pakistan, Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, and Zechmesiter (2015) said, learning is a powerful tool in helping learners to understand themselves, their immediate family members, environment and the world at large. This implies that, to make learning memorable, teachers are to use a variety of teaching aids which simultaneously serve as sources of knowledge and instrument of learning.

Teaching aids are didactically man-made objects are used in the teaching process as sources of cognition and learning to enrich the learner's experience and develop memory and the aesthetic education of the students (Pedagogical Encyclopedia, as cited in Đurđanović, 2015). They include the visuals, auditory and the audio-visual teaching aids. They play a significant role in the improvement of students' performance in the English language (Patel, 2014). As students have the tendency to forget, proper use of teaching aids may help retain more taught concepts permanently. Moreover, teaching aids develop the proper image when the students see, hear, taste, smell and touch the real objects. Despite their importance, the Zimbabwean teachers' attitude towards using teaching aids in English lesson is not known. This study therefore sought to explore the use of teaching aids in the English language at secondary schools in Gwanda South District.

Literature Review

Research has it that teaching aids make learners understand better the concepts taught (Asokhia, 2009). Without the use of teaching aids, teaching and learning become very monotonous and students easily forget the learned concepts, leading to high failure rate. The old adage by Confucius, “I hear, I forget; I see, I remember; and I do, I understand” implies that teaching aids reinforce the concepts learned and are necessary for students to perform better in their educational endeavors.

Importance of Teaching Aids

The current technological age has affected the teaching-learning process in the world, with the duty of the teacher now being that of providing a conducive environment where the student can construct knowledge by interacting with the physical and social environment. In this context, there is a need to orient teachers and develop appropriate contexts as well as specific teaching aids, which are useful to enhance writing competence which Lee (2016) views as a gateway to academic success.

A number of research studies have been done on the importance of teaching aids in Zimbabwe and beyond its borders. In Zimbabwe, the Nziramasanga Education Commission (1999) conducted a research on teaching aids. It focused on the effects of teaching aids in teaching English in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Findings revealed that instruction without teaching aids is an abstraction since no meaningful gain on the part of the learner is noted and the student retention period where these are not used is very short. Their lack in use in some schools in Zimbabwe was cited as one of the reasons why students fail to notch up abstract ideas across the subjects that are offered, resulting in student's poor performance.

Teaching aids in English should be used to stimulate the interest of the students in the subject. In relation to this, Asokhia (2009) also conducted a research study on the effects of teaching aids in teaching English at the secondary level (in Zimbabwe). Findings revealed that teaching aids should be used to clarify confusing pair words. These should be written on worksheets as this approach creates an image in a pupils' mind about the word presented on the worksheet.

A similar study was carried out by Li and Song (2009) on the impact of teaching aids on secondary level students in China. Their findings revealed that the purpose of teaching aids is to enhance presentations and they increase curiosity and recollection of information by students. Utilizing teaching aids in the teaching of English effectively sets the best teaching learning environment. Findings also showed that teaching aids help clear laziness in pupils and bring clarity to confusing concepts. Teaching methodology is enhanced by using teaching aids while key points of a concept are identified eradicating confusion and enhancing comprehension.

A related study was carried out on visual teaching aids which use sense of vision such as film, slide projector, charts, black and white board, maps, pictures, models, textbooks and flash cards. They are designed to supplement written and spoken information for better comprehension. Kaswa's (2006) study on visual teaching aids in Zimbabwe at secondary school level found that visual aids can be used to increase the effectiveness of the classroom learning teaching process.

The author realized that the visual teaching aids enhance the learning and their availability brings about stimulus variation that is essential to sustain students' attention.

There are also audio teaching aids; these are sound-related aids which endeavor to make the knowledge clear through the sense of hearing. Anderson (2010) conducted a study on audio teaching aids in the teaching of English at a secondary school in London. Findings revealed that teaching aids make the learning more concrete, effective, realistic, and more dynamic. He stated that most of the knowledge we acquire in schools comes through our ears. This suggests that audio teaching aids are trainable, motivational, classifiable, and stimulating.

The above findings therefore show that the use of multi-sensory teaching aids is of paramount importance in the teaching-learning process. Learning is not useful if students forget what they have learned. Although it is not possible to use teaching aids in every lesson, the teacher should try to do so in order to enhance the learning process. Improved student engagement results in improved performance. Auditory teaching aids make the teaching process more effective, thus creating interest in different groups of learners (Shaughnessy et al., 2015). This means that a learner benefits from the teaching aids and can pay more attention with minimum effort because curiosity is aroused.

At times, teaching aids are associated with both sound and sight and they are known as audio-visual aids. Walliman (2009) conducted a study on audio-visual teaching aids in the United States. He focused on the effects of using audio-visual teaching aids in teaching secondary school students in New York. The findings of this study revealed that audio-visual teaching aids can be used to make the learning experience more concrete and more dynamic. They must be practical, simple, interesting, educational, affective, and above all, effective.

The learning of English is made easy and effective through phonics. Audio materials containing sounds of letters and sounds of different word parts can help pupils in their pronunciation and command of spoken English (O'Neil, 1982). This emphasizes the need and importance of using audio-visual aids. This is important in the sense that pupils will learn by hearing the different sounds thereby imitating them easily.

Teaching Aids and Academic Achievement

Aderinoye (2015) implied that there is a positive relationship between instructional materials and learning achievement. Instructional materials in general are perceived as ready help for teachers in the classroom interaction process while teaching aids give meaning to words and concepts by bringing out the real meaning. He further argued that instructional materials enhance the

understanding of concepts. Majasa (cited in Aderinoye, 2015) states that teaching aids facilitate the work of the teacher, enhance effective understanding by the pupils, as well as arouse pupils' interest in the subjects being taught. This means that teaching aids enhances academic achievement.

Aderinoye (2015) complains that the near absence of textual materials and other teaching aids in some nomadic schools in Nigeria is quite pathetic. This author proposes an urgent need for all arms of government, especially the federal government, to curtail this trend by allocating a reasonable and commensurable budgetary provision to the National Commission for Nomadic Education for the acquisition and distribution of these materials in order to promote effective learning achievement of pupils in nomadic schools. "Grossarchive" (2013) conducted a study on the effects of using teaching aids in secondary school students in Nigeria. Findings revealed that there is a significant positive difference in the performance of secondary school students in economics when they are taught the subject with teaching aids. The findings showed that teaching aids obviously improve the performance of students. The researcher went on to suggest that schools should provide enough teaching materials to enable teachers to clarify their lessons. They also concluded that adequate infrastructure facilities and conducive atmosphere are essential for effective learning and retention of what is learned. Schools should send their English teachers to seminars and workshops in order to update their knowledge on teaching aids.

Asokhia (2009) stated that the teaching aids enrich the teaching of English and create a desire for learning amongst the learners. The teaching aids in the English class have a variety of uses, for instance, to clarify pronunciation and to reinforce stress and intonation. Asokhia went on stating that the guided compositions where pupils can fill in groups or cards or prints should be highly encouraged by the teacher. He also saw the chalkboard as an effective aid in this aspect where the short compositions can be written on one side and the words on the other side in so doing, haziness is eliminated on the part of the pupils and words are therefore easily comprehended.

Olayinka (2016) also researched on the contribution of instructional materials to the academic achievement of secondary school students in social studies in Ekiti State of Nigeria. The study concluded that students who were taught with instructional materials performed better than those taught without. The study therefore recommended that teachers of social studies should employ the use of essential instructional materials for their teaching and also improvise where and when the materials are not available. Olayinka (2016) called for a concerted effort among parents, school, and the government to make available important and necessary instructional materials to teachers of social studies for enhanced teaching and consequently improved achievement of students in the subject.

Focusing on the reviewed literature above, it can be argued that teaching aids are of great importance in the teaching profession where a teacher needs to use them wisely and knowledgeable in order to achieve the educational goals.

Challenges of Teaching Aids Usage

Despite the effectiveness of teaching aids in English language instruction at secondary schools, there are potential challenges in using these teaching aids; for instance, the costs, the availability of the teaching aids, operational know-how, moral support, and quality. This is a challenge of Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general.

Africa is characterized by limited instructional resources due to poverty. This has negatively impacted the education system. The Africa-America Institute (2015) highlighted that statistics from a vast body of research from the World Bank and UNESCO showed that schools lack the necessary resources and effective curricula for effective learning. There is an insufficient supply of reading textbooks and other teaching and learning materials. As a remedy to the inadequate teaching resources, locally sourced teaching aids have been put to use. For instance, in Tanzania, locally-sourced teaching aids are engaging students and improving education (Trochim, 2004). Trochim (2004) further explains that once teachers use homemade teaching aids, students' performance highly improve.

The UNICEF has been offering financial support for purchasing educational needed resources in the schools. In support to that, the Zimbabwean Government is equipping schools with a variety of materials such as computers, charts, projectors, television sets and reading materials so as to improve student's performance. However, some parts of the country have not yet been reached and these areas are characterized by low academic passing rate, such as Gwanda South District, which has a high failure rate in English in Zimbabwe.

In relation to the challenges in using teaching aids, Griffiths (2008) conducted a study on obstacles that teachers encounter in teaching English in Iran. The findings showed that apart from external limitations such as insufficient teaching time and limited teaching resources, English language teachers are also discouraged by their students' low proficiency in speaking English and using technology during the teaching time. Teachers showed willingness to receive training in how to plan and perform their teaching more effectively and how to enhance students' engagement in class activity. They were also willing to learn more effective approaches for teaching their pupils.

From the review of literature on teaching aids, it is clear that their use cannot be underestimated. They can be of paramount importance in the learning of the English language. However, there are challenges associated with the use of teaching aids that need to be addressed for effective English teaching and learning. This study explored teaching aids in the English language instruction in

the secondary schools in Gwanda South District, Zimbabwe, focusing on the following research questions:

1. How frequently are teaching aids used in English language teaching in secondary schools in Gwanda South District?
2. What are the challenges encountered by English teachers in the use of teaching aids in Gwanda South District secondary schools?
3. How can these challenges be effectively addressed?

Research Methodology

Başkarada (2014) described a research design as a logical link in a research study from the research questions to the research conclusions through steps that are undertaken during data collection and data analysis. This study has used a descriptive design where questionnaires for teachers were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics

Sample and Sampling Technique

The population is the total number of elements with the same characteristics of those under study (Best & Kahn, 2005). This means that all the English language teachers of the secondary schools in Gwanda District were the population of the study. They were 128 in all.

The purposive sample of the study comprised 48 English teachers who were selected from six secondary schools in Gwanda South District. From each school, two English teachers from each form (Form 1 to Form 4) were selected, giving a total number of 8 respondents per school and a grant total of 48 respondents for the whole study. It is important to highlight here that Zimbabwe follows the British system.

Research Instruments

The structured questionnaire was used as a research collection instrument of the study. Experts in the Languages and Communication Department at Solusi University validated the questionnaire that was used to collect data from the teachers. They commented on items coverage and necessary corrections were made before the instrument was used. This data collection instrument was relevant due to the nature of details that the study sought to explore.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers obtained a letter of introduction from Solusi University, Language of Communication Department. They then used the letter from Solusi University to obtain permission from the Provincial Education Offices to carry out the study. The respondents' consent was also sought by liaising with the school heads of the targeted schools. The researchers then delivered the instruments to the respondents. Questionnaires were collected after three days for descriptive computations.

Demographic Characteristics

Information about the demographic characteristics of the respondents of the study is summarized in the Table 1. The table shows that 62.5 % of the respondents were female while 37.5% were male. Usually, more female than male teachers teach languages in the schools in Zimbabwe. The same table also shows that 37.5% of the respondents had between 0 to 5 years of teaching experience while 52% were within the range of 6-10 years. The rest, that is 10.5%, were within 11-15 years of teaching experience. It shows that most of the respondents were well experienced in the teaching field. Of the respondents, 79.5% were qualified teachers who were skilled in the teaching process. The respondents were therefore appropriate teachers.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	37.5%
	Female	30	62.5%
Teaching Experience	0-5years	18	37.5
	6-10years	25	52
	11-15years	5	10.5
Education Qualification	Diploma	30	62.5
	Degree	8	17
	Other	10	20.5

Research Findings

Table 2 shows respondents' responses on the use of teaching aid in English language teaching.

Table 2
Use of Teaching Aids

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I use visual teaching aids in teaching English language.	5	10.4	43	89.6
I use visual teaching aids in every English language lesson.	0		48	100
I use audio teaching aids in the teaching of English language	5	10.4	43	89.6
I use audio-visual teaching aids in the teaching of English language	7	14.6	41	85.4

On the use of teaching aids in English language teaching, Table 2 indicates that 89.6% of the total number of respondents disagreed that they used visual teaching aids. Only 10.4% of the respondents agreed that they used visual teaching aids in their English language teaching. The results obtained revealed that the majority of the teachers do not use the visual teaching aids at all when teaching English.

The visual teaching aids can help English learners understand certain concepts (Kaswa, 2006). This implies that during lesson delivery, students fail to grasp concepts since the teachers just give bare instructions without visual teaching aids; thus, resulting in poor performance in the English subject.

Table 2 indicates that 100% of the respondents disagreed that they use visual teaching aids in every English language lesson. The results obtained show that English teachers rarely employ visual teaching aids when teaching English. The poor performance of students in English can be ascribed to this, among other factors. The abstract notions presented in teaching become easy to understand through concrete presentation of abstract ideas and concepts.

Table 2 shows that 89.6 % of the respondents disagreed that they use auditory teaching aids in the teaching of English. This means that their teaching is crippled since auditory teaching aids make the teaching process more effective; thus, creating interest in different groups of learners (Shaughnessy et al., 2015).

Further, Table 2 shows that 85.4% of the respondents disagreed that they use audio-visual teaching aids in the teaching of English. Audio-visual aids are helpful in effective perceptual and conceptual learning as well as in providing near realistic experiences (Aderinoye, 2015). This implies that audio-visual teaching aids are not commonly used in the teaching of English in the schools. This can contribute much to students' poor performance in the English subject.

Table 3 shows the challenges encountered by English language teachers in the use of teaching aids. The table indicates that 79.2% of the respondents said that they were not skilful enough to use audio teaching aids like audios, videos, and the radio. Only 10.4% of the respondents agreed that they were skilful in using them. These findings show that most of the teachers are not skilful enough to use audio teaching aids and this can significantly contribute to students' poor performance in the English subject. Yet, auditory teaching aids are believed to enhance the development of a lesson plan and build interest; thus making students good listeners and thereby improving their performance (Shaughnessy et al., 2015).

Table 3
Challenges Encountered in the Use of Teaching Aids

Statement	Agree		Not Sure		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
I am skilful enough to use audio teaching aids.	5	10.4	5	10.4	38	79.2
I can operate audio-visual teaching aids.	9	18.8	29	60.4	10	20.8
I feel the learning time is inadequate.	41	85.4	6	12.5	1	2.1
I believe there are inadequate resources.	37	77.1	11	22.9	0	0
I feel the skills in using teaching aids are a challenge.	34	70.8	8	16.7	6	12.5

Table 3 indicates that only 18.8% of the respondents could operate audio-visual teaching aids like laptops, television, and puppet players. The high percentage of those who were not sure, 64.4%, shows that there is a challenge in the operation. This can explain why the respondents are not using them during English instruction as shown in Table 2. This eventually leads to a low passing rate in the English subject.

On the issue of availability of English language teaching time that can allow the use of teaching aids, 85.4% of the respondents agreed that the learning time was inadequate as shown in Table 3. This can also explain why most of the English language teachers rarely use teaching aids: they need more time. Students need significant time to master the concepts taught. Some students learn fast while others need quite a large amount of time to master what they are taught (Kaswa, 2006). This therefore implies that the learning time offered for English language lessons in schools should be increased to enhance effective learning.

Table 3 indicates that 77.1% of the respondents agreed that there are inadequate resources in the teaching of English. Such resources include the teaching aids. Some of the teaching aids, like computers, need power that might be unavailable in rural settings, like Gwanda. For effective teaching and learning process, there is a demand of adequate resources; otherwise, this can lead to poor performance of both the teachers and the learners (Asokhia, 2006).

Table 3 also indicates that 70.8% of the total number of respondents agreed that the skills in using teaching aids are generally a challenge. The inability of teachers to use the teaching aids could be a contributory factor to students' poor performance in the English subject. English language teachers therefore need to be equipped with the necessary skills so that they can become more competent in their work and keep abreast with innovative teaching strategies.

Literature has exposed possible solutions to the teaching aids problem discussed above. On the issue of lack teaching aids operational know-how, Lee (2016) suggested that there is a need for the responsible authorities to orient teachers on operating specific teaching aids, which are useful to enhance writing competence. Griffiths (2008) proposed the same thing; that is, the training of teachers on teaching aids related to their respective subjects. Additionally, "Grossarchive" (2013) said that schools should send their English teachers to seminars and workshops in order to update their knowledge and teaching practices. Williman (2009) brought in another dimension; suggesting that teaching aids can be practical and simple and still serve their purpose. Many teachers can use such teaching aids without necessarily having to complete any serious training.

Asokhia (2009) addressed the issue of the cost of teaching aids, suggesting simple and cheap aids, such as teacher-made worksheets. He also saw the chalkboard, which is available in most classrooms, as an effective aid. Olayinka (2016) also brought the idea of improvised teaching aids where and when the materials are not available while Trochim (2004) talked of homemade teaching aids. “Grossarchive” (2013) and Lee (2016) further opted for non-monetary factors, such as, an atmosphere conducive to learning, which can be manipulated for effective learning and retention of what is learned.

On the problem of teaching aids scarcity, Olayinka (2016) called for a concerted effort among parents, schools, and the government to make available important and necessary instructional materials to teachers in order to enhance teaching and consequently improve student achievement in the English subject. Donations, especially from school-related organizations like UNICEF, can also be involved in the provision of teaching aids.

Conclusion

Findings showed that teachers in secondary schools in Gwanda District rarely use teaching aids, be it audio or visual, when teaching English against the overwhelming literature that shows that teaching aids are important in the teaching and learning process. This finding is closely associated with the other findings that most teachers were not competent in using teaching aids and the schools do not have enough teaching aids for effective teaching and learning.

Although the causes of academic underachievement in schools are complex and difficult to determine as echoed by Nkoma (2014), one can conclude that these findings explain, at least in part, the low passing rate in the English subject in Gwanda District. The situation poses a cause of concern since the passing of the English subject has been made mandatory in Zimbabwe (Sylod & Chivhanga 2013). The distribution of teaching aids and other teaching resources can no longer be the task of well-wishers and non-governmental organizations alone. The government should play a leading role.

What needs to be done by the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe and the other responsible authorities is to make teaching aids available in the schools. Workshops and seminars on the production and usage of teaching aids can also be organized so that teachers can be equipped with the necessary skills for the benefit of their pupils.

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