

ABSTRACT

In recent years, Grade 12 French examination results in Zambia have been getting poor and poorer. Statistics by the Examinations Council of Zambia, (E.C.Z, 2008) indicate that French examinations results drop each year by a significant percentage in terms of pupils' performance.

This being a serious concern to the Ministry of Education however, there had been no attempt to find out which factors contribute to this deteriorating performance. Worse still, no effort was made to find out which specific French language aspects are more problematic to pupils who sit for Grade 12 French examinations.

Hence, an investigation was conducted with a view to find out factors affecting pupils' poor performance in Grade 12 French examinations, their contents, and specific components which are very challenging to pupils.

The research design was a survey and for that reason, both 'Qualitative and Quantitative methods' were used to collect data. The target population was all the former pupils who studied French and wrote Grade 12 French examinations and all the teachers of French in Lusaka urban district. About 100 former pupils of French were targeted while all the teachers of French that could be found in schools offering French in Lusaka urban district were targeted. Education managers such as the French Curriculum Specialist and the French Examinations Specialist were also targeted.

The sample population consisted of 78 students enrolled at the University of Zambia, that is to say 65 females and 13 males who had done French and wrote Grade 12 French examinations. The University of Zambia campus was used as a sample frame owing to the fact it would have

been difficult to find pupils with such characteristics out in society since French is not offered in many schools. Even where it is taught, only a small number of pupils follow it up to completion of Grade 12. The sample population also included 22 teachers of French, that is to say 16 males and 6 females in schools around Lusaka urban district offering French. One Examinations Specialist from the Examinations Council of Zambia was also interviewed.

The data was collected by use of questionnaires for teachers of French and for former pupils who studied French and wrote Grade 12 French examinations while the data obtained from the interview was transcribed and presented as raw data.

The data was thereafter analysed in descriptive statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) where the teachers and students' views were grouped in major themes corresponding to the research questions in order to determine their frequency distribution.

Concerning the first research objective, the findings indicated that poor classroom methodology was frequently mentioned by the students as the main contributing factor to pupils' poor performance. On the other hand, teachers expressed that in most cases poor performance was caused by pupils' own lack of seriousness.

Both the teachers and pupils agreed that the level at which French education starts, lack of adequate didactic materials and the rigidity of examinations as well as their being based on foreign materials instead of local ones are other serious contributors to poor performance. On the second objective, it was unanimously agreed by all the respondents that Reading Passage was the easiest component of Grade 12 French examinations while Composition and Structure examined in French Paper 1 was perceived as the most difficult component.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents from whom I have been separated for many years but have not stopped feeling their spiritual encouragement. Special thanks to my uncle, Mr J.M.V Mulinda and the family, for their enormous support and encouragement throughout my education career. Sincere gratitude goes to my friends and colleagues who advised and shared ideas with me during this research.

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A LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

1. CDC- Curriculum Development Centre
2. COMESA- Common Market for East and Southern Africa
3. CPD- Continuous Professional Development
4. ECZ- Examinations Council of Zambia
5. FLE- Français Langue Etrangère (French Foreign Language)
6. MOE- Ministry of Education
7. SADC- Southern African Development Community
8. UN- United Nations
9. UNZA- University of Zambia
10. USA- United States of America
11. ZAFT- Zambia Association of French Teachers