

HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL
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**A review of the curriculum documents for
English second language learning in Grades
1 – 3 in twelve African countries**

**Report prepared for
Maskew Miller Longman**

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the results of a preliminary review of the syllabusⁱ documents for Grades 1 – 3 for the teaching of English as a second language in the following countries:

Botswana	Malawi	Tanzania
Ghana	Namibia	Uganda
Kenya	Nigeria	Zambia
Lesotho	South Africa	Zimbabwe

The review of the curriculum documents was undertaken with a view to considering the possibilities of developing a generic literacy course for use in different contexts with minimal adaptations. The first section of the report presents the results of the review in tabular form, and provides detail on particular aspects of the curriculum documents. These aspects entail those identified by Maskew Miller Longman as being of interest to their particular project, as well as additional categories generated in the course of the review.

In the second section general comments on the issues identified in Section 1 are made which summarise the findings presented in the table. Recommendations in relation to the issues regarding the development of the generic literacy course are then made.

Summary of findings

The review finds a great deal of similarity across the syllabi, particularly with respect to the format and language used in the documents (outcomes-based education, tabular representation, specification of broad areas and topics); the assessment procedures (continuous, non-formal); the broad principles (learner-centred); the language principles (an eclectic approach, favouring whole language and communicative approaches, with phonic awareness); and the language approach (additive bilingualism in most cases).

Differences, however, exist in terms of the level at which language is taught and the content of the curricula. So although the development of a generic literacy course would seem very feasible across the different contexts, it is recommended that this course include a basic module, with one or two extension modules. Further, a thorough analysis of the content needs to be undertaken in order to find commonalities and differences across curricula. Some of this work (especially under 'curriculum structure') is begun in this report.

Limitations

The findings presented in the report are preliminary, and a thorough content analysis of the syllabi would need to be conducted in order to confirm that there is indeed sufficient similarity across curricula in order to pursue a generic course. Further, the review was conducted with a limited amount of available documentation. Not all questions could be answered, and in the case of Malawi (where no documentation for levels 1 to 3 was available) there is missing information.

Table 1: Teaching Hours and Language Policy (MOI=Medium of instruction)

	Teaching hours			Language policy	
	Per school year	Periods per week	Minutes per teaching period	What is the mother tongue and English policy?	In what language are learners taught to read and write?
Botswana		10	30	Mother Tongue instruction with gradual progress through 'interlanguage' to bilingualism and English MOI in Year 4.	Setswana & English
Ghana	400	10		Mother Tongue instruction in first three years, English taught as subject. Years 4-7 English taught as subject and used as MOI.	Mother Tongue
Kenya		5	30	Mother Tongue instruction in first three years, English taught as subject. Years 4-7 English taught as subject and used as MOI.	Mother Tongue
Lesotho	288 periods/year (1-2) 256 periods/year (3)	9 (1-2) 8 (3)		Basotho MOI year 1-3, thereafter English	Basotho
Malawi				MOI mother tongue for Years 1 – 4, English MOI from Grade 5 onwards. ⁱⁱ	Mother Tongue
Namibia		5 (1-2) 9 (3)		MOI is mother tongue Year 1 – 3. Year 4 English MOI.	Mother Tongue
Nigeria				MOI in local language Years 1-3, transition to English MOI Year 4 ⁱⁱⁱ	Mother Tongue and English
South Africa				Mother Tongue instruction in first three years, English taught as subject. Years 4-7 English taught as subject and used as MOI.	Mother Tongue
Tanzania	194 days	7	30	MOI KiSwahili in primary. English in secondary. English introduced as second language in primary.	KiSwahili
Uganda			30	MOI in first four years is mother tongue, and English and KiSwahili are taught as subjects, after which English becomes medium of instruction and Mother Tongue and KiSwahili are taught as subjects.	Mother Tongue, KiSwahili and English
Zambia				English is the MOI from Year 1 onwards. In Year 1 learners learn initial basic skills of reading and writing in a local language, the literacy focus in Year 2 is on English, and Years 3 –7 on both languages. ^{iv}	Year 1: Listening and speaking in range of languages (incl. Zambian, English, French). Reading and writing Zambian langs only. Year 2 & 3: Listening, speaking, reading and writing in all languages. Same syllabus.
Zimbabwe				English, Ndebele or Shona is the MOI in Years 1-3, depending on the language of the majority of learners. English taught throughout, becomes MOI in Grade 4.	Bi-lingual – teaching English and Mother Tongue at the same time. Largely dependent on Mother Tongue of teacher as to how much support.

Table 2: Reading Methodology, General Methodology, Language across the Curriculum & Themes in teaching

	Reading methodology	Language learning and teaching methodology	Language across the curriculum	Themes in teaching
	Phonics? Whole language? Eclectic? Other?	Communicative? Grammar based?	Is there any focus on the acquisition of language to support the curriculum?	Are themes suggested? Prescribed? What are they?
Botswana	Eclectic, but definite phonics emphasis	Communicative	No	Suggested but not prescribed
Ghana	Both	Both. "understanding followed by practice".	Suggested. Topics specified for Years 4-7.	No themes
Kenya	Not specified. No phonics.	Not explicit. Grammatical structures in sentences common	Through some of the themes, though most pertain to learners' everyday lives	Yes. Theme driven. See Appendix A.
Lesotho	Whole language. Very little phonics	Both	No	No themes
Malawi	Eclectic – phonics and whole language			
Namibia	Whole language	Communicative stated: "Emphasis is to be put on creating small situations where it makes sense to learn or practice the language function to be mastered".	Identifies particular areas: population education, HIV/AIDS, Human rights and democracy and environmental awareness, but not reflected in actual learning outcomes.	No themes
Nigeria	Whole language. No phonics evident	Focus on grammar and 'structures'	No	No. States topics: "Languages are basically structural (written or oral) rather than thematic" (vi)
South Africa	Eclectic. Phonics and whole language, though stated emphasis on latter.	Both, but focus on communicative.	For mathematics and under 'thinking and reasoning', but no examples and not specified.	Not prescribed. Suggested they be used and selected with care
Tanzania	Whole language. No phonics at all evident.	Communicative (focus on the nominal)	For counting	No themes – language topics
Uganda	No phonics evident	Communicative (focus on the nominal)	For mathematics only	Yes. Theme driven. See Appendix A.
Zambia	Eclectic, but phonics emphasis especially in Year 1 and 2.	Communicative	Not evident, though claims emphasis on integration in curriculum	No themes
Zimbabwe	Phonics and "look-say"	"Functions and structures". Focus on language structures, but in use (functions)	No	No themes

Table 3: Syllabus Structure

	Syllabus structure			
	Sequence – order of teaching items	Framework – OBE, LC, other?	Organising topics	Level of specification
Botswana	Teachers invited to vary sequence	Outcomes language	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Medium
Ghana	Teachers invited to vary sequence		Listening & Speaking; Grammar; Reading; Writing & composition; Library (extensive reading)	High specification. Especially in terms of teacher initiation and learner response.
Kenya	Specified	Outcomes language	Themes, with Specific objectives Language patterns Vocabulary lists	Medium, with vocabulary lists, grammar structure lists.
Lesotho	Ordering with incremental difficulty in specific topics	Outcomes-based	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Medium. Lists, but not many examples.
Malawi				
Namibia	General sequence, but level of generality easy for manipulation	Outcomes-based Learner-centred	Listening; Speaking; Reading Writing - but emphasis on first three	Low. Gives broad topics only.
Nigeria	Highly specified	Outcomes language	Structure; Speech; Reading; Writing	VERY High. Teacher and learner actions specified. Lists and examples.
South Africa	Specified by grade, but not within grade	Outcomes-based	Listening; Speaking; Reading & viewing; Writing; Thinking and reasoning; Language structure and use	Medium. Some examples and comprehensive glossary.
Tanzania	Specified in the curriculum	Learner-centred Outcomes language:	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Highly specified teacher and learner actions
Uganda	Specified	Outcomes language	Vocabulary, Structures, listening and speaking, reading and writing	High, with lists of examples, vocabulary, activities, evaluation
Zambia	Specified	Outcomes-based Learner-centred	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Low. Lists of outcomes. No examples.
Zimbabwe	Blocks sequenced but variation invited within	'Functional Objectives'	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	High. Teacher and learner communications specified

Table 4: Assessment & Resources

	Assessment			Resources
	Continuous / formative	Portfolio / Assignments	Summative / tests	Are any resources prescribed / recommended?
Botswana	Yes.	No	No	No
Ghana	Yes	Yes	Yes (tests and CASS)	No
Kenya	Yes	No	No	Generic
Lesotho	None suggested	No	No	Generic
Malawi				
Namibia	Informal and formal	No	No	Generic
Nigeria	Yes	No	No	Generic (course book?)
South Africa	Yes	Yes	No	Generic
Tanzania	Yes	No	Yes	Generic
Uganda	Yes	No	Yes	No
Zambia	Yes – stated	No	No	No
Zimbabwe	Yes	No	No	No

Comments and recommendations

1. Teaching hours

Comment:

It was not possible in all cases to collect data which indicated the amount of time allocated for English instruction. For those countries where this information was available the range was between five and ten periods a week. The periods are of 30-minute duration.

Recommendation:

Given the data that was collected from five countries, the average time allocated to English learning across these countries is seven periods a week (periods of 30-minute duration). A generic course would probably approximate these time periods. Given that there are on average 40 school weeks in a year, this would amount to approximately 280 30-minute lessons per grade for an entire year.

2. Language policy

Comment:

Across all twelve countries the aim is to eventually establish English as the MOI. However, there is variation in terms of when the transition from mother tongue to English is made, and consequently the level at which English is first introduced. In eight of the countries the MOI in the first three years is the local language of the learners, or a specified indigenous language. English is taught as a subject / second language, and in the fourth year of primary school, the transition to English as the MOI is made. There are five exceptions to this pattern:

- In Zambia a policy of bilingualism is followed, where English is MOI from Year 1. However, in Year 1 learners learn initial basic skills of reading and writing in a local language, the literacy focus in Year 2 is on English, and Years 3–7 on both languages.
- In Malawi and Uganda the transition to English as the MOI occurs in Year 5.
- In Tanzania English is the MOI for the whole of the primary phase, the transition to English being made at the secondary level.
- In Zimbabwe the option is available to employ English as the MOI from Year 1. Many schools utilize this option despite students being second language speakers of English (Gudhlanga, 2005).

Recommendation:

A generic course could include *core* and *additional* course/s that could be used across contexts where English proficiency amongst learners and teachers differs markedly. Zimbabwe and Uganda already have a basic and extension curriculum in place.

3. Reading methodology

Comment:

All country curricula, apart from Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Namibia approach reading through a combination of phonics and whole language learning. It is not clear whether phonics learning is absent from the four aforementioned curricula through lack of specification or by design. Nonetheless, on the whole an eclectic approach to reading is taken. In the case of Ghana, library, or extensive reading is also included in the syllabus, aiming to develop a love for reading in learners, and skills for utilizing a library and handling books.

4. Language learning and teaching methodology

Comment:

By and large what is suggested is a communicative approach to language learning, summed up in the South African syllabus document as follows:

Learners should not be given grammatical rules or lists of vocabulary to learn. They will learn grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation in context by repeatedly:
Hearing and reading structures, words, and sounds in oral and written context; and
Writing down unfamiliar words in their dictionaries, learning and using them (page 11).

However, although this is stated as a principle in almost all the documents, the actual specification of learning differs at times. What one does find is the listing of grammatical structures and rules to be followed. It is possible to conclude therefore that the approach is far more eclectic than the stated principles may suggest.

Several of the curricula contain lists of vocabulary to be covered and learnt. Ghana has a strong grammar focus with grammar topics and constructions to be covered.

Finally, although the syllabi claim a communicative approach, several, especially Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda entail a 'nominal' approach – consisting of naming and labelling objects and people, and scripted exchanges which suggest a call and response classroom communication structure.

Recommendation:

A generic course would have to take account of both the intentions of curricula (to offer a communicative approach) and how outcomes and content are specified in lists of vocabulary and grammar and language structures to be taught and learnt. What a communicative approach would actually entail, and whether this would be grasped by teachers given the range of applications in the curricula, would need to be considered in constructing a generic course.

Comment:

In several of the curricula making comparisons between learners' home language and English is stressed. This is in the form of code-switching (Zimbabwe) or, in the

Botswana case, a specific methodology called the 'preview/review technique' where instruction is offered in the home language and repeated in English.

Comment:

Most of the curricula suggest a range of methodologies for teaching with an emphasis on "learner-centred", "communicative", "interactive" and "participatory" techniques. These include: role-play, drama, pair and group discussions, case studies; debates; field-trips and project work; songs; games.

5. Language across the curriculum

Comment:

There is very little explicit focus on language across the curriculum, apart from reference to mathematics in the learning of numbers, and vocabulary related to measurement and time. Most of the curricula do raise language across the curriculum as an issue, or suggest that teachers pay attention to this. However, it is rarely integrated into the actual specification of content and outcomes. For example, the South Africa curriculum reads "Uses language to understand concepts and vocabulary relating to different Learning Areas". Only examples for mathematics are clearly specified. And again, although not reflected in the actual syllabus, the Namibian curriculum suggests the inclusion of population education, HIV/AIDS, human rights and democracy and environmental awareness.

Recommendation:

The question of transition to English MOI for all languages in most countries in Year 4 would need to be considered in the development of a generic literacy curriculum. Some clearer, more explicit ways of integrating language from other subjects would usefully form part of the course, going beyond mathematics to common vocabulary, themes, topics used in other subjects.

6. Themes in teaching

Comment:

Although some of the curricula suggest the use of themes, only two prescribe themes: Kenya and Uganda (see Appendix A). These two curricula also have a stronger emphasis on vocabulary learning. Several curricula suggest that themes be used but these are at the teacher's discretion and are not specified. The organising devices for the other curricula are described below in 7c.

7. Syllabus structure

7a. Sequence – order of teaching items

Comment:

All curricula commence with a focus on listening and speaking in the first year, with an increasing focus on reading and writing in the following two years. The order in

which teaching is expected to occur is generally highly specified from one year to the next, but flexible in a number of cases within the year.

7b. Framework – Outcomes-based, Learner-centred, other

Comment:

All syllabus documents, aside from that of Zimbabwe, follow an outcomes-based format, or alternatively use the language of outcomes. This includes terms such as learning outcome, specific outcomes, general outcomes. The phrase ‘the learner/child should be able to ...’ is also privileged in most of the documents. All documents, apart from Zambia, also follow a tabular format, where various aspects of the syllabus are outlined.

The vast majority of the curricula also stipulate that a learner-centred approach to education is privileged in the curriculum. What this means, however, varies between syllabi. Also what implications this approach has for the development of the curriculum would appear to vary significantly between the different countries’ documents.

Recommendation:

Constructing a course consistent with outcomes-based terms and concepts would be familiar across all countries, apart from Zimbabwe. An analysis of what is meant by ‘learner-centred’ in the various countries, and how these ideas may be integrated into a generic course may be useful.

7c. Organising topics

Comment:

In six of the countries the curriculum is structured around four main language skills:
listening
speaking
reading
writing.

There are some variations on these, however, with additional categories indicating slightly different emphases. In the two theme-driven curricula (Kenya and Uganda), a ‘vocabulary’ category is used:

Kenya	Uganda
Theme	Theme
Specific objective	Vocabulary
Language patterns	Structures
Vocabulary list	listening & speaking
	reading & writing

In Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria a stronger emphasis on grammar and language structures is indicated in the structuring categories used there:

Ghana	South Africa	Nigeria
Listening & speaking	Listening	Structure
Grammar	Speaking	Speech
Reading	Reading & viewing	Reading
Writing & composition	Writing	Writing
Library	Thinking & reasoning	
	Language structure & use	

Recommendation:

These broad organisers would be familiar to teachers, and a combination could be used to structure a generic course.

7e. Level of specification

Comment:

The level of specification varies across the curricula, with some syllabus documents providing explicit directives in terms of content and methodology, whilst others remain relatively open. The Nigerian curriculum is particularly highly specified, including specific directives as to what the teacher and learner should do and say, the content and specific examples. The rationale for this high level of specification is given in the document: “considering also the ability of the average Nigerian teacher details regarding the performance objectives, teacher activities, pupil’s activities and evaluation guide; are specified in the document” (ii).

Recommendation:

In the development of a generic course, a high level of specification is recommended. The problem of teachers’ proficiency in English is not limited to Nigeria, but exists across the African countries represented here (UNESCO, 2005). High specification with examples, lists of vocabulary, and structured activities with a pedagogic function for both teachers and learners, is recommended.

8. Assessment

Comment:

The assessment focus in the curricula is on continuous assessment. No formal assessment procedures (such as tests or exams) are suggested, except for Ghana and Uganda. The general approach is exemplified in the statement from the Botswana syllabus document: “Assessment will be mainly informal and take the form of teachers observing learners’ language performance in speech and writing”

Recommendation:

Although tasks and their form could be constructed to aid teachers in determining and monitoring students’ competence and progress, no formal tests need to be constructed for a generic course.

9. Resources

Comment:

No specific texts are recommended in any of the curricula, apart from Nigeria which makes reference to a 'course book'. Several of the countries' curricula provide lists of common vocabulary/phrases. Other than these, generic types of resources are recommended. These include:

Songs; radio and audiotape stories; riddles and jokes; picture books; photographs; magazine pictures; television programmes; videos; poems; comics; calendar; Rules; children's plays; books (fiction and non-fiction).

There is an emphasis in most curricula is on cultural sensitivity, and the utilization of local cultural resources in teaching.

Recommendation:

It may be useful to compile vocabulary lists that include words/phrases/structures that are common across the curricula. Useful texts that are cross-cultural may also assist teachers with the selection of appropriate resources for teaching particular aspects of literacy.

References

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Notes:

ⁱ The words 'syllabus' and 'curriculum' are used interchangeably in the report, to refer to the intended, or formal curriculum, as represented in policy documents.

ⁱⁱ Chilora, H.G. (2000) School Language Policy, Research And Practice In Malawi, Paper presented at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) 2000 Conference, San Antonio, Texas, USA, 8 – 12 March.

ⁱⁱⁱ In reality, however, many schools employ English as MOI from the start. This is partly due to the fact that there are 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria, and many teachers are not proficient in the local languages of the students (Ango et al, 2003)

^{iv} Manchisis, P.C. (2004). The Status Of The Indigenous Languages In Institutions Of Learning In Zambia: Past, Present And Future. *The African Symposium* Vol. 4 No. 1.

Appendix A: Specified themes: Kenya & Uganda

Kenya

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Greetings and requests	Greetings and polite language	School and school activities
Home	Environment	Health and hygiene
Classroom	School	Child labour
Numbers	Numbers	Home and family
Family	Time	Position and direction
Our body	Position and direction	Play things
Days of the week and weather	Home and home activities	Transport
School	Shopping	Environment
Time	Parts of the body	Diseases
Months of the year	Health and hygiene	Accidents and road safety
Clothes	Travel	Everyday activities
Farm animals and tools in the home	Clothes	Occupation
Travel	Food	Communication
Shopping	Wild animals	Sports
Wild animals	Weather	Technology
Occupation	The farm	Animals
The world around us	Home equipment	Climate and disasters

Uganda

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Greetings and farewell	Greetings and farewell	Requests and refusals
Classroom	Classroom	Weather
Numbers	School and classroom	Numbers
Classroom	Home and home activities	Time & calendar
School	Daily routine	School timetable
Self	Food	Daily activities
Home	Numbers	Position
Home activities	Positions	Our community
School activities	Time & calendar	Animals
Family and family relationships	Our community	Occupations
Parts of the body	Colours	Likes and dislikes
Animals	Transport	Basic health and hygiene
Colours	Relationships	Food
Time and calendar	Weather	Direction
Names of common foods	Clothing	Measuring
Basic health and hygiene	Parts of the body	Shopping
Requests	Measuring	Relationships
Position	Shopping	Transport
Transport	The market	Accidents
Accidents	The hospital	Tenses with irregular verbs
	Jobs, workplace and tools	