

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter presents the conceptual framework in which this research has been conducted. The starting point is an effort to define the concept of 'Language Testing' in its various contexts. Specific details are given on the difference between 'Testing' and 'Assessing' the learner's knowledge of a particular language and their impact on the evaluation of language education programmes.

It also presents the background that generated the need to conduct this research, the statement of the problem, purpose, objectives, research questions and the significance of the study. Operational definitions and delimitations of the research are also presented.

1.0 Conceptual Framework

"Language Assessment or Language Testing is a field of study under the umbrella of Applied Linguistics. Its main focus is the assessment of first, second or other language in the school, college, or university context; assessment of language use in the workplace; and assessment of language in the immigration, citizenship, and asylum contexts"(Encyclopedia of language and Education, 2008 p211).

However, this definition does not actually say what language testing is, as much as the contexts in which it is practiced.

The most useful definition was given by Chapelle and Brindley (1969) cited in Norbert Schmitt (1978) which reads: "In the context of language teaching and learning, 'assessment' refers to the act of collecting information and making judgments about learner's knowledge of a language and ability to use it". However, this raises an interesting debate as to whether 'language testing' and 'language assessment' can be treated as synonymous, as assumed by the Encyclopedia cited above.

Spolsky (1975) identifies three stages in the recent history of language testing: The pre-scientific (usually known as Traditional language Testing), The psychometric-structuralist and The psycho-linguistic-sociolinguistic.

Psychometric-Structuralist Testing, (Lado's Approach) consists in breaking down the complexities of language into isolated segments. This influences both what is tested and how it is tested.

What is revealed by a structural contrastive analysis of first language and language testing at all linguistic levels from syntactic to phonological is that discrete items are constructed. These ideally reveal the candidate's ability to handle one level of language in terms of one of the four skills notably listening, speaking, reading and writing.

According to Sealinker (1972), the disadvantage of this approach is that they rest on the assumption that knowledge of the elements of a language is equal to knowledge of that language. The biggest concern however, is that the ability to synthesize is missing from an atomistic analysis. Also it is extremely difficult and probably undesirable to construct "pure" test items (i.e. items operating on one level of structure only) other than ones which are extremely trivial in

nature. The only clear advantage of Discrete Point Tests is that they yield data which is easily quantifiable.

The counting of bits, that is if language performance is to be described by means of numerical scores, discrete-point testing is helpful. The tasks are unambiguous, the marking introduces no element of subjectivity and a person's final score is clear for all to see. Discrete-point tests can be accurately and objectively marked even by mechanical scanning methods (<http://www.sedl.org>).

Dell Hymes proposed the concept of communicative competence. He argued that a speaker can produce grammatical sentences that are completely inappropriate. In communicative competence, he included not only the ability to form correct sentences but to use them at appropriate times. Since Hymes proposed the idea in the early 1970s, it has been expanded considerably, and various types of competencies have been proposed. However, the basic idea of communicative competence remains the ability to use language appropriately, both receptively and productively, in real-life situations.

Tests intended to test communicative language are judged, then, as observed by Kathleen (1996) on the extent to which they simulate real life communicative situations rather than on how reliable the results are. In fact, there is an almost inevitable loss of reliability as a result of the loss of control in a communicative testing situation. If, for example, a test is intended to test the ability to participate in a group discussion for students who are going to a British university, it is impossible to control what the other participants in the discussion will say, making it difficult for every candidate to be observed in the same situation which would be ideal for test reliability.

However, according to the basic assumptions of communicative language testing, this is compensated for by the realism of the situation.

There is necessarily a subjective element to the evaluation of communicative tests. Real life situations do not always have objectively right or wrong answers, and so band scales need to be developed to evaluate the results. Each band has a description of the quality (and sometimes quantity) of the receptive or productive performance of the candidate (<http://iteslj.org/>).

The modern approach to Language Testing follows communicative language teaching methodologies and finds 'Integrative Tests' to be often pragmatic in the sense that they set tasks which cause the learner to process sequences of elements in a language that conform to the normal contextual constraints of that language, and which require the learner to relate sequences of linguistic elements via pragmatic mappings to extra linguistic context.

Therefore, Discrete Point Tests cannot be pragmatic. There is no ordinary discourse situation and no normal language use context where a learner might be asked for example, to listen and distinguish between "ship" and "sheep" or perform "active" to "passive" transformations.

Another aspect concerned with the assessment of learners' acquired language skills is described as 'Evaluation'.

According to Jenkins (1989), Evaluation can be divided into three categories. These might be termed "progress evaluation", "diagnostic evaluation" and "proficiency evaluation". Progress evaluation is perceived to be a part of a basic program of language learning. An example would be periodic examinations over material covered in a language course. Progress evaluations might also be functional, testing whether the learner can handle a certain situation or fulfill a

certain assignment in a real-life situation as they will be expected to do as part of their integration.

Progress evaluation in the Standard Curriculum involves the completion of the basic components. Using the checklists provided, or similar ones based on a specific design, the learner and the institution have a clear and objective measure of the learner's progress. Completion of the course entails fulfillment of each activity and completion of each component on the checklists. The Progress Report Form provides a thorough self-evaluation, which is objectified when the form is sent to the learner and to the institution as official report.

A diagnostic evaluation is skill oriented with a goal of discovering deficiencies or weaknesses which would then be dealt with. A Refresher Course might begin with a diagnostic evaluation, then a learning plan for the course could be developed emphasizing the needs of the learner.

A proficiency evaluation is not concerned so much with certain material or specific grammatical features or vocabulary, as with overall combined skills and general facility in the language. Progress evaluations test mastery of specific material studied. A proficiency evaluation, on the other hand, is not limited to any specific material, but covers the whole range of the language as spoken or written by native speakers of that language.

Grade 12 French examinations fall under 'summative evaluation', that is to say, examinations written as test for completion of an education cycle. In Zambia, Grade 12 marks the completion point for secondary education in French as foreign language and other subjects in which pupils must pass examinations that qualify them to obtain a school certificate as proof for having

acquired the skills prescribed in the curriculum. Since the senior secondary French syllabus emphasizes integrated skill approach to teaching French, examinations consist in a variety of language skills that include grammar, aural and oral production as well as writing.

It is believed that everyone has the ability to learn a language. It is also believed that learning languages helps one to know about their own language and culture, and encourages them to understand and appreciate other people's language and culture. Thus, learning a language helps to develop other important life skills such as communication, empathy, acceptance of other people's differences and willingness to learn from and be changed by somebody else's way of life.

The learning of a foreign language is however an exceedingly complex task. Its difficulty depends generally upon what aspects of language are to be learned, the degree of mastery desired and the degree to which the target language differs from the learner's native or customary language.

Evaluation at any level can therefore reward efforts and accelerate progress. Evaluations provide an opportunity for review and enable the learner to consolidate what has been learned up to that point. Evaluations enable the learner and teacher or language helpers to discover or clarify areas of weakness which can then be strengthened. Evaluations can also provide the basis for guidelines for continuing progress.

1.1Background

Apparently no one can dispute the fact that language policy in a multilingual state such as Zambia poses serious challenges on National Education system.

Zambia's National Language Policy recognizes about seventy –two (72) local languages corresponding to ethnic groups. However, only seven (7) of them (Nyanja, Bemba, Silozi, Tonga, Kaonde, Luvale and Lunda) have been raised to the status of official language and are taught in public schools.

Siding with local languages, there exist foreign languages notably English and French that are taught in the school curriculum. English enjoys the status of official language while French on the other hand has the status of foreign language and is only taught to serve specific purposes to do with international communication with the francophone world.

By official status, English remains the sole medium of instruction in the education system from Grade One up to tertiary level. It is also a vehicle by which administration and other government's businesses including international affairs are run. For this reason, it is evidently possible to conclude that the attention and resources put in the teaching of English lead to better results and students' motivation more than in any other language taught in schools.

On the other hand, French was introduced in the Zambian education curriculum during colonial administration. It must be here understood that during colonial era, two education systems were in place, one for Whites and another for Blacks. French was by then taught only in schools for European children while Latin, considered then to be a dead language was offered in African schools.

French was for the first time offered to African pupils in the 1950's at Munali Boys and Chipembi Girls secondary schools. The number of schools teaching French increased by the 1980's to 1990's following the involvement and support of the French government through its Embassy (Machinyise, 2009 p5).

However, there has been a serious decrease in the number of schools offering French and students' motivation in the recent years. Moreover, the educational policy states that French should be taught from grade 8 in public schools as an optional subject and this makes French unable to attract much attention on the part of students and personnel involved in the preparation of teaching programmes. In fact, it is reported that French like local languages suffers stigmatization in learning institutions resulting in potential students and teachers shunning it. It is probable that this trend has affected the performance of those who decided to continue learning it.

Machinyise (2009) observes that the statistics as given by the French Embassy show that the decline in the number of public schools teaching French has reached alarming levels. He also states that, according to the entry data at the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ), the number of schools that registered for French examinations has been steadily reducing as follows: In the year 2000, about 132 public schools registered as centres for French examinations. In 2003 the number reduced to 130 while in 2007 only 126 centres were registered.

This being the case however, French popularity has been gradually growing in private institutions with some schools offering it from as early as primary school level.

It is interesting to note also, according to E.C.Z (2008), that missionary schools seem to maintain impressive records of high pass rate in Grade 12 French examinations as opposed to Government

schools. Reference is made to schools such as Saint Monica's Secondary school in Eastern province, Saint Mary's in Lusaka, Ibenga Girls secondary school on The Copperbelt and Njase secondary school in Southern province. From this scenario, it may be of interest to find out what these schools do that is not done in public schools in order to help them also upraise their standing.

Furthermore, the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Zambia has met serious challenges considering the geopolitical situation in which Zambia finds herself. With only one francophone neighbour (the Democratic Republic of Congo), the use of French in Zambia is restricted to serve very specific functions beyond the region. These functions relate to various international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), to which Zambia subscribes through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and in which some members use French as their official language.

In Zambia, Grade 12 examinations in French are divided in four papers and can be said to aim at testing both cognitive and productive skills. Paper 3 which comes early on the examination time table and lasts for 25 minutes; tests the candidate's ability to identify French phonemes through reading a passage or "Texte de Lecture". Questions on general knowledge are then asked in French to the candidate just to test their oral productive skills.

Paper 5 comes next, focusing on testing listening-comprehension skills acquired in the course of learning (aural) for 50 minutes. In this paper, short passages known as "Faits Divers" and a text of 2 to 3 short paragraphs are read by the invigilator while candidates listen, then they are asked to read the questions before a second reading. After the second reading, candidates are then

allowed to indicate the answers by circling the appropriate answers on their multiple choice-answer sheets.

On the other hand, Paper 1 tests macro skills of natural language production through composition writing, grammar, structural transformations and cloze tests. In this paper, candidates are asked in one hour and thirty minutes to write one composition of about 120 words by choosing a topic from the options given. The composition could be in sort of letter, descriptive, narrative or article writing. In addition, they have sections in which they replace underlined words or group of words by pronouns, rewrite sentences as per instructions or change sentences from direct to indirect speech or vice versa; and fill blank spaces in sentences with missing words respectively.

Paper 2 is “Reading Comprehension” and lasts for one hour. In this paper, candidates are asked to read and understand instructions to every communicative activity they are required to perform. The first set of activity consists in showing their understanding and interaction with the environment around them while the other section brings questions based on short situational stories to which they are required to answer with brief statements or simply by choosing the right answers from options provided.

It has to be mentioned that each component of examination poses its own level of difficulties depending on the nature of the task to be performed and the amount of learning that has taken place in that regard. However, whatever would be the source of concern in trying to improve our students’ output is not only bound to be a factor in the teaching and learning of French, but it will continue to thrive in second and foreign language education and testing; and will require continuous analysis of both our students’ and society’s needs.

For instance, statistics on examination results for the past 3 years (2003, 2006, 2007) obtained from the Examinations Council of Zambia (2008) are presented as a mark of evidence to high failure rate in French as follows:

.In 2003, 364 candidates representing 61% from a total of 601 who sat for French scored less than 50%.

.In 2006, 548 candidates representing 65% from a total of 841 scored less than 50%

.In 2007, 659 candidates representing 68% from a total of 965 scored less than 50%

Nonetheless, there had never been a study to clearly determine factors which contribute to high failure rate in French by the majority of our pupils in high schools. Therefore, an investigation was required to establish what factors really contribute to poor examination results.

1.2 Statement of the problem

According to statistics by (E.C.Z 2003, 2006, 2007), evidence has shown that the performance of pupils in Grade 12 French examinations has been deteriorating in recent years but no study had been conducted on the same problem. Hence, we did not know the factors contributing to the poor performance of pupils in Grade 12 French examinations which this study sought to establish.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The study was aimed at establishing the factors affecting pupils' poor performance in Grade 12 French examinations.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Following the purpose above, the objectives of this study were to:

- . Investigate the factors contributing to poor results in Grade 12 French examinations
- . Find out specific examination components that cause more difficulties to pupils

1.5 Research Questions

The study was anchored in the following leading questions:

- . What factors contribute to poor performance of pupils in Grade 12 French examinations?
- . Which specific examination components cause more difficulties than others to pupils?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be useful to stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Education, the French embassy and the schools themselves. These may use the findings to improve upon the assessment of French in the country. It will also be a contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of second and foreign language testing.

1.7 Delimitations

The study was limited to the district of Lusaka from which all informants; students, teachers, and other officials in the Ministry were sampled for data collection purpose.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1. Communicative competence- Ability by the language learner to use language in an intelligible manner both receptively and productively.
2. Continuous Professional Development- Programmes designed by the Ministry of Education intended to provide a platform for teachers to share and discuss developments and issues arising in their profession.
3. Evaluation- A test aimed at assessing the success of a learning programme at a given point in the process, and the difficulties faced by the learner in order to plan for remedial tasks.
4. Examination- A test or a set of tests in a subject which may be compulsory or optional, conducted by an institution or body at the end of an education cycle in order to confer a title, certificate, or select a candidate against a given average into a higher level of an education system.
5. Foreign Language- A language that is not spoken in the country but is taught in schools for specific function.
6. Language Testing- A practice in which an instrument is used to measure the language acquisition level achieved by the learner.
7. Mother Tongue- (L1) A Language which a child first acquires.
8. Official Language- A language used for the running of administration, education and other government businesses.
9. Second Language- (L2) A language that an individual acquires after his/her first language, usually learnt in formal school.

Summary

Chapter one tried to define Language “assessment”, “testing” and “evaluation” in all contexts of language education. This was in view of placing Grade 12 French examinations in their right context so that the reader may appreciate factors that generated the need for the study at hand.

French as a foreign language in Zambian schools has faced a number of challenges that have affected pupils’ performance in grade 12 examinations. This was discussed from the historical context of French language education in Zambia, its place in the national life and the evidence of pupils’ poor performance as shown by the E.C.Z results statistics in 2003, 2006 and 2007 indicating a steady decrease in performance. This indication coupled with lack of any previous study to determine the factors contributing to this situation is what lead to the need to conduct this study.

The next chapter evaluates the significance of this study in relation to the related literature from studies that were done responding to similar challenges arising in second/foreign language testing worldwide, particularly in French as a foreign language.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature reviewed about French language in the context of foreign language testing; first, from a global perspective, Africa and Zambia. Particular attention is given to challenges faced in testing and assessing skills in foreign languages.

2.0 Foreign Language Testing and Evaluation

The authority and influence of teachers is never more crucial than when they are evaluating the performance of their students. Teachers and educators are required to carry out testing which has to answer a multitude of social needs.

Language teachers try to measure language proficiency or behaviour in order to make educational or personal decisions for individuals, schools, or other social and professional institutions. In order to perform this practical task of precise measurement, it is necessary to develop a scientific foundation on which to base the test, as all language tests imply a theoretical attitude about the nature of language and its measurement (Valerie, 1981).

A test evaluates the candidate as a 'student' of the language. A proficiency evaluation evaluates the candidate as a 'speaker' of the language. (That is, how a particular candidate compares to a native speaker of the target language). Thus, it is important to make a technical distinction between tests and evaluations.

In implementing evaluation, the overall value to be gained for the institution, including the individual learner's productivity and success, must be considered paramount. The mild intimidation some people feel in face of any kind of evaluation is minimal compared to the increased sense of worth and self-esteem most gained from the success of fulfilling the evaluation or getting the help and improvement in communication stemming from it (Jenkins,1989a).

The problem of what it means to know a language is one of the central issues in Applied Linguistics at present. The acquisition of a second or foreign language (L2) is probably more complex to evaluate than first language (L1) acquisition. For example, it cannot be asserted with certainty as whether 'Bilingualism' also implies 'Biculturalism'. This would depend on the needs and objectives of each group of students.

According to Spolsky (1975), the layman's idea of learning a language is learning words, but his idea of what it means to know a language is knowing how to perform various functions in that language, such as knowing how to read a news paper, understanding a news broadcast, etc. The question would be again to know how much of a language is needed by a person to carry out a specific function. For instance, in order to find out whether a person knows enough English to understand a lecture in any given subject, he can be made to listen to such a lecture and then be asked some questions about it.

Another approach is to try to characterize the knowledge of the language he requires to function in this way or another in linguistic terms. Tests which concentrate on specific structural and lexical items are known as 'Discrete-Point Tests'. 'Integrative Tests' on the other hand measure general language ability (Valerie, 1981b).

Underlying any functional use of language, there are a number of secrete elements which make an integrated system. In order to function in a language it is necessary to control all aspects of it and these include syntax, phonology, morphology and semantics.

The goals of the Foreign Language Program as perceived by Stansfield (1996) are to develop proficiency in the language at a gradual sequential pace throughout the four levels while also fostering an interest and appreciation of the language and culture. He further states that the learning outcomes of all levels are directly aligned with the Ohio Academic Content Standards for Foreign Language which includes the following:

· *Communicate in the language*

Students initiate and sustain spoken and written language in a variety of practical settings using listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as well as knowledge of the target culture.

· *Understand other cultures*

Students demonstrate an understanding of traditions, customs, beliefs, and cultural contributions and how these elements relate to language.

· *Connect with other disciplines and acquire information*

Students connect information about the language and cultures they are learning with concepts studied in other subject areas.

· *Develop insight into their language and culture*

Through study of language and culture, students recognize, compare, and contrast language concepts as well as cultural perspectives, practices, and products.

· *Participate in the global community*

Students use the foreign language to communicate with speakers of that language, both at home and around the world, to improve their own communication skills and to enhance their view of themselves as citizens of the world ([www://http.foreignlanguage.htm](http://www.foreignlanguage.htm)).

Since it is not possible for a candidate to know everything that might be asked in an examination, marking will show where the candidate falls in the range of total possible marks in an overall performance. Such an examination necessarily shows not only what the candidate knows, but also what the candidate does not know.

A candidate may have learned more or gained less, but a particular school or department sets a minimum qualification for its own purposes. Professional qualifying examinations fall into this category. The proficiency evaluation in language considers the total accumulated skills compared to the total range possible in the language.

A proficiency evaluation is different from a test over specific material studied in a course. The instruments should be designed to probe a person's full range of skills in reference to the total range possible. In contrasting a “test” and a “proficiency evaluation”, an analogy may be drawn from the American academic system in a particular university course where a student is tested over the specific material taught in the course in order to assess the amount of skill and the degree of its mastery (<http://www.aphilosophyoflanguageproficiencyevaluation.htm>).

2.1 Difficulties in Foreign Language Testing

The proficiency levels were originally developed by the Foreign Service Institute of the United States Department of State. The FSI is the general standard for language evaluation. The evaluation format based on the FSI definitions has been used by the Peace Corps in its training programs around the world. A major deficiency found with the FSI/Peace Corps approach to evaluation is that only technical language features were considered in evaluation of proficiency levels. The only factors considered were grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation and comprehension. This overlooks the cultural and social aspects of communication ([www://htp.foreignlanguage.htm](http://www.foreignlanguage.htm)).

The two instruments used are "Evaluation of Communication Skills, Oral Skills" and the "Proficiency Level Checklist." Points are given only on the items on the "Evaluation" sheet. Topics covered in the conversation are marked "yes" or "no" on the checklist, with appropriate comments. Points for Topical Skills and cultural knowledge are given on the "Evaluation" scoring sheet, under Social Skills and Cultural Awareness, which are important aspects of language.

The evaluators use the appropriate evaluation instrument to give a score for the performance of the candidate. The technical points are well-known as Oral Comprehension, Grammar Correctness, Adequacy of Vocabulary, Correctness of Pronunciation, and Fluency. Top scores would therefore represent skills of a native or bilingual speaker of the target language.

Since the basic goal is communication, other values in addition to technical skills should be considered. This should be considered on the basis that some people can get their idea across and effectively communicate, even with obvious deficiencies in technical points, such as grammar or pronunciation. Thus this ability should be evaluated in the category of “Understandability”.

Candidates should be judged in terms of how creative and how flexible they are with the language, how great a variety of forms and structures they can use and how much they know to say the same thing in subtly different ways.

If the person can make only one or two set statements about a certain topic, it is an indication of a skill that still requires training. In the same manner, it is important for the conversation to cover many angles of each important question, in order to evaluate creativity. Observations should be made in field situations, in role- play or in discussion of certain situations, about the person's approaches, interaction, and awareness of social environments. In additions to the above mentioned areas one must make observation of body language, use of idioms, intonations, and many other skills that show individual's mastery or control of the language in question. .

Under Cultural Awareness, candidate's insights on the foreign culture should be observed in the way they speak about experiences, the people, history, wedding or burial customs and proverbs, as well as attitudes towards traditional concepts or national attitudes. This does not necessarily imply agreement or acceptance, but sympathetic awareness, and even of areas of conflict between the foreign culture and the candidate's home culture and heritage.

For instance, Jenkins (1989b) observes that evaluators find it difficult to really judge foreigners learning Swahili against native speakers. He further states that they continue to evaluate candidates as students, on the basis of what would be expected of most learners, not completely on the way a Swahili speaker actually speaks his own language. It is easy to think, "She is doing very well for a foreigner." While this is good to know, the ultimate goal is to do very well in comparison to the Swahili speakers. This is also affected by cultural factors.

“A second alternative is to evaluate learners over a period of time while teaching or assisting them in various learning activities or simply observing them in various situations. The evaluator would spend some time in the learner's home, accompanying the learner on trips to the market, business offices, churches, schools and so on. The time for this might vary. At the end of the period of time, the evaluator would fill out the evaluation instruments. Such an evaluation should be conducted by two or more evaluators. The evaluation might be given in conjunction with some formal learning sessions or drills to enhance best outcomes” suggests Jenkins (1989b).

On the issue of setting tests for foreign language learners, Jenkins (1989b) argues that the panel should consist of national speakers of the language, preferably native speakers. He gives again an example from the multilingual setting of East Africa, where native speakers of Swahili are in a decided minority, though Swahili is the primary language for many educated nationals, who would serve adequately as evaluators of a foreigner's Swahili.

However, he admits that there is some difference of opinion among "experts" on whether foreigners should be involved in that some candidates have felt it adds an element of support to

have a fellow learner participate because some feel intimidated, and this could have adverse effect.

The conceptual model of language acquisition proposed by Carroll (1962) is that the learning process applies with particular force to the learning of foreign language in five elements that may include among others, the learner's aptitude, perseverance, intelligence, the quality of instruction and the opportunity for learning usually provided by the policy in use.

{Johnson & Newport (1989), Long (1990)} explain that the acquisition of second and foreign language cannot however be overemphasized. For instance, native like attainment by late learners of a second language is deemed impossible by proponents of the critical period hypothesis as it applies to second language acquisition.

The putative biological factors at play are thought to exert immutable constraining effects on the acquisition of L2 phonology. A post-pubertal L2 learner will inevitably have a foreign accent and this deficit is attributed to neurobiological factors, particularly difficulties in neuromuscular coordination.

For example, Kaoma C (1994), studied the difficulties encountered by Zambian learners of French whose mother tongue was Bemba and discovered that they found it difficult to master French sounds due to differences in French and Bemba phonological systems; which according to Lado (1968) relate to interference between mother tongue (L1) and second language (L2) whose detection is facilitated by contrastive analysis.

Listening in a second or foreign language is also a very demanding task because it involves both correctly interpreting incoming speech and responding appropriately to the speaker.

James Milton of Swansen University presented a paper in 2002, in which he considered the position that the British GCSE and A-Level are given in the Common European Framework (CEFR). The vocabulary sizes of learners taking French examinations are considered in relation to the vocabulary information and word list sizes included in the CEFR documentation. The vocabulary knowledge of learners appears small, very small compared to learners of other languages at the same levels. Learners in Britain appear to lack the vocabulary knowledge necessary to carry out the skills indicated for the levels they are expected to attain.

The transition from year 11 of GCSE entails a steep increased difficulty arising partly from exposure to large amount of new and complex vocabulary as students move from a basic transactional and survival-based syllabus to more extended and abstract texts and topics.

Milton's (2006) research studied vocabulary development under normal class room conditions in England, which presumably involve a combination of explicit and incidental vocabulary learning. The former is defined as the "focused study of words", and the latter as "learning through exposure when one's attention is focused on the use of language, rather the learning itself" (e.g through reading or listening). That both explicit and implicit modes play some role in vocabulary acquisition is generally acknowledged (Schmitt, 2000: 116).

This situation when viewed from a Zambian experience, one would observe that pupils are deprived of learning through exposure since the immediate environment of Zambian learners does not enhance acquisition of vocabulary for it is unlikely to meet anybody speaking French on Zambian streets.

In 1971, another study conducted by David Annabelle investigated factors associated with the learning of French as a foreign language. Tests were developed to assess performance in reading,

listening, speaking and writing. Two types of writing test were used. The first could be reliably scored, being of an objective or quasi-objective nature. The second involved directed composition. The target population was 14-year-olds and students in the final grade of the secondary school. The participating education systems were: Chile, England, Netherland, New Zealand, Romania, Scotland, Sweden and United States.

The following were the key findings:

.General proficiency in learning French was strongly related to performance on a word knowledge test in the student's mother tongue, which was used as a measure of verbal ability.

.The student's aspiration to understand spoken French contributed more to listening achievement than to reading achievement. Aspiration to learn to read French contributed more to reading scores.

.In all of four fields of performance (reading, listening, speaking, writing) there was a strong linear relationship between country mean score and the average number of years the students had studied French.

.Time spent on homework had an influence on reading scores, but much less effect on listening scores, which were only indirectly influenced by amount of homework. Class room activities were much more important for listening. Students achieved higher score when French was used for substantial part of the time in the classroom, and when the use of the mother tongue was reduced but not eliminated.

.Neither the amount of University training nor the amount of travel or residence in a French speaking country by the teacher led to any differences in students' French achievement.

From this scenario, the Zambian experience just like the British, might be complicated by factors that have to do with the environment of the learners, class room practices as well as policy direction to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. However, room must be left for new experiences brought out by the uniqueness of every factor under investigation in this study.

2.2 French Language Testing in Zambia

Grade Twelve French examinations in Zambia have always been one difficult area to satisfy in as far as pupils' performance is concerned. In a study aimed at analysing Grade Nine and Twelve French examinations in terms of their validity and objectivity, Manchishi (1977) observed among other things that teachers of French were not sufficiently trained in the area of French language evaluation. Besides high levels of subjectivity especially in oral tests which were usually poorly constructed; written tests were also dominated by multiple choice questions and the trends seemed to have remained the same throughout the years.

Apparently there seems to be no Continuous Professional Development programmes which would enable teachers to discuss among themselves new teaching techniques and difficulties faced in French language testing. This is coupled with lack of clear objectives for the teaching of French language in the Zambian school system (Manchishi, 1977:102).

However, in order to devise a proper testing strategy, there is need to clearly define goals and objectives of French in education system which should be linked to its testing.

As a matter of fact, it may not be sufficient to be content with the existence of policy statement such as French being one of the foreign languages to be taught in Zambia yet whose implementation cares little about the difficulties encountered on ground including teacher training, teaching materials and establishing continuous professional development programmes in which among others, concerns about examinations can be tabled (MOE, 2008).

In Zambia, there is an acknowledged difficulty in demonstrating that the standard of school examinations remains constant over the years. It is also a source of debate every time examinations results come out. There is some evidence that foreign language examinations, and French in particular, have had declining results since 1980's, but empirical measures to demonstrate this objectively are rare.

It is often argued that the teaching of foreign language should be based on methodologies that use local resource materials as much as possible, so that students are not seen as operating from an environment that is far removed from theirs and brought into the one about which they have no knowledge.

The understanding behind this view is that foreign language programmes should be adapted to the customs, needs of society and their national economy. Thus, even examination content should be based on situations that depict the environment in which students live if we want them to produce better results.

On the other hand however, as observed by Aboubaker (2009), critiques of this approach argue that programmes which fail to go beyond national customs and localized methods of teaching cannot claim to offer standard competences but only put students at a disadvantage on the international market (<http://www.edufle.net>).

In any case, every learning programme must be accompanied by an evaluation mechanism. The concept of evaluation of a learning programme has over the years been subjected to analysis in terms of both its function and its relevance to that which it is supposed to measure. Nonetheless, evaluation is and will remain the sole means of determining the success of the teaching and learning programmes as well as areas that need improvement.

A question may be raised as to whether the placement of Zambia's French examinations in the international context is appropriate. This matter must be handled with the care that it requires because it may reinforce the stereotype that the Zambian pupils are simply bad at foreign languages particularly French.

The issue should be to see to it that what the system expects these learners to do they are able to do it; rather than setting standards against other systems which might bring the Zambian into disrepute. The system should not be seen as failing to give the learners credit for the standards they have achieved and only discredit them for not achieving the anticipated standards.

Summary

This chapter has reinstated the place of language testing as a basis of decisions that need to be taken in language education programme be at personal or at institutional level. It has also discussed the conflicting roles of judging the learners' progress as students and as speakers of a foreign language against native speakers; and the amount of time required to make correct judgement over learners' progress which is not available to the judge.

In Zambia, concerns were raised over insufficient training of teachers in language evaluation, rigidity of examinations for a long time, lack of Continuous Professional Development programmes as well as lack of clear objectives for teaching French.

The following chapter explains the methodology that was used to carry out this study and gives the details on the reason for the choice of a particular approach or technique.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology that was used to collect the desired data; in particular, the research design, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, research instruments, data collection procedure and analysis.

3.0 Research design

This research was a survey intended to investigate factors that contribute to poor Grade Twelve French examination results. Gay (1997) defines a survey as an “attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables.” Views of pupils and teachers’ experiences on French examinations were collected from former pupils who sat for Grade 12 French examinations and teachers of French from different schools offering French in Lusaka urban district.

The purpose of using this design was to find out what teachers and the former pupils thought were the causes of poor performance in Grade 12 French examinations by pupils based on their own experience. In addition, it was intended to allow former pupils and teachers say which specific examinations components were more difficult to them.

3.1 Target population

The target population consisted of all the school leavers who sat for Grade 12 Twelve French examination currently enrolled at the University of Zambia and all the teachers of French in Lusaka urban district.

A French Examinations Specialist from the Examinations Council of Zambia and a French Curriculum Specialist from the Curriculum Development Centre were also targeted. These specialists were targeted in addition to pupils and teachers because of their involvement in the running of examinations and learning programmes respectively.

3.2 Sample size

78 school leavers (13 males and 65 females) were selected using Snowball sampling technique as mentioned earlier because these were hard to find samples given that it would not have been easy to find former pupils who had done French and had written Grade 12 French examinations using other techniques. On the other hand, 22 teachers of French (16 males and 6 females) were sampled from both public and private schools offering French in Lusaka Urban district. Furthermore, 1 Examinations Specialist was interviewed.

Efforts to interview the French Curriculum Specialist proved futile as this post was vacant following the retirement of the previous specialist. The Ministry had not yet appointed another specialist.

3.3 Sampling technique

Snowball sampling was used to find school leavers who had done French at secondary school and had written Grade Twelve French examinations. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate. As suggested by Johnson B. and Christensen L (2004), snowball sampling is used if the sample for the study is very rare or limited to a very small subgroup of the population like it is the case with students enrolled at the University of Zambia and have written Grade 12 French examinations. After observing the initial respondent, the researcher used Exponential Non-

Discriminative snowball sampling by asking for assistance from the respondent to help identify people with similar traits or interests until a sufficient number of respondents was obtained.

Therefore, each participant that volunteered to be in research was asked to identify one or more additional people who satisfied conditions of having done French and written it at Grade Twelve level; and were willing to participate in the study.

Teachers were sampled using simple random sampling technique. According to Valerie J.E and John H. McColl's (2005), Simple random sampling is a basic sampling technique by which a sample is selected for study from a larger group where each individual is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. The researcher visited schools offering French around Lusaka urban district distributing questionnaires to all teachers of French available in those institutions.

French examinations and curriculum specialists were purposively sampled because at each institution (E.C.Z and C.D.C) there is only one specialist in charge of examinations and curriculum respectively.

3.4 Research instruments

The desired data was collected by use of questionnaires that were in two types. One questionnaire was designed for school leavers while the other one was designed for teachers of French. The researcher also conducted interview with an Examinations Specialist from the Examinations Council of Zambia (Reference can be made to appendices for questionnaires and interview guides).

No interview was conducted with the French Curriculum specialist as mentioned earlier because the office was vacant.

3.5 Data collection

Questionnaires: Questionnaires were administered by the researcher himself for a period of one month mainly because the participants were at the University campus. The researcher left questionnaires for the respondents to fill in at their own time and then he went back later to collect the already filled in questionnaires. As mentioned earlier, a questionnaire was given to a student who did French and wrote Grade 12 French examination and then the same student was asked if he/she knew anyone else with similar experience in order for him/her to be given also a questionnaire. At the same time the researcher visited schools within Lusaka urban district leaving questionnaires for the teachers of French to fill in and then be collected later.

Interview: The researcher conducted a qualitative, structured interview with the French examinations specialist. As a research tool, the researcher prepared questions in advance (see interview guide in appendices) to guide and keep the study in focus. The researcher recorded all the responses in script for future analysis. Where the explanations were not clear, the researcher asked additional questions for clarifications.

3.6 Data analysis

Data collected in the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics were applied to the processed data by showing variable frequency distributions from students' responses and then from the teachers' responses.

Responses were grouped in themes according to the questions of the study that were to investigate the factors contributing to poor Grade 12 French examinations and to find out specific examination components that caused more difficulties to pupils. These themes were used as the variables whose frequency distribution showed which ones were more recurring than others thereby providing answers to

what factors contribute to the poor performance and which specific components caused difficulties to pupils respectively.

Qualitative data was analysed by bringing out emerging themes that were categorized and interpreted.

Comparisons were then done by observation between teachers' and pupils' responses in order to establish differences and similarities between teachers' and pupils' experiences about French examinations.

Summary

In this chapter, the nature of the study which necessitated the use of a survey as the best approach to determine factors contributing to pupils' poor performance in Grade 12 French examinations was explained. Reasons for the approach were that it consisted in collecting views from the target population made up of teachers and former pupils of French in Lusaka urban district; which is a typical characteristic of all qualitative research designs.

Further details were given on the size and sampling procedure, the instrument design, the collection of data and its analysis mode. The next chapter therefore presents the findings of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the research in three parts. The first part covers the data obtained from students who studied and wrote Grade 12 French examinations. 13 male and 65 female students responded to the questions pertaining to various aspects of French examinations in Zambian schools most importantly, what they think were the factors contributing to pupils' poor performance and what can be done to improve on the situation. The second part presents the data obtained from the teachers of French comprising of 16 males and 6 females. Similarly, Teachers responded to the questions intended to bring out their professional opinion on the state of Grade 12 French examinations and pupils' performance. The third and final part presents opinions from the Examination Specialist on how Grade 12 French examinations are run, challenges and difficulties faced by both teachers and students.

Findings from former pupils of French

Table 1- Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	12	15.4
Female	66	84.6
Total	78	100.0

Table 2- Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
18	2	2.6
19	12	15.4
20	18	23.1
21	15	19.2
22	11	14.1
23	9	11.5
24	2	2.6
25	1	1.3
26	1	1.3
27	2	2.6
35	1	1.3
42	1	1.3
45	1	1.3
47	1	1.3
Total	77	98.7
No response	1	1.3
	78	100.0

Table 1 and 2 shows the gender and age of respondents respectively. As reflected in the tables, 12 male students and 66 female students volunteered to participate in the study. These were students enrolled in different programmes of study at the University of Zambia at the time the research was being conducted. The minimum age was 18 years while the maximum age was 47 years. It must be mentioned that this wide difference between the maximum age and the minimum age is owed to the fact that some of the students are enrolled at the University as *in-service* students meaning that they had been working for a time period before they undertook University studies. However, for the purpose of the research, only those who had done French at secondary school and had written Grade 12 French examination were selected to participate in the study.

It is also important to mention as it can be seen from Table 2, that high frequencies in age were found in 18 to 23years age bracket with 20 years as the highest frequency representing 23.1% of respondents.

Table 3- Level at which learning French started

Level	Frequency	Percent
Preschool	1	1.3
Primary	20	25.6
Secondary	57	73.1
Total	78	100.0

As observed from Table 3, most students, that is to say 73.1% of the respondents started learning French at Secondary school level. It is important to understand here that according to the new Government policy the first two years of secondary education have been added to basic Education while the three last years of secondary education have been incorporated into what is known as High School with the exception of missionary schools which have maintained 5 years of secondary education from Grade 8 to Grade 12. Therefore, this implies that some students might have done French from grade 8 all the way through grade 12 especially those in missionary schools while others simply came in contact with French language at High school level(from Grade 10 to Grade 12).

Table 4- Sources of Motivation to Learn French

Source of Motivation	Frequency	Percent
Parents	8	10.03
Teachers	8	10.0
Media	9	11.3
Imposed by school	55	68.8
Total responses	80	100.0

The table above indicates that 55 responses representing 70.5% of cases were in agreement that French was imposed on them in schools they attended. However, in some cases, Some other influences compelled the student to persevere in his/her learning of French, explaining the existence of 70.5% cases instead of 68.8% of the total number of respondents.

Table 5- Grade obtained in G12 French final examination

Grade Obtained	Frequency	Percent
1	29	37.2
2	13	16.7
3	12	15.4
4	4	5.1
5	6	7.7
6	4	5.1
7	5	6.4
8	4	5.1
9	1	1.3
Total	78	100.0

It was found out that despite the level of difficulty in learning and writing French examinations expressed by students, more students had better results as observed in the table above. 37.2% of respondents indicated that they got “Distinction (1)”, 16.7% got “Distinction (2)” while 15.4% got “Merit (3)” all together representing 69.2% of respondents. Reasons can be speculated around the fact that the sample was made up of University students whose selection must have been based on good results from secondary school.

Table 6– Easiest Area of Examination

Area of Examination	Frequency	Percent
Reading Passage	35	42.7
Listening Comprehension	13	15.9
Composition and Structure	20	24.4
Reading Comprehension	14	17.1
Total responses	82	100.0

Table 7– Most difficult Area of Examination

Most Difficult Area of Examination	Frequency	Percent
Reading Passage	4	4.9
Listening Comprehension	27	32.9
Composition and Structure	36	43.9
Reading Comprehension	15	18.3
Total responses	82	100.0

Table 6 and 7 show the easiest and most difficult areas of examination respectively. Consistency was exhibited in what students perceived to be the easiest and most difficult components of examination. Reading passage scored highest when asked which component was easiest while Composition and Structure scored highest when asked which component was the most difficult.

Even if there could be discrepancies in extremes of individual tables, there was no wide difference in frequencies of direct opposites to highest frequencies when comparing the two tables.

For instance Table 6 suggests that Reading Passage was the easiest component with the highest frequency (42.7% of cases) and Listening Comprehension the most difficult since it has the lowest frequency (15.9% of cases). On the other hand, Table 7 indicates that Composition Structure was the most difficult as proved by the highest frequency (43.9% of cases) while Reading Passage was the easiest since it had the lowest frequency (4.9% of cases). Close observation reveals that Composition and Structure (24.4% of cases) in Table 6 is closer to Listening Comprehension (the most difficult with 15.9% of cases according to Table 6) than it is to Reading Passage (42.7% of cases). Therefore, one would say that there is no difference in the value of information presented in both tables.

Table 8- Factors contributing to Poor Performance

Cause of poor performance	Frequency	Percent
Lack of materials	13	9.6
Lack of support by government	2	1.5
Lack of support by school	2	1.5
Lack of rich linguistic environment	14	10.3
Poor classroom methodology	25	18.4
Late start	16	11.8
Few hours of contact	2	1.5
School imposes French	7	5.1
Lack of enough teachers	5	3.7
Lack of seriousness by pupils	22	16.2
Teachers' incompetence	6	4.4
Syllabus is difficult	2	1.5
Pupils are discouraged by friends	2	1.5
Examinations are difficult	3	2.2
Pupils find no future use of French	7	5.1
Lack of teachers' motivation	8	5.9
Total responses	136	100.0

Poor classroom methodology was frequently mentioned (32.1% of cases) by students as the main factor contributing to pupils' poor performance in examinations. They felt they were not well taught hence, not well prepared in view of the task ahead of them. However, they also admitted

(in 28.2% of cases) that their own lack of seriousness was highly responsible for their poor performance. In any case, the level at which pupils start learning French, the environment in which they learn and lack of teaching and learning materials were other sources of great concern in as far as poor performance was concerned.

Table 9- Suggestions on Improving Performance in French examinations

Suggestions	Frequency	Percent
Strengthen policy	12	9.8
Provide enough learning materials	15	12.3
Expose pupils to rich linguistic environment	17	13.9
Improve teaching methodology	25	20.5
Start learning French early	18	14.8
Change the syllabus	4	3.3
Increase hours of contact	3	2.5
French shouldn't be imposed in school	7	5.7
Increase the number of teachers	4	3.3
Make French compulsory in school	2	1.6
Pupils should work hard	4	3.3
Train teachers who have done French	3	2.5
Employ qualified teachers	4	3.3
Change examination style	4	3.3
Total responses	122	100.0

In view of the efforts to improve pupils' performance, students consistently indicated that teachers should improve their classroom methodologies to benefit the learners in terms of required knowledge for better performance in examinations. They also expressed the need for concerned stakeholders to put in place measures that compel those who intend to study French in the school curriculum to start it at the earliest stage of their education (primary school level at least). Moreover, the need for a rich linguistic environment, enough teaching and learning materials as well as the enactment of a strong policy on French language education by the Ministry of Education should be campaigned for if better examinations results are to be achieved.

Findings from the Teachers

Table 10- Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	16	72.7
Female	6	27.3
Total	22	100.0

Table 11- Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
24	1	4.5
26	1	4.5
29	2	9.1
33	1	4.5
36	1	4.5
37	1	4.5
38	1	4.5
39	1	4.5
40	2	9.1
45	1	4.5
46	1	4.5
47	1	4.5
48	3	13.6
Total	17	77.3
No response	5	22.7
	22	100.0

As indicated in the tables above, 16 male teachers and 6 female teachers participated in the research. These were ranging in the ages of 24 years to 48 years. 5 of the 22 teachers did not indicate their age. This age distribution clearly indicates that the sample was made of teachers who recently graduated from their training institutions and had little or no teaching experience at all; as well as those who have been in the service long enough to equip themselves with vast experience.

Table 12- Institution of Training

Institution of Training	Frequency	Percent
College	18	64.3
University	10	35.7
Total responses	28	100.0

Table 13- Qualification Obtained

Qualification Obtained	Frequency	Percent
Diploma	18	64.3
Degree	10	35.7
Total responses	28	100.0

Table 12 and 13 indicate institutions of teacher training and obtained qualifications respectively. Since 22 teachers participated in the research, 28 responses include teachers who went to both college and University. Therefore, 18 teachers only went to college. Among 10 who went to the University, 4 were direct entries from secondary school while 6 had also been to College.

Similarly, their qualifications follow the same pattern in the sense that some of the teachers were in possession of both a University Degree and a Diploma from a College of Education.

Table 14- Length of Service

Length of Service	Frequency	Percent
1 to 5 years	7	31.8
6 to 10 years	4	18.2
11 to 15 years	6	27.3
16 to 20 years	3	13.6
21 years and above	2	9.1
Total responses	22	100.0

Most teachers had served between 1 and 5 years and 11 and 15 years respectively. Going by the trend indicated in Table 14 above, one observes that these teachers were inclined to abandon teaching French as soon as they completed 15 years of service.

Table 15- Grade Taught

Grade Taught	Frequency	Percent
Grade 8	12	16.2
Grade 9	12	16.2
Grade 10	19	25.7
Grade 11	16	21.6
Grade 12	15	20.3
Total responses	74	100.0

From the table above, most teachers were found teaching Grade 10, 11 and 12 respectively. This trend is however related to the establishment of High Schools as earlier mentioned. Therefore, since French is

offered at secondary school level in most public schools and that secondary schools had been changed into High Schools, a big number of teachers of French is found in High Schools.

Table 16- Type of School

Type of School	Frequency	Percent
Government	14	53.8
Missionary	2	7.7
Private	10	38.5
Total responses	26	100.0

Apart from Missionary schools which do not allow their teachers to seek part-time work in other institutions, in most cases teachers serving in private schools get their teachers of French from public schools on part-time basis. Therefore, the majority of these teachers are found in Government schools among whom a considerable number would be employed by private schools on part-time basis to trade in this rare skill of teaching French which is increasingly becoming popular for the private enterprise.

Table 17- Tests Administered in a Term

Number of Times	Frequency	Percent
Once per Term	1	4.5
Twice per Term	2	9.1
More than Twice per Term	19	86.4
Total	22	100.0

Most teachers admitted giving class tests more than twice per term implying that students' progress rate was monitored from time to time.

Table 18- Involvement in Setting Grade 12 French Examinations

Involved	Frequency	Percent
yes	2	9.1
no	20	90.9
Total	22	100.0

Table 19- Involvement in Marking Grade 12 French Examination

Involved	Frequency	Percent
yes	2	9.1
no	20	90.9
Total	22	100.0

Only 2 among 22 teachers were found to be involved in setting and marking Grade 12 French examinations as shown in Table 18 and 19 respectively. It is observed therefore, that most teachers teach that which they do not participate in examining; instead, examinations are set by independent people. This could lead to lack of relationship between examination content and that which was taught in class, thus causing pupils' poor performance.

Table 20-Difficult Examination Components

Poorly Scored Components	Frequency	Percent
Reading Passage	3	10.0
Listening Comprehension	4	13.3
Composition and Structure	18	60.0
Reading Comprehension	5	16.7
Total responses	30	100.0

Table 21- Easiest Examination Components

Highest Scored	Frequency	Percent
Reading Passage	6	22.2
Listening Comprehension	10	37.0
Composition and Structure	2	7.4
Reading Comprehension	9	33.3
Total responses	27	100.0

Again, as observed from the students' opinion, teachers also expressed that Composition and Structure is by far the most difficult component of Grade 12 French examination (60% of cases) while Reading Passage happens to be the easiest as indicated in Table 20. Table 21 however reverses the order exhibited in table 20 by suggesting that Listening Comprehension is the highest scored component (37% of cases) followed by Reading Comprehension with 33.3% of cases.

Table 22- School Performance in Past Three Years

School Performance	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	3	13.0
Good	13	56.5
Fair	6	26.1
Poor	1	4.3
Total responses	23	100.0

The majority of teachers represented by 59.1% of cases expressed that their school performance in Grade 12 French examinations of the past three years had been good contrary to what was indicated by the E.C.Z's statistics on French examination results. However, since the Examinations Council of Zambia present national statistics, there could be room to believe that in the individual schools visited for the purpose of the research pupils were doing fine compared to the national situation.

Table 23- Factors contributing to Poor Performance

Factors	Frequency	Percent
Lack of rich linguistic environment	6	11.1
Lack of pupils' interest	9	16.7
Examinations are difficult	4	7.4
Lack of teaching and learning materials	5	9.3
Less hours of contact	4	7.4
Lack of teachers' motivation	3	5.6
Late start in learning French	7	13.0
Little time for examinations	3	5.6
Examinations present foreign materials	6	11.1
There's poor policy on French	3	5.6
Examinations are rigid	2	3.7
Lack of qualified teachers	2	3.7
Total responses	54	100.0

Among many factors contributing to pupils' poor performance in French, Lack of pupils' interest (16.7% of cases), Late start in learning French (13% of cases), Lack of rich linguistic environment (11.1% of cases) and examinations not based on local materials were cited by teachers as the major factors contributing to high failure rate. One teacher responding to the question on what they think are the causes of pupils' poor performance in French wrote this:

There is lack of continuity, E.C.Z want us to cover a 5 year programme in 2 years

and half. There is no French in Basic Schools, pupils come to grade 10 with nothing in French.

Table 24-Suggestions to Improve Performance in French examinations

Suggestion	Frequency	Percent
Change examination content	5	9.6
Teachers should be motivated	5	9.6
Pupils should be motivated	6	11.5
Examinations should be made easier	2	3.8
Hours of contact should be increased	5	9.6
Teaching and learning materials should be provided	6	11.5
The syllabus should be revised	3	5.8
The policy should be strengthened	3	5.8
Pupils should start learning French early	5	9.6
Expose pupils to rich linguistic environment	5	9.6
French should be made compulsory	2	3.8
Teachers should be going for refresher courses	1	1.9
Teachers should work hard	3	5.8
There should be dialogue between ECZ and CDC	1	1.9
Total responses	52	100.0

In most cases, teachers expressed that among other things pupils should be motivated (11.5% of cases), learning and teaching materials should be provided (11.5% of cases) if pupils' performance is to be improved. In addition, the need to change the examination content to suit the local needs, motivating teachers of French, starting the teaching of French early, exposing pupils to rich linguistic environment as well as increasing hours of contact are some of the credible means to achieve the best results in French. This is yet what another female teacher wrote about teacher-pupil contact time:

Institutions offering French should increase French periods in class to 6 per week on the time table if pupils are to learn as much as necessary for a good pass in the examinations.

Findings from Education Managers

From the interview held with the Examinations Specialist at the Examinations Council of Zambia (E.C.Z), a number of issues concerning French examinations were highlighted. As a matter of fact, she expressed that she was not happy with French examination results especially at Grade 12 level.

In principle, E.C.Z runs a programme to train setters of examinations. The team of these trainees is made up of practicing and retired teachers of French. It becomes permanent unless a member dies or drops out. The only duty of the E.C.Z is to coordinate activities and proofread examinations.

According to the Examinations Specialist, Paper 1 which includes Composition, Grammar, Structures and Vocabulary is often found to be difficult for the pupils:

Paper 1 is the most difficult. According to the reports I receive from the markers, pupils are not well prepared, they do not have sufficient writing skills in French, most likely because teachers do not teach enough Composition Writing. They also do not give pupils enough practice on Pronouns.

She however admitted that something needs to be done on the format of examinations:

Both Composition tasks in Paper 1 are unguided unlike in English examinations. Yet, French is a foreign language only met in the classroom. Pupils find problems in expressing themselves. Therefore, examinations should be modified.

There was also concern on Paper 3 comprising of Speaking and Reading (Oral) as she explained that most pupils perform poorly because they do not have enough time of contact with the language whether in class or outside the classroom.

The time allocated to particular examination components seems to be another huge challenge to pupils as she describes the state of examination content:

Reported Speech is another problem especially because they make it a whole section instead of giving only a few question on this aspect. They should also include one question on Re-writes for instance.

Nonetheless, the Examinations Specialist indicated that Close Test and Filling-in-Words are components which pupils do fairly well.

On the relationship between the Examinations Council and the Curriculum Development Centre, she disclosed that there was a good linkage between examinations and the syllabus and that as far as the examinations were concerned the syllabus was well covered.

She expressed concern on the pupils' attitude towards French explaining that candidates did not receive enough motivation in their learning of French and that Grade 10 were the worst affected because of mixing pupils from different backgrounds (those who have done French before and

those who have not) at High School level. She suggested that French at senior secondary level should only be offered to those with experience:

What should be emphasized is quality not quantity to ensure continuity.

She called for renewed partnership with Embassy of France on preparing and formatting examinations as it used to be the case some time back.

Summary

Findings from all the informants of the research were presented in the manner that they were obtained from either the questionnaires or the interview. All the responses to the 9 questions in the student questionnaire and 13 questions in the teacher's questionnaire were grouped and presented. The data obtained from the interview with the Examinations Specialist were also presented in transcription. This was in an attempt to provide a foundation for appropriate interpretation of the results and determine whether they give answers to the research questions.

Therefore, in the following chapter, the discussion of these findings will try to relate the results to the objectives of the study and try to answer the questions that were posed in the research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter four has presented the findings of the research. In this chapter, discussion of these findings will contribute to the understanding of the situation concerning Grade 12 French examinations in Zambian schools. This discussion will be based on the research objectives as an attempt to answer the key research questions. It will also seek to establish commonalities between views of different informant groups which in turn will serve as a means of validating the findings of the study.

5.1 Factors Contributing to Poor Results in Grade 12 French Examinations

The first objective of the study was to establish the factors that contributed to poor results in Grade 12 French examinations. As a matter of fact, all the informants expressed concern over pupils' poor results in Grade 12 French examinations owing to a multiplicity of factors some of which they had control over while others are a responsibility of Government through the Ministry of Education.

Both students and teachers indicated that the level at which French language education started in public schools was not favorable to enable High School graduate acquire fluency in French.

As it was observed from Table 3, 73.1% of students started learning French at secondary school level, the majority of them having in fact come in contact with it at Grade 10 following the introduction of High School by the Ministry of Education. Worse still, the mixing in Grade 10 of

pupils who have done French at junior secondary and those who have not, undoubtedly has negative effect on class room delivery by teachers because they would need to handle different classes of learners in one class room yet who are supposed to meet the same objectives at the end of the day.

In the same vein, it was suggested that even the examination format should take the above raised concern into consideration by making it friendly to the level of the candidates' knowledge.

This scenario is in agreement with the Swedish National Report on The 1970 and 1971 International Investigation on French as a Foreign Language whose results showed that the time spent studying French proved an important factor in explaining variance in different achievement tests while geographic proximity to a French speaking country did not prove to be a determining factor for good performance (Astrid, 1975 Report No 22).

Another example is given by Lopata (1963) as he explains that classes of third-grade children in New York and suburban New York schools were taught conversational French for 15 minutes daily. After a year, they were evaluated for French skills and their scores on the Stanford Achievement Test were compared with scores of children who had not received French instructions. All significant differences were in favour of the experimental group: The children were judged to have pronunciation and fluency in French superior to that of High School students with the same amount of instructions.

Therefore, pupils in Zambia fail in final examinations because they simply have not had enough time for instructions in the course of learning French as a foreign language. Actually, most teachers and students talked to expressed that apart from the short period of instructions in

French, class time tables allocate very few periods of French per week as compared to other subjects of importance in schools where French is offered.

It is also important to note the significance of imposing French on students where it is offered as expressed by 70.5% of students. There is no doubt that this has a negative effect on the perception and motivation with which pupils study French.

Birkmaier (1968) observes that Second Language learners' ethnocentric tendencies and his/her attitudes towards other group are believed to determine their success in learning the new language. Their motivation to learn is thought to be determined by their attitude and by their orientation towards learning a second language. He further explains that the orientation is "instrumental" in form, if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in one's occupation; and is "integrative" if the student is oriented to learn more about the other cultural community as if he desired to become a potential member of the group.

From the students' views, both types of motivation are not likely to drive learners of French in a situation where 70.5% of the learners were forced to study French against their will, and if constrained to study the language under these circumstances, examination results cannot be as good as it would be desired.

It is well established that in the literature on second language that comprehension of messages by the language learner is an essential condition on the acquisition process (Twessi, 1998).

Therefore, choosing a text on which to develop lesson objectives in a French class has never been easy for teachers of French in Zambian schools. Most of the teaching materials in

secondary schools present foreign materials. Examinations are not any better because pupils are required to comprehend texts depicting environments to which they have never been or exploit the language they have never been exposed to in their course of instructions like Section 1 of Paper 2 of Grade 12 French examination.

This is a typical example of the 'Kleenex Text' - a text selected from a Spanish newspaper about the life of a couple who works selling tissues at traffic lights in Spain. Much as this would be perceived to be an ideal authentic situation thought of raising interesting discussion, the text had 111 words of which 26 were not understood by over half of the students, 19 not understood by almost all the students while 10 out of the 19 were slang words. This hindered students' comprehension of the text and it became a total failure in the end. This is the case with Paper 2 on Reading Comprehension for Grade 12 French examination in Zambia.

Tweissi (1998) argues on the basis of these results that authentic texts are found not always to be the most appropriate especially for foreign students not linguistically mature enough to face them. It goes to show that there is something about the type and amount of modification that should be looked into and analysed carefully as suggested one teacher saying that the syllabus should be africanised.

Related to this situation was lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials as expressed by both teachers and students. Apart from "Echanges" that was produced in Zambia for the Zambian learner, since French was introduced in Zambian schools there have never been books in French that were produced in Zambia. Even those that were brought in either from France or West Africa have continued falling short with the situation worsening in the recent past. Currently, some schools that are still offering French have one copy of *Tempo* (the book used to

day in teaching French as a foreign language) for the teacher and the pupils. Teachers and pupils expressed that it becomes difficult to teach and learn French without sufficient books to read.

In addition, French being a foreign language in Zambia, material resources need to include modern technological equipments such as Audio and Video Cassette Player or Satellite broadcasting equipment, to allow pupils access native or near-native French accent as a model to good oral production and vehicle for consolidating aural skills. However, most schools do not have any of these resources. Even the few that have been donated with some equipment by the Cultural Services Department of The French Embassy can neither repair nor replace them when they get damaged or depreciated. Therefore, pupils lack the opportunity to enhance their skills in French language vital for a good performance in examinations.

With the restructuring of secondary school, it was intended that High Schools should be taught by University graduates who are thought of having the required competence to teach at that level (M.O.E, 2008). Even if the implementation of this policy seems to still be challenged by lack of adequate numbers of qualified personnel in key subjects such as Mathematics and Natural Sciences, French language is by far the worst affected by the harsh reality.

In Zambia, only Nkrumah College of Education and the University of Zambia train teachers of French. As if this is not enough, the enrollment rates cannot guarantee hope for the demand for qualified teachers ever being satisfied. From the interviews held with teachers, they expressed that the situation could be as bad as enrolling only 5 students per intake to train as teachers of French either at College or at the University during their course of training.

As a result, some institutions especially private schools have opted to recruit less or non-qualified teachers some of them coming from neighbouring countries such as Democratic

Republic of Congo (D.R.C) with neither teacher training background nor understanding of the local educational system. Even in public schools where recruitment is somehow strict, the majority of teachers as indicated in Table 12 and 13 have only been trained at college yet have been posted to High School which require higher competence than they have got.

This is what is described as *quality compromise* yet which examinations do not take into account. If pupils have been taught by less or non-qualified teachers, they are unlikely to acquire skills adequate enough to enable them perform better in the examination.

Again as observed in Table 18 and 19, high failure rate in French could be linked to the fact that most teachers do not participate in setting and marking examinations administered to their pupils. Even if the Examination Specialist explained in an interview that examination setters are selected from serving and retired teachers thereby conceived of having the experience required in setting valid and reliable tests for pupils, the fact that this team is maintained for a long time allows no flexibility and new ideas in formatting examination content which should be an important aspect of testing. Thus, the declining French examination results over the years could be explained to some degree by the rigidity that has continued to characterize and heavily weigh on examination formatting.

5.2 Easy and Difficult Examination Components

The second objective of the study was to find out which specific examination components cause more difficulties to pupils. All the informants, students, teachers and the Examinations Specialist indicated that Composition and Structure (Paper 1) was the most difficult component of Grade 12 French examinations while Reading Passage (Paper 3) in most cases appeared to be the

easiest and highest scored even if in Table 21 teachers put Listening Comprehension (Paper 5) and Reading Comprehension (Paper 2) ahead of Reading Passage as easiest components.

An explanation to this state of affairs was attempted by the Examinations Specialist as she felt that pupils do not have sufficient writing skills in French as a result of teachers not paying enough attention to Composition Writing in their class sessions.

Paper 1 comprises two sections notably Composition and Structure. The Composition section requires pupils to choose topics out of given options (narrative, descriptive, article or letter) and write one piece of composition on the model of English except that the length of each composition is reduced to 120 words instead of 350 words for English examination. The Structure section covers Direct and Reported speech, the use of Pronouns, Rewrites and Close tests.

However, all the tasks highlighted above require a considerable amount of vocabulary in the foreign language for the learner to successfully carry them out. According to the research conducted by Milton (2006) on French as a Foreign Language and The European Framework of Reference for Languages, it was discovered that in both English and French the most frequent 2000 words, and overwhelmingly the most frequent words in any language are learned earliest, say during elementary school age. He states further that this is what gives about 80% coverage of normal text.

The 80% coverage of normal text is a very interesting and important figure because it marks the level at which learners appear to progress from understanding almost nothing they hear or read, except in the most contrived of circumstances, to having passages of clarity and being able to grasp the gist of a conversation.

Unfortunately, pupils in Zambia do not have opportunity to be exposed to French language at elementary school level except in private schools. Therefore, High School French language course cannot equip pupils with the required vocabulary to perform well in composition writing and close tests during Grade 12 examinations.

However, an unexpected contradiction to the general feeling that pupils are doing poorly in French suggests changes in perspectives on how pupils' achievement in French should be analysed. It is interesting to note that despite all the challenges encountered in teaching and learning French, 69.2% of the sample got good results ranging from Distinction(1) to Merit(3). As mentioned earlier on, reasons could be speculated around the fact that the sample was made up of University students whose selection must have been based on good results from secondary school.

This is further reinforced by the fact that 56.5% and 26.1% of teachers of French indicated that their school performance in French was good and fair respectively. In any case, the target population comprised of schools in Lusaka urban district which is advantaged in access to qualified teachers and material resources. However this revelation does not discredit the validity of the statistics by the Examinations Council Of Zambia indicating high failure rate in French because they reflect results obtained by learners nationwide including those from many disadvantaged schools.

Summary

The discussion of findings was done in line with the research objectives. On the first objective, views from pupils showed among other factors that poor classroom methodology and late start in learning French were the root causes of poor performance. On the other hand, views from

teachers agreed with pupils' in that starting late to learn French was indeed a hindrance to good performance but also pointed out that even pupils should carry their own blame in that they do not apply themselves seriously to their studies in French.

On the second objective, all views pointed to the fact that Reading Passage seems to be the easiest component of examinations whereas Composition and Structure is the most difficult.

The following and last chapter gives a conclusion on the situation that has been presented in this research and gives recommendations as some of the ways through which it can be improved.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This study had been intended to investigate the factors contributing to poor results in Grade 12 French examinations. In the light of high failure rate in these examinations, the study also sought to find out specific examinations components that caused more difficulties to pupils and reasons why this was the case. This chapter summarises the general impression generated by the data obtained from all the informants and presents some recommendations.

Conclusion

In line with the first research objective, the factors affecting pupils' poor performance in Grade 12 French examinations were found to be based on a number of problems some of which are a responsibility of players directly involved in classroom activities such as teachers and pupils while others are a responsibility of Government through the Ministry of Education. The major findings were however that the time allocated for classroom learning and the level at which French language education started were not favorable for pupils to acquire enough fluency to perform better in examinations.

It was also indicated that the format of examinations did not match the level of the candidate's knowledge in the sense that it was centered on topics that depict a foreign environment and

culture to candidates. Furthermore, there were no sufficient and adequate didactic materials to facilitate the teaching and learning of French.

Lack of enough and qualified teachers of French was also seen to be another serious blow in producing competent candidates for examinations.

Regarding the second research objective, Composition and Structure was found to be the most difficult component of Grade 12 French examinations whereas Reading Passage was the easiest.

As a result of lack of proper motivation pupils were said not to be serious with their studies in French as if it mattered less whether they succeeded in it or not. Teachers were also said not to apply themselves so seriously on their teaching of French. In this regard, the popular view has been that teachers are using the wrong methodology to teach French as a foreign language to Zambian pupils.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations made:

To the Ministry of Education

1. French should be seen becoming a working tool for our high school graduates. Since the importance of French in Zambia is not a question of doubt, the government through the Ministry of Education should see to it that French teaching programmes in schools are given the support they deserve by strengthening the policy in a number of ways such as changing French from optional to compulsory subject as expressed by a number of respondents.

2. The Ministry of Education should allow schools to start offering French from primary school level so that the children can be acquainted with the language at an early age when their minds are still young to acquire foreign language with ease.
3. Teacher training programmes should be given more attention. Particularly, more students should be encouraged to train as teachers of French and preferably they should be candidates who already have had some previous experience with French, say from secondary school instead of starting it at the training institution like it is the case at the University of Zambia.
4. Ministry of Education should source or partner with institutions such as the French Embassy and the Alliance Française for the provision of teaching and learning materials because these might prove to be difficult to source given the geo-political situation that Zambia finds herself in.

To the school administrators

1. Pupils should be encouraged to study French by explaining to them how profitable it is in terms of employment prospects. This will in turn allure them to work hard and get better results in examinations.

To the Examinations Council of Zambia

The current examinations format should be revised because it has been observed that examinations have for a long time been inflexible. Even if it can be argued that being related to an education system they have an obligation to remain reasonably constant and change only when accompanied by the necessary changes in school teaching methods and necessary

curriculum, pupils should be given chance to learn and be examined on integrated foreign language culture with some elements from the local culture.

To the Curriculum Development Centre

. The Curriculum Specialists should review the syllabus in light of the restructuring of the school system particularly looking at the effects of the establishment of High School on the French language course for secondary school pupils.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Students

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

School of Education

Department of Language and Social Science Education

**PUPILS AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON POOR PERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12
FRENCH EXAMINATIONS.**

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Dear respondent, this survey is aimed at bringing to light factors that affect pupils' poor performance in French examinations. Your views on this subject are requested to help achieving this objective. The findings will help a great deal in improving examination results by pupils themselves and all those involved in teaching and preparing examinations.

Kindly TICK the correct answer or answer in the space provided as appropriate.

Q1. Sex

-Male

-Female

Q2. What is your age?

.....

Q3. At what level did you start learning French?

-Pre-school

-Primary

-Secondary

Q4. What motivated you to learn French?

-Parents

-Teachers

-Media

-Imposed by School

Q5. What grade did you get in your grade 12 French final examination?

.....

Q6. What area of examination did you find easiest?

-Reading Passage

-Listening Comprehension

-Composition and Structure

-Reading Comprehension

Q7. Which area of examination did you find most difficult?

-Reading Passage

-Listening Comprehension

-Composition and Structure

-Reading Comprehension

Q8. In your own opinion, what do you think are the causes of poor performance in grade 12 French examinations?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q9. What do you think should be done to improve pupils' performance in grade 12 French examinations?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Teachers

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBA

School of Education

Department of Language and Social Science Education

**PUPILS AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON POOR PERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12
FRENCH EXAMINATIONS**

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Dear respondent, this survey is aimed at bringing to light factors that affect pupils poor performance in French examinations. Your views on this subject are requested to help in achieving this objective. The findings will help a great deal in improving examination results by pupils themselves and all those involved in teaching and preparing examinations.

Kindly TICK the correct answer (some questions may accept more than one option) or answer in the space provided as appropriate.

Q1. Sex

-Male

-Female

Q2. Age

.....

Q3. Where did you train as a teacher of French?

-College

-University

Q4. What qualification did you obtain?

-Diploma

-Degree

Q5. How long have you teaching French?

-1 to 5 years

-6 to 10 years

-11 to 15 years

-16 to 20 years

-21 years and beyond

Q6. What grade do you teach?

-Grade 8

-Grade 9

-Grade 10

-Grade 11

-Grade 12

Q7. In what type of school do you teach?

-Government school

-Missionary grant-aided school

-Private school

Q8. How often do you administer class tests in French?

-Once in a term

-Twice in a term

-More than twice in a term

Q9. Are you involved in setting questions for grade 12 examinations?

-Yes

-No

Q10. Are you involved in marking grade 12 French examinations?

-Yes

-No

Q11. From your experience, which components in examinations offer difficulties to candidates?

.....

.....
Q12. In which ones do candidates score high?

.....
.....

Q13. What has been your school performance in French final examinations like in the past 3 years?

-Very good

-Good

-Fair

-Poor

-Very poor

Q14. What do you think are the causes of poor performance by pupils in grade 12 French examinations?

.....
.....

Q15. What do you think should be done to improve examination results?

.....
.....

Appendix C: Interview Guide with Education Managers (French Examinations Specialist)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

School of Education

Department of Language and Social Science Education

**PUPILS AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON POOR PERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12
FRENCH EXAMINATIONS**

Q1. Are you satisfied with French examination results by pupils?

Q2. Who sets grade 12 French examinations?

Q3. What experience do examination setters have?

Q4. What are the components of grade 12 French examinations?

Q5. According to your experience, which ones offer difficulties to pupils?

Q6. In which ones do candidates score high?

Q7. What is the linkage between examination contents and what is taught in school like?

Q8. Generally, what do you think are the causes of pupils' poor performance in French?

Appendix D: Interview Guide with Education Managers (French Curriculum Specialist)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

School of Education

Department of Language and Social Science Education

**PUPILS AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON POOR PERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12
FRENCH EXAMINATIONS**

Q1. What are the components of grade 12 French examinations?

Q2. Which components offer difficulties to pupils?

Q3. In which ones do candidates score high?

Q4. What is the linkage between examination components and what is taught in school like?

Q5. Are you satisfied with the current national French examination results by the pupils?

Q6. What do you think are the causes of pupils' poor performance in grade 12 French examinations?

Q7. What is your comment on examination content in relation to the syllabus at hand?

