



CURRICULUM COMPATIBILITY FOR ESL CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF FUNCTIONAL-NOTIONAL ENGLISH SYLLABUS IN ZIMBABWE

Cathrine Ngwaruⁱ

Lecturer, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe

Abstract:

Successful language teaching and learning usually depends on a number of factors including; the type of language syllabus used, how well teachers understand the demands of that syllabus and how pedagogically knowledgeable they are. This qualitative study investigated the primary school teachers' understanding and awareness of the assumptions underlying the Functional-Notional English Language syllabus currently used in Zimbabwe. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data from ten primary school teachers of ESL purposively selected from five schools in Masvingo district to the south of Zimbabwe. The purpose was to establish the extent to which teachers' classroom pedagogies were responsive to the demands of the syllabus and the impact that their practices had on the learners' communicative competence and overall academic performance. The study is conceptualised within Kumaravadivelu's (1994; 2008) Post method framework and Vygotsky's (1962; 1978) Constructivist theory of second language teaching. The results of the study revealed that; teachers were aware of some of the demands of the functional-notional syllabus but their instructional practices did not fully conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures. The study concluded that, there was still a great deal of work required in this area of ESL pedagogy for the enhancement of pupils' linguistic proficiency for general academic performance.

Keywords: functional-notional syllabus, instructional practices, linguistic proficiency, pedagogic practices, post method pedagogy

ⁱCorrespondence: ngwarucathrine@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In bilingual contexts such as Zimbabwe, the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) is essential because learners need high proficiency levels to access the school wide curriculum. Notably, English is the medium of instruction as well as a compulsory subject from primary to secondary school level. At university level, it is the main medium of instruction for all subjects except the teaching of other languages. In the labour market and in all other formal sectors, it is one of the official languages of communication. Due to these and other reasons, ESL remains an important pedagogic enterprise for development of learner proficiency to access the curriculum more effectively. Implicit in this situation is that teachers require sound knowledge about the curriculum, deep subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge about the appropriate techniques and skills to execute their practice effectively to develop learners' communicative competence. However, while the above is the expected norm, Orafi & Borg (2009) & Roussi (2012) highlight that there is often a mismatch between curricula intentions and pedagogical practice. Teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge is yet another contextual factor that may hamper the implementation of curricula intentions.

This study examined primary school teachers' perceptions of the compatibility of the Functional-Notional English syllabus used in Zimbabwe. The study is essential to establish teacher efficacy, which is believed to be strongly linked to effective syllabus implementation and student learning outcomes. The study, therefore, attempted to answer the following questions:

1. *What are ESL teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of the Functional Notional English Syllabus?*
2. *To what extent do teachers' classroom pedagogies in English as a Second Language reflect the underlining assumption of the Functional-Notional English syllabus?*

2. ESL Theories and Teaching Practices

2.1 Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is an epistemology which states that learning takes place in contexts, and that learners form or construct much of what they learn and understand as a function of their experiences in situation (Schunk, 2000).

Constructivist views assert that learning is the active process of constructing rather than passively acquiring knowledge and instruction is the process of supporting

the knowledge constructed by the learners rather than the mere communication of knowledge (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Honebeinin, Duffy & Fishman, (1993)

According to Constructivist thinking, the social world is without meaning prior to one's experience and that knowledge is individually and actively constructed based on personal beliefs and experiences (Hennessy 1993). That knowledge is constructed by learners through an active, mental process of development where learners are the builders and creators of meaning. This view of learning is based on the belief that knowledge cannot simply be given by the teacher at the front of the room to students in their desks. Rather, Constructivism gives students ownership of what they learn through the articulation and exchanging of ideas, negotiating with others, evaluating their contributions in a socially acceptable manner, and collaborating on tasks effectively by sharing in-group projects. Vygotsky, (1978) says that language and learning are inextricably intertwined, that is to say, **learning involves language and the language we use influences learning**. It has influenced the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) - an approach that underpins the functional-notional syllabus in its emphasis on learner centred teaching strategies and the importance of using language to make meaning (Hymes1971; 1972).

With constructivist teaching, classroom communication is planned and presented in ways that stimulate real life situations (Mhundwa, 1998). Richards and Rodgers (1995) regard functional activities as giving and following directions, solving problems, using clues, conversations, dialogues, role plays and debates, all of which should not be memorised since speech, by its very nature, is spontaneous. Communicative methods such as, pair-work, group discussions and role play, provide appropriate opportunities for ESL learners to fluently express their views, reflect on the various issues and direct their own learning. In other words, **with constructivism, learning according to constructivism is a social activity where all learning is intimately associated with the learners' connection with other human beings**, teachers, peers, family members as well as casual acquaintances. In this case, teachers should not ignore the fact the pupils learn best when they collaborate and interact with other human beings. In the classroom, the role of the teacher is mainly that of a facilitator to introduce topics, to guide discussions, and to ensure that the class activities are smoothly carried out.

2.2 The Post-method Framework

Kumaravadivelu (1994; 2003) conceptualizes the Post-method framework as the development of a unique set of classroom practices by teachers themselves, tailored to

their own identities, beliefs and teaching styles and most importantly to suit the specific context in which they teach.

Richards (2013) adds that the Post- method pedagogy is the kind of teaching which is not based on the prescriptions and procedures of a particular method nor which follows a predetermined syllabus but which draws on the teachers' individual conceptualization of language, language learning and teaching the practical knowledge and skills teachers develop from knowledge and experience.

A close reading of the definitions above indicate a departure from method based classroom practices towards the formulation of new styles of classroom practices for teaching English as a second language based on contextual realities and teachers' experiences and knowledge. The Post method pedagogy is based on Kumaravadivelu's (1994; 2003; 2006) three pedagogic principles of particularity, practicality and possibility which aim to provide a comprehensive context for language teaching for social engagement and political accountability. In addition, it consist of macro and micro strategies which Kumaravadivelu (2003b), defines as guiding viewpoints derived from historical, theoretical, empirical, and experiential insights related to second language instruction. The principle of particularity entails that the sort of techniques that teachers use depends on where, when and whom they are teaching. Implicit in that scenario is that for any language pedagogy to be relevant, it must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals in a particular institutional context embedded in a particular milieu. Local educational, institutional and social contexts have to be duly considered (Kumaravadivelu 1994; 2001; 2003; 2006). The principle of practicality relates to the relationship between theory and practice by breaking the well-established division of labour between the theorists as producers of knowledge and teachers as consumers of that knowledge because that division does not give room for self-conceptualisation and self-construction of pedagogic knowledge on the part of the teacher Kumaravadivelu (2012). This principle therefore advocates for pedagogic knowledge that is relevant thus should come from the everyday practice of teachers and methods used should be applicable in real situations otherwise the practice–theory relationship will not be realised. In line with the above, Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues that, teachers who attempt to derive a theory from practice get practically in touch with existing language problems and, as they develop deeper insights into those problems, they become more versatile in addressing them. Second language teachers then should not be asked to put into practice the professional theories handed down to them by theorizers because instructional contexts are different and thus requires different classroom procedure and techniques. With reference to the parameter of possibility, Abad (2013) articulates that teachers are not

mere technicians who replicate prescribed curricular and enact imposed policies. Instead, this principle takes a critical dimension in which the broad socio-political, historical and economic conditions affect the life of the learner, the teacher and the learning environment. It therefore calls upon teachers to devise their own theories, forms of knowledge and social practices that work within their peculiar experiences and that both teachers and learners bring to the pedagogic setting (Giroux cited by Kumaravadivelu 2001). Post-method pedagogy frame work is thus linked with critical pedagogy which advocates social justice and social transformation through education.

The two theories discussed above are interwoven dimensions of ESL teaching which provide teachers with important guiding principles on which to base their teaching in order to be aware of their teaching process and be able to justify it. The Post-method pedagogy for example, is crucial for teachers' development since it involves teachers constructing "*classroom-oriented*" theories of practice (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) and thus, values teachers' potentials by emphasizing their experiences as teachers, parents/caretakers and students which are underestimated in the implementation of existing methods (Prabhu, 1990). On the other hand, Constructivism recognizes and allows teachers and learners to collaborate and construct their own knowledge using their repertoire of experiences that they bring to the pedagogic setting. Based on their knowledge about the post-method and the Constructivist method, teachers can construct their own methods and thus act as evaluators, observers, critical thinkers, theorizers and practitioners. With macro strategies for example, teachers are able to generate their own location-specific, need-based micro strategies or classroom procedures. This way, the teacher is seen both as a creator of learning opportunities for their learners and the utilizer of learning opportunities created by learners.

3. Context of the Study

Much as the general context of the study is the GZU while the specific context are the schools,, cognisance should be taken that it is also affected by national issues related to syllabus implementation. For that reason, it is important to discuss briefly how national policies affect the syllabus implementation. Zimbabwe's education system is centralised, with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) responsible for development and dissemination of the curriculum. The standards Control department of the Ministry supervises the implementation at school level. (Kahari 2014).The inclusion of any subject in the syllabus is preceded by a needs analysis that takes into account strategic planning to

ascertain utility, relevance and ability to instil in students the knowledge to solve problems, make judgements and carry out academic tasks (Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2011). In order to implement the Functional-Notional syllabus effectively, teachers need to be fully conversant with its underlying theoretical principles, content and the appropriate classroom procedures to employ. In line with this, Ball (1994) emphasizes that an understanding of intentions embedded in a policy is a significant factor in its implementation. The point is that students and their communicative purposes are at the very core of teaching (Raine, 2010).

4. Related ESL Practices

In Zimbabwe, some studies about English second language teaching have also been carried out. Ngwaru (2011) critically explored children's funds of knowledge to establish how teachers utilised them towards pupils' literacy learning. The results highlighted a very disturbing trend where pupils' learning and academic performance in ESL was heavily compromised by the use of an unfamiliar language as a language of instruction in which both teachers and children had limited competence. This further resulted in the use inappropriate pedagogy where interaction was limited to mere repetition. Nyota and Mareva (2012) ascertained the techniques, methods and approaches that dominated the teachers' practices by documenting how teachers used the Structural Approach focusing on grammatical structures and linguistic competence. In their study, lessons were characterized by a proliferation of repetition, memorization and substitution techniques, non-contextualization of language teaching, non-tolerance of errors, and preoccupation with accuracy. Close analysis of the above studies is testimony to the fact that the syllabus is not effectively implemented.

5. Research Methodology

This qualitative study (Berg 2007; Creswell 2009; Glesne, 2011) was conducted in five selected primary schools around Masvingo in Zimbabwe. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were employed to collect data from ten teachers (two from each school) purposely selected from five primary schools. The qualitative design was important because; it is an inductive exploratory approach to discover the meaning of human action where results are reported in words and conceptual frameworks (Creswell 2009; Berg 2007). Employing this design allowed the researcher to formulate research questions that required explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts - Denzin and Lincoln (2005). Semi-structured interviews and document

analysis were used because they are personal and intimate encounters in which 'open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and can consist of several key questions that help to define the areas of exploration and allow for possible divergence in pursuit of ideas or responses in more detail (Gill et al 2008). Interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions, conceptualisation and implementation of the syllabus, the instructional techniques used and how teachers utilised children's funds of knowledge to build new knowledge. Document analysis were important in this study because they are always developed with no reference to the researcher and therefore provided objective, systematic and reliable information about the phenomenon under research analysis (Leedy and Ormrod 2001). The documents analysed were samples of teachers lesson plans retrieved from their scheme-cum plans. A scheme-cum plan in the Zimbabwean school context is a teacher-made document that combines aspects of both the scheme of work and the lesson plans and is used for instructional purposes in a specified period during the school term. The scheme-cum plan usually spells out the aims and objectives, the content to be taught, teacher-pupil activities, the source of matter, instructional techniques and media to be used. It is an important classroom instructional document to which teachers always refer.

The study attempted to answer the how, what and why questions about the perceptions of teachers regarding the functional-notional syllabus, allowing the researcher to study phenomenon in the natural settings for interpretation in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Seeking teachers' perceptions of the functional-notional syllabus and its implementation was consistent with Silverman's (2013) view that qualitative research helps the researcher to explore the participants' experiences and understanding of these experiences.

6. Understanding the Functional-Notional English Syllabus in Zimbabwe

Research about curriculum implementation highlights that teachers are a critical component of the educational system as their decisions about instructional practices determine the fruitfulness of a syllabus. In ESL pedagogy, as in other classroom pedagogies, effective and meaningful learning is usually achieved through the teachers' ability to interpret and implement the syllabus using instructional practices that address the needs of the learners. In Zimbabwe's education system, the functional-notional syllabus associated with the work of a British linguist Wilkins (1972) is still the basis of current official syllabus document used. Wilkins (1981) sees a syllabus as a document that specifies the content of language teaching and learning which have been submitted to some degree of structuring and ordering with the aim of making teaching

and learning a more effective process. Dubin & Olshtain, (1986) echo that a syllabus is “a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translates the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level”. The Functional-Notional syllabus therefore is a kind of communicative syllabus which organizes units with the foundation of some functions such as asking question, expressing opinions, expressing wishes, making suggestions, complaining, and apologizing rather than including units instructing noun gender or present tense ending (Wilkins 1976). (Grunert 1997; Postorino 1999) add that it provides a framework for what should be studied, along with a rationale for why that content should be selected and ordered. Proponents of this syllabus claim that it addresses the deficiencies of the Audio-Lingual Approach by helping learners develop their ability to communicate effectively in a real life situations. Brown (1995) points out that due to its nature, this syllabus draws on theories and descriptions of language that emphasise the functional, notional and social aspects of competence (see Hymes (1972)’s model of communicative competence and Halliday (1971)’s functional grammar). Language teaching should focus more on the purposes (functions) of using the language and the meanings (notions) expressed through the language rather than grammatical forms. The term “*function*” refers to the communicative act usually involving interaction at least between two people where language use is for purposes of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes while notions refer to the conceptual meanings expressed through language (Savignon, 1983). It is constructivist in nature and typical of its structure, it should be taught according to the requirements of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) (Richards and Rodgers 2001). CLT is based on a theory of language as a system of expression of meaning; the primary function of language being to achieve communicative competence (Nunan, 2008).

The functional view of language highlights the importance of discourse (Malinowski 1923). Accordingly, when teaching using the functional notional syllabus, teachers should choose real-world situations as their “*notion*,” and choose corresponding functions to teach to prepare students to communicate in that situation in the lesson. This would generate a special kind of excitement for learning and leads to productive learning. During classroom discourse, the teacher is advised to take a passive role, acts as a facilitator who guides all the instructional processes and is the initiator of interaction (Littlewood, 1981). The minimal controls on the classroom discourse by the teacher allow learners to freely take control the topics of their own discourse (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 1999). Constructivist teaching requires learners to learn through communicating in the target language rather than through overt teaching of atomised particles of the language, to use authentic texts in which activities should be based on

meaning making and interaction should be equally meaning rather than form focused. Interactive language instruction involves the teacher and learners engaging in activities which create conditions that foster language use and leads to further language development. The whole process of classroom instruction, learners should be given opportunities to focus on the learning process and the language items and mistakes should be considered a part of the learning process. The language forms, its functions, and communicative skills they have learned can be used immediately in the communicative activities and in role plays, or even in the real world. By using this idea to structure teaching, the instructional focus becomes less about form and more about the meaning of an utterance. In this way, students use the language in order to fulfil a specific purpose, therefore making their speech more meaningful. Krashen and Terrell (1983) suggest that basic communication goals can be expressed in terms of situations, functions and topics. However, while the syllabus should be implemented according to prescribed standards, research indicates a discrepancy between the official curriculum and the real curriculum that obtains in the classroom. This is usually caused by a number of factors including teachers' beliefs about syllabus implementation.

7. Teachers' Beliefs about Syllabus Implementation

While teachers are expected to employ classroom practices consistent with Constructivism, the classroom practice is usually skewed towards teachers' pedagogical beliefs as these play a central role in their teaching practices (Handal & Herrington, 2003; Salmon & MacCyvers, 2001). Through their own school experience, teachers formed unconscious beliefs about themselves and their abilities, about the nature of knowledge, and its acquisition. Richards and Lockhart (1994) confirm this by reiterating that teachers continually have to make decisions about which general method and specific techniques would best enable a second language learner of English to be taught effectively. These beliefs are usually reflected in the teaching techniques, choice of activities, decision-making, and in evaluation of pupils progress (Borg, 2001). In this study, it is not uncommon to believe that what teachers think and believe about the functional-notional is true, they perceive information supporting that belief and largely, these factors can influence the ways, the aspirations and requirements of how language syllabuses are interpreted and implemented (Goh et al 2005). With reference to this study, teachers do not always follow what is pre-scribed. Instead, they are guided more by their long cherished beliefs about what constitute good teaching and usually, this result in the mismatch between the intentions of the official curriculum and the result of the real curriculum.

8. Findings

The results articulated here were collected from the ten interviews questions that teachers responded to and from an analysis of the lesson plans retrieved from their scheme cum plans. Two lessons were selected and summarised to highlight the characteristics of the lessons that most teachers made. The focus of analysis centred on three aspects of the lesson; objectives, teacher-pupil activities and instructional techniques. Normally, the term '*SMART*' is what teachers and teacher educators use to describe objectives. *S* means the objectives are specific and clear about the what, where, when and how of the lesson. *M* means the objectives are measurable while *A* means achievable objectives *R* stands for realistic and it means the teacher's ability to obtain the level of change reflected in the objective. *T* means time bound. At least a teacher should be able to state the time in which the activities are accomplished. In view of the above, objectives were therefore analysed in terms of their smartness while activities and instructional techniques were analysed in terms of their consistency to the two philosophies discussed above.

8.1 Lesson One

Objectives, as has been said above, objectives determine the direction of the lesson. In this lesson, the teacher focused on learner centred activities where children were actively involved in the learning process. However, the activities were too few that they did not engage all the participants effectively thus minimizing children learning opportunities. Constructivist view of teaching advocates for a kind of teaching that provide increased opportunities for ELLs to develop sophisticated vocabulary knowledge including strong academic language. It also emphasizes on the provision independent reading that is structured and purposeful with a good reader-text match. The activities in this lesson are devoid of challenging narrative and expository texts to teach comprehension strategies. The activities lacks a strong on vocabulary development, rigorous ELL instruction often incorporates key comprehension strategies for listening and reading with both narrative and expository text. Instructional activities often incorporate the development of skills such as imaging and sequencing in both oral and written language and move to higher order thinking skills such as determining the main idea, drawing inferences, predicting outcomes and summarizing. However, this was not reflected in the lesson plan.

8.2 Lesson Two

In this lesson, objectives were well formulated and achievable but were very limiting in terms of how pupils would be engaged to participate. The lesson did not show how the teacher would tap into the various learning modalities to meet the learning styles of many students. Since this was a composition, one would have expected the teacher to show continuity by linking previously taught issues to the present content. In any composition, there is need to for vocabulary building to help children find suitable words to describe the phenomenon they are writing about, In this lesson, nothing about that was shown and there is no doubt that children would produce flat and dry pieces of essays. The lesson was also limiting in the sense that the teacher gave children pictures of animals that she probably thought about instead of allowing them to write what they know. In such lessons pupils will not be actively involved since they may not be familiar with the characteristics of some animals. It was not clear how the lesson objectives would be adapted to meet the needs of learners.

8.3 Teacher Interviews

In response to questions about syllabus implementation, teachers said they faced a dilemma in implementing the syllabus successfully because the schools emphasized on having students passing the written examinations than on acquiring knowledge. Most teachers said that underlying pedagogic approaches such as the CLT were not always appropriate to serve the pragmatic purpose of preparing children for the examinations. In responding to a question on the type of syllabus, most teachers knew that they were using a constructivist syllabus but did not know its official name. A few teachers said they did not bother to really find out about the syllabus. In responding to the second question, the majority of teachers did not think that a syllabus was important because the used text books to select all the content they needed and they knew what kind of staff would be tested. Teacher's responses on question three were similar to those given in question two. In responding to the fourth question, the majority concurred that it was necessary to adhere to the syllabus if they were available and if they were not, teachers said they still managed to teach what they wanted to using text books. Few teachers said that they did know what to say. Asked what procedures they employed to present their content, in responding to the issue of teaching techniques, all teachers mentioned techniques which were mostly consistent with the Audio-lingual approach and some were not even aware of that. In their responses to questions about instructional techniques, most teachers said that they were not very sure that children's activities were always constructivist in nature but at least they were the types of activities consistent with the examinations questions given at the end of year. In responding to

question on how to utilise children's funds of knowledge to build on new knowledge, the majority of teachers said that it was not always possible to know what funds of knowledge or previous knowledge children had especially if the knowledge was not school related and for that reason, teachers would simply use their discretion to assume what children knew and would normally start from there. The majority of teachers confirmed that they were aware of the assumptions underlying the Functional-notional syllabus. However, they lamented that it was not easy to implement the syllabus due to the following reasons; learner centred models were not seen as helpful in achieving success in the examinations.

9. Discussion

Analysed documents indicate that teachers' planning was not consistent with either constructivist or the post method pedagogy. Instead, was steeped in structural approaches where pupils were regarded as recipients of knowledge while the teacher was the constructor of all knowledge. In all lesson provided above, lesson activities were limited and there was little room for children to create their own knowledge. Where the teacher was supposed to be a facilitator, it looked like the learning was teacher centred and children interaction limited. In lesson three for example, the teacher provided children with animals to write about instead of allowing children the autonomy to choose animals they want from a whole world of animals especially those from the children's experiences. This shows that teachers disregarded children's socio-cultural funds of knowledge, described by Moll et al (1992) as not only valuable to students' lives, but can assist teachers in understanding the ways in which these experiences can be practically and meaningfully connected to classroom curriculum. Very little of Kumaravadivelu's three principles are reflected in teachers instructional practices. In the principle of practicality where there should be a relationship between theory and practice in pedagogic knowledge, nothing can be ascertained in the lesson plans and implicit in that situation is the fact what children are learning has no relevance to their situation thus the goal of learning is elusive. In lesson two, pupils are told to demonstrate good reading that they copy from the teacher instead of reading the way they can. This is a clear indication that teachers' classroom practices are far from constructivist thinking where learners must actively participate in the learning process.

While a syllabus fits learners 'needs, it might not fit well to another culture due to the different learning strategies. It is therefore difficult to design a syllabus that could be used in all societies as each society has a different culture. This confirms the relevance of Kumaravadivelu (2012)'s post method pedagogy where the principle of

practicality advocates that for any pedagogic knowledge to be relevant, it should come from the everyday practice of teachers and methods used should be applicable in real situations otherwise the practice–theory relationship will not be realised. Basing on the characteristics of Post method pedagogy, one can say that the functional-notional syllabus used in Zimbabwe is a foreign construct and typical of such constructs, creation of new knowledge is not the domain of teachers. Their task is to execute what is prescribed for them.

Obanya (2002) says frontal teaching where lessons are characterised by recitation and imitation, practice of exam type skill, repetition and memorisation is evidenced in African ESL classrooms. An analysis of the lesson plan indicated that teachers barely created opportunities for pupils to produce spoken and written language during their lessons as is required by both the post method and constructivist theories. Contrary to this, administrators who are tasked with the responsibility of observing, assessing and evaluating teacher effectiveness do not concern themselves with what approach is used but want to know more about teacher effectiveness in presenting the lesson. Evidence suggests that the support given to teachers during their initial teacher preparation especially in linking theory into practice rarely as effective as it should be.

During the instructional process, teachers are expected to consider and demonstrate knowledge of; the content that has to be delivered to learners, the pedagogic practices to engage in, the nature of classroom interaction that takes place and the type of learning environment that promote effective learning. However, information obtained from teachers indicate that there is a serious shortage of instructional materials and very often teachers find it difficult to implement the syllabus according to prescribed and expected standards where children get the opportunity to interact meaningfully. It was clear that the two theoretical frameworks described above are far from being realised and perhaps this is consistent with what Oxford (1996) says when he points out that; *“Each culture has its own approach to learning and thus to learning strategies, and therefore no single formula for assessing and instructing learning strategies exists.”* Conversely, the learner- centred belief emphasizes student responsibility for learning and focuses on knowledge construction and how students get persuaded to work and learn together. The issue of examination featured frequently in teachers responses about the challenges they faced in curriculum implementation. Teachers reiterated that public examinations in Zimbabwe were very highly regarded by many (Moyo & Modiba 2011) and success in them was a big family achievement because it yielded better employment opportunities thus improving the quality of family life. Due to that reason, teachers concentrated on what they thought helped children pass the examination. To reinforce this point, Seth (2002) & Bernard (2009) add that the

examination system illustrates the importance of education as a determiner of social status, and, is acute for entrance to higher education, although the effects percolate through the entire system. This however comes with a heavy price where there is a tendency to emphasise the learning outcome at the expense of the learning process (Bernard 2009). Teachers argued they were more concerned with children passing the examination since teacher effectiveness in most schools was measured on learners' performance in tests or the examination at the end of the year. Reports gathered from participants show that most teachers who responded to the interviews confirm that ESL instruction have not kept pace with innovations hence teachers still adhered to the old models of teaching.

Both principles discussed above advocate for democratic learning environments where both the teacher and the learner have the autonomy to decide and to construct their own knowledge to make sense of their teaching and learning respectively. All learning should be learner centred. Cummins (2007) alludes to the fact that learner centred pedagogy raises student achievement promote democratic classrooms, complex thinking, joint production and meet student communication goals.

Savigon (2002b) adds that teacher education has not paid the serious communicative approaches has not received the attention it warrants and that teachers have not been given the necessary tools for using them by teacher educators. While teachers acknowledged the need to teach consistently with constructivism, very little of this was reflected in their lesson plans. This situation supports Whitley's (1993) argument that the needs of teachers have not been well researched and that constructivist approaches have not been disseminated in ways that are sensitive to the problems teachers confront in local programs and classrooms. The reason is that teachers may have developed little of the instructional capability about constructivism in their years of training and practice and cannot start to implement it in the classroom teaching or they have failed to realize to interpret well the assumptions of the Functional syllabus that requires the use of CLT.

Ngwaru's (2011) observation of teachers' practices in ESL classrooms in rural Zimbabwe primary schools, noted that teaching and learning entails what can be termed the transmission model where the teacher's role is to prepare and transmit information to learners while the learners' role is to receive, store and act upon this information Tishman & Jay et al (1992).

If these and other factors are considered and are adequately utilised, effective instruction usually occurs and learners are most likely to acquire the desired skills, competences and experiences. Students make meaning through activities such as collaborative, problem solving and writing for purpose. Learners gain more

understanding by processing what they hear and read into their inter-language than learning an isolated grammar rule followed by pattern practice (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Instructional resources are educational inputs of vital importance to the teaching of any subject in the school curriculum. Savoury (1958) also adds that, a well-planned and imaginative use of visual aids in lessons should do much to banish apathy, supplement inadequacy of books as well as arousing students' interest by giving them something practical to see and do, and at the same time helping to train them to think things out themselves.

10. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to establish the extent to which primary schools ESL teachers' pedagogic practices mirrored the implicit assumptions underlying the ESL functional-notional syllabus currently used in Zimbabwe. The purpose was to gather and document evidence about the quality of teaching and learning with special reference to teachers' awareness of the Functional-Notional syllabus and its implementation. Studies such as this one are important because they help to find solutions to particular instructional problems.

The study found out that; teachers' ESL instructional practices are responsive more to the expectations of school administrators and the society where success in examinations is preferable to the process of effective learning and acquisition of knowledge. Without high language competence, motivation becomes more a product of curricular demands, pressure from exams, and academic and professional success, instead of demand for communication.

As Widows (1998) perceived, the English language teaching that takes communicative competence as the invariable goal doesn't fit in the EFL contexts where learners' engagement in social interaction with native English speakers is minimal (Wei, 2011). The study also noted that constructivist teaching which is consistent with the functional syllabus is far from being realized especially in rural schools that have serious depriving learning environments. Teachers' practices depended more on their tacit beliefs, perceptions and knowledge about second language teaching than it does on curricular demands.

Sadly, the majority of Zimbabwean schools are located in the rural areas. In view of the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

11. Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- That teachers be exposed to constructivist-based instruction, which would then facilitate the development of teaching strategies consistent with recent reform movements.
- Teachers need to select content and classroom activities, based on learners' needs and interests that are suitably challenging and that promote language development.
- Communicative competence should be the aim of teaching while classroom activities aim at fluency rather than accuracy.
- Teachers need professional development where they learn more about the benefits of constructivists' models of instruction.
- Learners need improved learning environments where they have access to large amounts of language input useful for their learning.

References

1. Abad, J.V. (2013). Pedagogical factors that influence EFL teaching: Some considerations for teachers' professional development Profile, 15 (1), 97-108.
2. Ball, S. (1994). Education Reform. A Critical and Post Structure Approach. Buckingham: Open University Press.
3. Berg, B.I. (2007) Qualitative Research Method for Social Sciences 6th Editions .San Francisco: Pearson Education, Inc.
4. Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd Ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
5. Borg, S. (2001). Self-perception and practice in teaching grammar. *ELT Journal* 55 (1), 21-9
6. Burns, A. (1990). Focus on language in the communicative classroom. In G. Brindley (Ed.), *the second language curriculum in action* (pp. 36-58). Sydney: NCELTR.
7. Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches* (3rd Edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publication, Inc.
8. Cummins, J. (2007). Identity texts. The imaginative construction of self through multiliteracies pedagogy. In: Garcia, O., Skutnabb-Kangas, T., Torres-Guzma' n,

- M.E. (Eds.), *Imaging Multilingual Schools. Languages in Education and Globalization*. Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
9. Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 10. Dubin, F. & Olshtain, E. (1986). *Course design: Developing programs and materials for language learning*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 0521276429
 11. Duffy, T. M., & Cunningham, D.J. (1996). Constructivism Implications for the design and delivery of instruction. In D. H. Jonassen (Ed.), *Educational communications and technology* (pp. 170-199). New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.
 12. Ellis, R. (1999). *Learning a Second Language through Interaction*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamin.
 13. Ellis, R. (1997). *SLA Research and Language Teaching*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
 14. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum,
 15. Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6), 291-295
 16. Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th Ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
 17. Grunert (1997). *The course syllabus; A learning centred approach*. Bolton MA; Anker Publishing Company.
 18. Handal, B. & Herrington, A. (2003). "Mathematics teachers' beliefs and curriculum reform". *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 15 (1), 59 – 69.
 19. Hennessy, S. (1993). Situated cognition and cognitive apprenticeship: implications for classroom learning. *Studies in Science Education*, 22, 1-41.
 20. Hymes, D. (1971). Competence and performance in linguistic theory. In R. Huxley & E. Ingram (Eds.), *Language acquisition: Models and methods*. London: Academic Press.
 21. Hymes, Dell H. (1972). "On communicative competence". In J. B. Pride and J. Holmes, eds., *Sociolinguistics*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 269-293.
 22. Honebein, P., Duffy, T., and Fishman, B. (1993). Constructivism and the design of learning environments: Context and authentic activities for learning. In T. Duffy, J. Lowyck, and D. J. Jonassen (Eds.) *The Design of Constructivist Learning Environments: Implications for Instructional Design and the Use of Technology*. Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag.

23. Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994). The post method condition: Emerging strategies for second/foreign language teaching [J]. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 27-47.
24. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a Postmethod Pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 537-560. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588427>
25. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Postmethod*. London:
26. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003b). *Beyond Methods: Macro-strategies for Language Teaching*. New Haven, C. T.: Yale University Press.
27. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. New York: Routledge.
28. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a Postmethod Pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 537-560. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588427>.
29. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding Language teaching: From method to Postmethod*. London, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
30. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). Critical language pedagogy: A postmethod perspective on English language teaching. *World Englishes*, 22(4), 539-550.
31. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2008). *Cultural Globalization and Language Education*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press
32. Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994). The post-method condition: (E) Merging strategies for second/foreign language teaching. *TESOL QUORTELY*, 28, 27-48.
33. Kumaravadivelu, B. (1993). Maximizing learner potential in the communicative classroom. *ELT Journal*, 47(1), 12-21.
34. Krashen, S, & Terrell, T.D.,(1983) *The natural approach: Language Acquisition in the classroom*. Oxford Peganon.
35. Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). *Grammar and Its Teaching: Challenging Its Myths*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: Centre for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved January 23, 2005, from <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/larsen01.html>
36. Leedy, P. & Ormrod, J. (2001): *Practical Research; Planning and Design*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
37. Littlewood, W. T., (1981) *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction*, Cambridge: CUP.
38. Littlewood, W. (2007) *Communicative and task-based Language Teaching in East Asian classrooms*. *Language Teaching*, 40, 243-249.

39. Malinowski (1923) the problem of meaning in primitive language. In K C Ogden and I. A. Richards (Eds) *The meaning of meaning* (pp. 146-152) London Rutledge.
40. Marinova-Todd, S. H. (2003). *Comprehensive analysis of ultimate attainment in adult second language acquisition*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Massachusetts.
41. Mareva, R & Nyota, S. (2012) Structural or communicative approach: A case study of English Language teaching in Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools. *Internal journal of English and literature Vol. 3(5)*, pp. 103-111.
42. Mhundwa PH (1998). *Communico-Grammatical Strategies for Teaching ESL: An Applied Linguistics Approach*. Gweru: Mambo Press
43. Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. "Theory into Practice," 31(2), 132-141.
44. Mufanechiya, A. and Mufanechiya, T. (2011). *Essays on curriculum issues in Zimbabwe Deutschland: Lambert Academic Publishing*.
45. Ngwaru M. (2011) "Quality Assurance in Education in Zimbabwe." A Paper presented as a public lecture at Great Zimbabwe University on 22 September 2011.
46. Ngwaru J.M., (2010). *Literacy Practices at Home and at School for Rural Children in Zimbabwe*. Saarbracken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller Aktiengesellschaft.
47. Nunan, D. (1987) 'Communicative Teaching: Making it work' *ELT Journal* 41/2, OUP, P136- P.145.
48. Nunan D (2008) [Practical English language teaching](#), New York, McGraw Hill
49. Obanya, P. (2002) "Curriculum Overload in the Language Education Programme for Basic Education" in Adebayo, L., Isiugo–Abanihe, I., and Ohi, I.N. (Eds) *Perspectives on Applied Linguistics in Language and Literature*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig) Ltd.
50. Orafi, S.M.S. & S. Borg. (2009) Intentions and realities in implementing communicative curriculum reform. *System* 37 (2) 243-253
51. Oxford, R. L. (1996). *Language Learning Strategies around the World: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. University of Hawaii, the USA
52. Postorino E (1999) Students with Academic difficulty; Prevention and Assistance *APS Observer* 10-11, 26
53. Prabhu, N. S. (1990) There is no best method–Why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 161-176.
54. Raine. P. (2010) A discussion of the notional -functional syllabus. Unpublished manuscript, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.

55. Richards, J.C. (2013) Curriculum approaches in language teaching: Forward, central, and backward design. *RELC Journal*, 44(1), 5-33.
56. Richards C & Rodgers, T. S. (2001) Approaches and methods in language teaching. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge: University Press.
57. Richards J.C., Rodgers TS (1995) Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. A description and analysis. Cambridge: CUP p 4
58. Richards, J. & Lockhart, C. (1994) Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms. CUP.
59. Roussi, M. 2012. L'insécurité linguistique des enseignants non natifs de langues étrangères. Actes du colloque FICEL, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – DILTEC.
60. Sadek, M. A., (2002). The Problems of English Language Teaching at Primary Level in Rural School of Bangladesh. *Unpublished Master's Thesis, Institute of Education Research, University of Dhaka.*
61. Savoury, N. J., (1958). "Visual aids in teaching History". *West African Journal of Education*. Vol. 2. No. 1 pp. 5 – 9.
62. Savignon, S. (1997). Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice. New York: McGraw-Hill.
63. Savignon, S. (2001). "Communicative language teaching in the twenty-first century." In M. Celce-Murcia (ed.), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
64. Seth, M.J. (2002) Education fever: society, politics, and the pursuit of schooling in South Korea. United States: University of Hawaii Press.
65. Wilkins, D. A., (1981). Notional syllabuses revisited. *Applied Linguistics* 2 (1), 83–89.
66. Wilkins, D. A., (1976). Notional syllabuses. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
67. Wilkins. A.D., (1972b). Grammatical, Situational and Notional syllabus Proceedings of the third international Congress of the Applied Linguistics. Heidelberg Julius, Groos Verlag.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).