

## **The Teaching and Learning of Advanced Level, English Language and Communication Skills Paper (8007) in Zimbabwe.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the teaching and learning of Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC), Advanced Level, English Language and Communication Skills Paper (8007) in Zimbabwean schools and the attitudes of students and teachers towards the subject. The data for the study was collected from seven schools in Harare, namely, Vainona High School, Mt Pleasant High School, Ellis Robbins Boys High School, Marlborough Girls High School, Marlborough High School, Oriel Boys High School and Oriel Girls High School. The researcher used three instruments to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. 60 questionnaires were distributed to each school and this was followed by semi-structured interviews with teachers of the subject and three students from each school. The researcher also observed English Language and Communication Skills lessons in the seven schools. The study found out that teachers and students had negative and positive attitudes towards English Language and Communication Skills teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** English Language and Communication Skills, Attitudes, Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council, Communicative Teaching Approach.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the teaching and learning of Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC), Advanced Level, English Language and Communication Skills (8007) Paper in seven schools in Harare, namely, Vainona High School, Mt Pleasant High School, Ellis Robbins Boys High School, Marlborough Girls High School, Marlborough High School, Oriel Boys High School and Oriel Girls High and the attitudes of students and teachers towards the subject. More specifically, the study focuses on how English Language and Communication Skills (ELCS) is being taught, what is being taught during the ELCS lessons and the attitudes of students and teachers towards the subject. The experiences and observations by the researcher, of university students lacking what Lucantoni (2002,13) calls, ‘ the ability to use English effectively for purposes of practical communication in a variety of second language situations’, prompted the researcher to find out how ELCS is being taught in Zimbabwe using the seven schools as a case study. The researcher hopes that by showing how the subject is being taught and learnt in schools, some solutions to remedy the communication problems might be found so that students can benefit more in the subject and excel in other subjects at high school and at university.

The Zimbabwean schools educational curriculum is nationalised and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education through its service arm, the Curriculum Development Unit develops and

disseminates the curriculum for implementation by teachers at various schools. The inclusion of any subject in the curriculum is preceded by a needs analysis which takes into account what Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya (2011) calls strategic planning to ascertain utility, relevance and ability to inculcate in students the knowledge to solve problems, make judgements and carry out useful tasks. Zimbabwe's education system consists of seven years of primary and six years of secondary schooling before students can enter university. After four years of secondary education, students write their Ordinary Level Examinations and those who would have passed can enrol for Advanced Level where the majority sit for Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council Examinations (ZIMSEC) while the minority, who are rich, sit for Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). To be enrolled for Advanced Level, students should have passed 5 Ordinary Level (ZIMSEC or CAMBRIDGE) subjects with a grade C or better, and one of these 5 subjects should be English Language.

At Advanced Level students are expected to study a minimum of three subjects which are now generally categorized as ,Sciences( Biology,Chemistry,Physics ,Mathematics and Geography),Arts(English Literature ,Geography,Shona/Ndebele ,Divinity,History,French,Art and Music) and Commercial( Management of Business ,Economics,Accounting,Computer Science and Statics ).In addition to the minimum three compulsory subjects, students also sit for the English Language and Communication Skills Paper. English Language and Communication Skills, formerly known as General Paper (8001) before localization of examinations is being 'taught' in most high schools in Zimbabwe but there is no educational policy stipulating that the teaching and learning of the subject should be compulsory. The subject is treated as an Advanced Subsidiary subject and it does not contribute anything towards entry qualifications to local universities, the University of Zimbabwe being a prime example. As a result, students and teachers have negative attitudes towards the learning and teaching of the subject which is regarded as a worst of time.

Attitudes according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) involve the evaluation by which individuals attach good or bad qualities to an idea or object. Attitudes have three main components; the affective component, the cognitive and the behavioural component. Bloom's et al (1956) Taxonomy of Education Objectives serves as an important theoretical framework for this study as it helps to explain teachers and students attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ELCS. This taxonomy contains three domains of learning, namely, cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The affective domain is important to this study as it consists of attitudes, values, motivation and feelings towards information which teachers and students have. This domain accounts for behaviours such as, awareness to the importance of ELCS, reaction to ELCS as a subject and the feelings and values ascribed to the subject by both students and teachers. The attitudes of students and teachers towards the teaching and learning of ELCS may be crucial indicators of the importance teachers and students place upon the subject.

The country's examination body, ZIMSEC in its Advanced Level English Language and Communication Syllabus (8007) (2013,2) explicitly recommends an, ' integrative approach to the appropriate use of English in different situations and for different purposes' ,which aims to ' equip students with English Language and Communication Skills essential for academic work at Advanced Level and beyond' .The syllabus is apparently referring to Communicative Language Teaching and it goes on to discourage teachers from having students learn language structures in isolation as what was happening prior to 1996 when the syllabus, which had been inherited from the pre-independence era, was largely structural( Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya (2011). While

ELCS tests students on their command of the English Language, it also requires students to be well-read and well-versed in a broad range of current issues. Specifically, what is needed is for teachers of the subject to be more discerning in their use of the communicative approach by being cognizant of its limitations, and implement appropriate communicative activities judiciously to meet the learning styles and needs of students in the Zimbabwean context. As the exam syllabus has been adopted from Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) General Paper (8001) and is unique to Zimbabwe, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what the English Language and Communication Skills Paper is about.

In terms of assessment, students are tested in three areas, the first being the ability to understand and critique on a number of current issues such as politics, environment, religion and mass media. This is tested in Paper 1, which is written in one and a half hours and which carries a weighting of fifty marks. Students are required to write one essay of between 500-800 words giving their personal response from a number of topics set on a variety of subjects. The marking is based on an impressionistic scale that focuses on both content and language. Secondly, students need to possess skills in comprehension, interpretation and application of a range of subject matter. Paper 2 is written in two hours and it carries a weighting of fifty percent. The paper consists of one compulsory question in section A and two questions in section B from which candidates choose one.

The question in section A will test communication skills based on, comparison of texts, report writing, appraisal of badly written passages, summarising, interpretation of graphs, statistical data, maps and any other form of data presentations. The question in section B will test comprehension of a passage in English, paraphrasing of given texts in the form of notes, statistics, and, or diagrams. Finally, the language component is tested in both Paper 1 and Paper 2, where students need to write using the accepted conventions of spelling, punctuation and grammar, use of different linguistic styles and expressions appropriate to the context, task and audience. The English Language and Communication Skills Paper is more than just an English language paper. As the name implies, it aims to equip the learners with skills that will enable them to cope with the demands of tertiary education and other subjects they are studying at Advanced Level. (ZIMSEC, 2013)

This study is mainly influenced by the researcher's experiences as an Academic Communication Skills and Professional Communication Skills lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, as an Advanced Level English Language and Communication Skills teacher and as a ZIMSEC, ELCS Examiner for 10 years. The researcher was motivated to carry out this research because of the performance of first year undergraduate students at the University of Zimbabwe which showed glaring shortcomings in what Widdowson (1991) calls language use, an understanding of which sentences or parts of sentences are appropriate in particular contexts. First year undergraduates evidently struggle to accomplish what Wilkins (1976) refers to as language functions, such as, criticizing, inviting, complaining, arguing and disagreeing. The students' failures to achieve such basic language functions manifest itself not only as the students socialise among themselves and with their lecturers but also in the students oral and written assignments. In short, most of the undergraduate students in Zimbabwe lack what Hymes (1972), Richards and Rodgers (1995), Mhundwa (1998) and Yule (1999) refer to as, communicative competence.

For higher education, the assumption has always been that the system lower down would play its role in ensuring that the necessary competences in the use and usage of the English Language are

firmly developed and grounded, well before entry by learners into institutions of higher learning. Thus, matters conceptual, rhetorical and stylistic as well as those relating to structure, function and notion, could be taken care of without much ado about basic grammar (subject-verb concordance, tense and parts of speech etc) and associated mechanical issues such as 'paragraphy' and punctuation. My experiences at the University of Zimbabwe point to the possibility of a mismatch between the expectations of both higher learning institutions and the reality of the situation on the ground in Zimbabwean schools with regards to language use and usage.

This study intends to answer the following questions;

1. What topics are being taught during ELCS lessons?
2. How is ELCS being taught and learnt in schools?
3. What are the attitudes of students and teachers towards the teaching and learning of ELCS?
4. What implications does the teaching and learning of ELCS in schools have on the Learning and Teaching of Academic Communication Skills especially at the University of Zimbabwe?

In answering these questions, the study is also guided by curriculum implementation as propounded by Ornsten and Hunkins (2013) that it should be an understanding of how learning programmes, information and ideas are executed in real classroom contexts.

## **2. THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH AND ELCS TEACHING IN ZIMBABWE.**

In Zimbabwe, English Language and Communication Skills (ELCS) should be taught according to the Communicative Language Teaching Approach which is implemented in compliance with Zimbabwe's educational policy (Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2011). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is usually characterised as a broad approach to teaching, rather than as a teaching method with a clearly defined set of classroom practices (Nunan, 2008). Historically, CLT has been seen as a response to the Audio-Lingual Method and as an extension of development of the notional-functional syllabus. The CLT teaching syllabus organises teaching according to the notional and functional categories of language rather than according to its structures. It concentrates on interactions (using language to communicate), tasks (using language to perform meaningful tasks) and the learner (putting the learner interests in the forefront). CLT is based on a theory of language as a system of expression of meaning; the primary function of language being interaction and communication (Nunan, 2008).

CLT places great emphasis on helping students use the target language in a variety of contexts and on learning functions. Unlike the Audio-Lingual Method, its primary focus is on helping learners create meaning rather than helping to develop perfect grammatical structures and acquire native-like competence. While CLT stresses the importance of communicative function competence rather than grammatical competence, the approach does not neglect grammar teaching (Thompson, 1996). There is definitely a need to equip students with a good grasp of the language so that they can communicate effectively and this is especially pertinent in Zimbabwe where the students are prone to a barrage of attacks from social media such as, twitter and face book. Many ELCS teachers in Zimbabwe have abandoned teaching English grammar yet the CLT stresses on communicative competence which is based on grammatical competence as the starting point leading to other competencies such as, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980).

In the words of Canale and Swain (1980, 7) communicative competence refers to the, 'interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar and socio-linguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use'. In other words, rules of use and rules of usage are complementary and not mutually exclusive. According to Canale and Swain (1980) the primary goal of a communicative approach must be to facilitate the integration of these two types of knowledge for the learner. Broadly speaking, communicative competence is an aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts.

The other characteristic of CLT is that classroom communication is planned and presented in ways that stimulate real life situations (Mhundwa, 1998). Functional communication activities in the classroom according to Richards and Rodgers (1995) include ,giving and following directions, solving problems, using clues, conversations, dialogues, role plays and debates ,all of which should not be memorised since speech, by its very nature, is spontaneous. By relying on communicative methods such as, pair-work, group discussions and role play, the objective is to provide ample opportunities for students to articulate their views ,reflect on the various (usually controversial) issues and direct their own learning. The role of the teacher is mainly that of a facilitator to introduce topics, guide the discussions, and ensure that the class activities are carried out smoothly. However, CLT has been understood by many teachers in Zimbabwe to imply that the teacher abdicates his role as a teacher.

There are obvious advantages for the adoption of the communicative approach to the teaching of ELCS in Zimbabwe .Littlewood (1981) notes that communicative activities are helpful in providing whole-task practice where various types of communicative activity are structured to suit the learner's level of ability. Communicative activities also improve natural learning when the learner is involved in using the target language for communication as it creates a context which supports learning through positive personal relationships among learners, and between learners and teachers (Littlewood, 1981).

### **3. METHOD**

The quantitative and qualitative data for this study was collected through questionnaires, interviews and observations. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Provincial Education Director for Harare Province. To make the data more valid and reliable, the researcher observed one ELCS lesson in each of the seven schools and conducted short unstructured interviews with the seven teachers and 3 students from each school. Of the seven teachers interviewed ,three had Bachelor's degrees from local universities and did not have a teaching professional qualification while the other four had Bachelors Degrees' and a Graduate Diploma in Education .The study emphasized the voices and experiences (Silverman, 2010) of teachers and students regarding their attitudes towards the learning and teaching of ELCS and the researcher's observations and experiences as an Advanced Level ELCS teacher and as a Communication Skills lecturer in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Zimbabwe.

A questionnaire divided into two parts was distributed to 420 students from the seven schools (20 Arts students, 20 Sciences students and 20 Commercials students in each school).Part A with closed questions asked for information on what the students are taught in terms of topics (**Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3**) and the teaching methodologies (**Table 4**) used by teachers. Students simply indicated

yes or no from a list of topics the researcher had extracted from the ZIMSEC English Language and Communication Skills, A Level Syllabus. The questionnaire with the same questions was modified for the teachers and was completed by one teacher from each school.

To determine the attitudes of students and teachers towards learning and teaching of ELCS, the researcher modified the Communication Skills Attitude Score (CSAS) created by Rees, Sheard and Davies (2002) was distributed to students (n=420) (Appendix 1) and teachers (n=7) (Appendix 2). The questionnaires had 24 item measures using a five point Likert type scale which included positive and negative statements about ELCS learning and teaching. The item responses were as follows; 1.Strongly Agree 2.Agree 3.Neutral 4.Disagree 5.Strongly disagree.

The Positive Attitude Scale(PAS) score was obtained by adding the scores of items 1,4,5,7,8,11,12,14,15,20,22 and 24 which are positively worded .The Negative Attitude Scale (NAS)score was obtained by adding the scores of items,2,3,6,9,10,13,16,17,18,19,21, and 30 which are negatively worded. Both scales ranged from 13 to 65 with higher scores indicating stronger positive or negative attitudes. The questionnaire also asked for background information such as, gender and whether the student was in the Sciences, Arts or Commercial class. This part of the questionnaire also consisted of open ended questions which were used to determine the factors contributing to the negative and positive attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ELCS. Descriptive analysis and percentages were used to analyse the data.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 TOPICS ON STUDY SKILLS.

**Table 1: Study Skills.**

TOPICS WHICH SHOULD BE TAUGHT ACCORDING TO THE ZIMSEC SYLLABUS	NAME OF SCHOOL						
	Vainona High School	Mt Pleasant High School	Ellis Robbins Boys High School	Marlborough High School	Marlberaign Girls High	Oriel Boys High School	Oriel Girls High School
Identifying facts and opinions							
Identifying organisational patterns in text							
Summarizing	√				√		
Paraphrasing	√				√		
Listening skills							
Reading							
Note taking	√						
Library use							
Referencing and citation							
Use of ICT							
Examination techniques		√	√	√		√	√

√-Indicates yes

Blank -Indicates no

**Table 1** summarises what the ZIMSEC Syllabus indicates should be taught and the responses from the students and teachers from the seven schools showing what the students were taught in terms of study skills. The results indicate that all the schools in this study were not teaching students how to organise facts and opinions, how to identify organisational patterns in a text, listening skills, reading skills, Library use, referencing and use of Information and Technology. Summarizing and paraphrasing was being taught in two schools and note taking and note making in only one school. Examination techniques which are probably taught when students are about to write their examinations are being taught in the majority of the schools.

#### 4.2 TOPICS ON ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

**Table 2: Academic Writing Skills and Professional Communication Skills.**

TOPICS WHICH SHOULD BE TAUGHT ACCORDING TO THE ZIMSEC SYLLABUS	NAME OF SCHOOL						
	Vainona High School	Mt Pleasant High School	Marlborough High School	Ellis Robbins Boy High School	Marlberaign Girls High	Oriel Boys High School	Oriel Girls High School
Use of appropriate register	√	√		√		√	√
Précis writing							
Report writing	√	√		√	√		√
Essay writing	√	√	√		√		√
Letter Writing					√		
Compiling a resume							
Oral Communication					√		

√-Indicates yes

Blank -Indicates no

**Table 2** summarises what the ZIMSEC Syllabus indicates should be taught and the responses from the students and teachers from the seven schools showing what the students were being taught in terms of Academic Writing Skills and Professional communication skills. The results indicate that the majority of the schools are not teaching oral communication skills, how to compile a resume, letter writing and précis writing. Five schools were teaching essay writing skills, report writing and use of appropriate vocabulary.

### 4.3 LANGUAGE SKILLS TOPICS

**Table 3: Language skills topics.**

LANGUAGE SKILLS WHICH SHOULD BE TAUGHT ACCORDING TO THE ZIMSEC SYLLABUS	NAME OF SCHOOL						
	Vainona High School	Mt Pleasant High School	Marlborough High School	Ellis Robbins Boys	Marlberaign Girls High	Oriel Boys High School	Oriel Girls High School
Sentence construction					√		
Punctuation							
Vocabulary							
Spellings							
Paragraphing							
English grammar							

√-Indicates yes

Blank -Indicates no

**Table 3** summarises what the ZIMSEC Syllabus indicates should be taught and the responses from the students and teachers from the seven schools showing what the students were being taught in terms English Language skills. The results show that all the schools are not teaching punctuation, vocabulary, spellings, paragraphing and English grammar while sentence construction is being taught in one school.

### 4.4 TEACHING METHODS

**Table 4: Teaching Methods.**

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES WHICH SHOULD BE USED IN TEACHING ACCORING TO ZIMSEC SYLLABUS	NAME OF SCHOOL						
	Vainona High School	Mt Pleasant High School	Marlborough High School	Ellis Robbins Boys	Marlberaign Girls High	Oriel Boys High	Oriel Girls High
Exposition							
Class presentations	√				√		
Research and Projects							
Field excursions							
Drama and Role play							
Seminars							
Use of ICT							
Debates	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Resource persons							

√-Indicates yes

Blank -Indicates no



**Table 4** summarises what the ZIMSEC Syllabus indicates should be taught and the responses from the students and teachers from the seven schools showing the teaching methodologies being used by teachers in conducting ELCS lessons. The results indicate that the main methods used to teach ELCS are class presentations and debates.

#### **4.5 Students and teachers attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English Language and Communication Skills.**

Teachers and students had both negative and positive attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ELCS. Negative Attitude Scores (NAS) were higher among students (70%) and teachers (55%). Female students had a higher PAS (68%) compared to male students (32%). Sciences students had a high NAS (40%) compared to Commercial students (35%) and Arts students (25%).

### **5. DISCUSSION.**

#### **5.1 THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS.**

The general finding of this study is that schools offer ELCS and make the subject compulsory for all students simply to use up lesson space on the timetable and to be able to justify requests for more teachers from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The reality on the ground is that, ELCS is not being taught in schools. Teachers and students were in agreement that the teaching and learning of the subject has been chaotic, characterised by no slots on the timetable, inadequate work given, teachers providing feedback much later than they should, inadequate planning or not at all, lack of teaching resources and lack of institutional support.

In 5 of the schools, ELCS lessons normally took the form of 'mass lectures' where lessons were conducted in the school hall. The researcher observed that in these schools, all students (Arts, Sciences and Commercial) met once a week for one hour for the ELCS lesson provided the teacher was 'free' to attend. The researcher observed that students had no exercise books and notebooks and the teachers did not have a Record of Marks and Scheme Book for ELCS. This means teachers are not scheming for the subject and the absence of a Record of Marks shows that students were not being given written work. The lessons, when they were held, took the form of structured debates or 'public speaking competitions' on current events or themes which seemed not to prepare students to be able to analyse information, make balanced arguments and write clearly. ELCS is not just limited to oral skills, reading and writing need to be developed to promote pupils confidence in all four skill areas. Much emphasis was placed on speaking and listening because it meant less marking for teachers than on writing. The teacher in CLT should assume the role of facilitator, guide, participant and resource person (Richards and Rodgers, 1995) but the teachers observed were passive, leaving learners to their own devices.

The results show that teachers were not teaching grammar to the students despite grammar being an important part of mastering a language. There is need to incorporate direct teaching on language skills specific to the ELCS Paper into the communicative activities such as, vocabulary, functions, pronunciation and other elements of language. This means the students need to learn how to write and express themselves in Standard English and understand the skills specific to the exam requirement of the subject. One way is for students to begin with communication on a particular topic, followed by the teacher presenting relevant language exercises to the students on that topic.

This approach is similar to the 'retrospective' approach of grammar (Thompson, 1996) where students are first exposed to a new language in comprehension context to understand its functions and meaning before they learn about the grammatical forms.

The assumption amongst teachers, teaching ELCS seem to be that, grammar is acquired unconsciously during performance on communicative functions. Grammar should be taught in an inductive way as learners are not presented with a list of grammatical rules that they learn by heart but rather the teacher provides them with examples from which the learners will have to infer the rules by themselves,. This makes the students to relate the new grammatical concepts to other grammatical information that they already have both from other grammatical concepts in the target language or even from grammatical information which appears in their L1. There are a number of inadequacies in the approach adopted for the teaching of ELCS in Zimbabwe. Most importantly, the teachers communicative competence did not constitute grammatical competence which should be a starting point leading to other competencies such as sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980). What is surprising is how the teachers would engage in purposive communication in language without being able to formulate the structures of that language as well.

The underlying assumption among teachers is that all students would have passed their Ordinary Level English Language and hence there is no need to help them in the language itself. This assumption is fallacious because some Advanced Level students have a weak foundation in the language and still encounter difficulties with the language. Such students might be willing to communicate in ELCS lessons but they remain restricted to an impoverished and inadequate inter-language where grammatical errors remain 'fossilised' and persist in tertiary education.

## **5.2 Students and teachers attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English Language and Communication Skills.**

The Negative Attitude Score (NAS) was lower amongst Arts students and high among Sciences and Commercials students. Arts students seemed to appreciate ELCS better as they regarded it as being more relevant to their areas of specialization where they write long essays, for example, in Literature in English, History and Shona. Sciences and Commercials students had a high NAS mainly because they regarded ELCS teachers as 'foreigners' in their departments who had nothing to offer them. Sciences students pointed out that their curriculum was overcrowded and they did not need an additional subject which was of no value. Female students had a low NAS than male students mainly because they were mainly studying Arts subjects while male students were mainly studying Science subjects'. The negative attitudes towards ELCS mainly emanated from the fact that it does not contribute anything towards entry qualifications to local universities. Despite the negative attitudes, some students noted the important skills that ELCS imparted, especially in presenting coherent arguments, sequencing and articulating ideas and in improving their diction.

Teaching methods also contributed to the negative attitudes towards the learning of ELCS. The large classes with an average of 80 students in a class, made lesson delivery difficult. The students pointed out that pair work, debates and group work in every lesson were boring and monotonous. In such situations, students do not only need to be communicating among themselves but also with the teacher or with an 'unseen' audience such as when writing a letter. The students reported that

teachers did not give them any written work and when it was given, teachers never bothered to mark the work. The students were not motivated to take the subject seriously and this resulted in the development of mainly negative attitudes.

The negative attitudes towards ELCS are also related to lethargic institutional support. The researcher observed that all the seven schools had no textbooks for ELCS and the schools did not have internally set mid- year and end of year examinations for ELCS .The teachers also intimated that school heads and heads of departments did not supervise the teaching of the subject, instead opting to do so for the 'important' subjects.ELCS lessons, if slotted on the timetable were slotted late in the afternoon when students are tired and according to the students ,this makes it difficult for them to concerntrate.In three of the schools ,there was no permanent ELCS teacher ,as teachers ,some of whom had no English Language background took turns to 'teach' the subject.

### **5.3 Teachers' attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English Language and Communication Skills.**

Ideally, teachers should spend most of their time planning, teaching, marking and meeting with individual students regarding their performance .The message that goes across to students when teachers behave like this is that the subject should be taken seriously and has a valuable contribution in the feature. To the contrary, when there is deliberate neglect of the subject by teachers, it is clear communication of it being less relevant. It is this negative attitude that teachers have shaped that influenced the hearts and minds of students. According to Wright (2005) teachers can extinguish student enthusiasm, dampen their hopes and dreams and turn them off the path of learning.Noll (2010) also says that when teachers fail to commit resources and time to the teaching of a subject they are communicating its relative insignificance.

Teachers responses in the interviews indicated that were aware of the important role of ELCS in the academic performance of students but there were powerless inculcating positive attitudes towards the subject among students and even among themselves. Teachers generally agreed that lack of resources, large class size, and their low level of motivation were the main contributing factors towards their negative attitudes .Serious academic discourse is given to examinable subjects and those that have a direct bearing on the students' future jobs and academic prospects.

Teachers interviewed pointed out that the subject was optional and hence an unwanted burden and a hindrance to concentrating on core subjects. Negative discourse came in the form of, *Haina basa iyi, hatidi kupedza nguva yevana tichiita zvinhu zvisingavapi mapoints anodiwa kumauniversity* (The subject is not useful hence we cannot waste precious time on a subject that does not contribute to the students overall points which will eventually take them to university. ELCS has been taught alongside those subjects regarded as very important and has suffered as a result. Valentine (2009) points out that teachers often teach less important subjects with less deliberate intentions. While ELCS is examinable, it has fallen in this category of subjects that are less important because it does not contribute to the aggregate points scored by a student and is not considered an entry requirement in universities and other tertiary institutions. Teachers also intimated that when schools are calculating overall pass rates, ELCS is not catered for and neither are the teachers awarded for good results as what is done for other subjects.

#### **5.4 Implications on the English Language proficiency of university students.**

Increasingly, there is a growing conviction among all concerned that there are certain deficits in the communication arsenals of university students in Zimbabwe in terms of proficiency in English. This perception suggests that there is in existence, a strange dichotomy between the country's high literacy rate and the levels of communicative ability in English (both competence and performance). The worrying situation of the inadequacies in the teaching and learning of ELCS in schools is corroborated by information from the university student core areas of study and other indicators such as, examiners reports, assignments, dissertations, theses and students presentations.

My experiences as a communication skills lecture bear testimony to acute evidence of mother tongue interference in university students' rendition of the phonology of English as it is always easy in most cases, for the initiated person to tell what part of Zimbabwe the student is from, as soon as they utter a word or a sentence. Also absent, is grammaticality in the English syntactical patterns of many of the students with clear evidence that notions such as, subject -verb concordance, tense and register, as well as the use of determiners are not entirely understood. Academic argumentation is also a challenge, given that many students have no ready grasp of the organic relationship between claims, ground and warrants. A consequence of this phenomenon is the quiet noticeable preference of most students for the use of subject- specific jargon and a tendency to behave as if content of their subject areas is classified or highly incomprehensible information that is beyond the scope of what they see as a constituency of laypersons.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

The major finding of this study is that the Zimbabwean education system has adequately failed to justify the continued existence of ELCS in the Advanced Level Curriculum since it is guilty of producing half baked school graduates. The teaching and learning situation obtaining in the schools calls into question the high pass rates witnessed in ELCS and the examination grading and marking system as students are 'passing without being taught'. All stakeholders; Curriculum Development Unit, Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council and the Ministry of Secondary and Primary Education need to go back to the drawing board and evaluate the way ELCS is taught and learnt in schools.

There is need for schools to have ELCS specialist teachers and the subject should be given equal treatment in terms of slots on the timetable as well as financial resources and materials. ELCS should also contribute to the points tally and become a requirement at all universities and tertiary institutions. Students, teachers and Institutional attitudes towards ELCS should be changed. While the subjects of the study were only seven schools, it is possible to apply the results of the research to the majority of the schools in the country.

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**APPENDIX 1****Modified Students English Language and Communication Skills Attitude Questionnaire**

1. In order to excel in my other subjects, i must have good ELCS.
  2. I can't see the point in learning ELCS\*
  3. Nobody is going to fail their other subjects for having poor ELCS. \*
  4. Developing my ELCS is just as important as developing my knowledge of other subjects which i am studying.
  5. ELCS lessons have helped me do well in other subjects.
  6. I haven't got the time to study for ELCS. \*
  7. The teacher makes the ELCS interesting
  8. Learning ELCS is interesting
  9. I can't be bothered to turn up for ELCS lessons\*
  10. The teacher shows us that the subject is not important. \*
  11. Learning ELCS has helped or will help facilitate good writing and presentation skills.
  12. ELCS has improved my ability to write good essays and to communicate well with teachers and students.
  13. ELCS teaching states the obvious \*
  14. Learning ELCS is fun
  15. The teacher marks and returns work on time
  16. Learning ELCS is too easy\*
  17. I don't need good ELCS to succeed in my studies\*
  18. The teacher doesn't give us homework\*
  19. I find it hard to admit having some problems with ELCS\*
  20. My ability to pass exams will get me through A Level, rather than my ability to communicate and use correct English.
  21. I find it difficult to take ELCS seriously\*
  22. Learning ELCS is important because my ability is a lifelong skill I will also use at university/tertiary institutions
  23. ELCS learning should be left to Arts students and not Sciences and Commercial students\*
  24. When i enrolled for A Level, i thought it was a really good idea to learn ELCS.
- \*Items negative and the score is reversed.

**APPENDIX 2.****Modified Teachers English Language and Communication Skills Attitude Questionnaire**

1. In order to excel in other subjects, students must have good ELCS.
2. I don't see the point in teaching ELCS\*
3. Students will not fail their other subjects for having poor ELCS. \*
4. Improving my ELCS teaching is just as important as improving my teaching of other subjects which i am
5. ELCS lessons have helped students do well in other subjects.
6. I haven't got the time to plan and research for ELCS lessons. \*
7. ELCS is interesting to teach.
8. Marking and planning for ELCS lessons is interesting.
9. I can't be bothered to turn up for ELCS lessons\*
10. I always show the students that the subject is not important. \*
11. Learning ELCS has helped or will help facilitate good writing and presentation skills of students.
12. ELCS has improved students ability to write good essays and to communicate well.
13. ELCS teaching states the obvious and in a repetition of O Level English Language Syllabus\*
14. Teaching ELCS is fun
15. I mark and return students work on time
16. Teaching ELCS is too easy\*
17. Students don't need good ELCS to succeed in their studies\*
18. I do not give the students homework\*
19. I find it hard to admit having some problems with the teaching of ELCS\*
20. Students ability to pass exams will push them through A Level, rather than their ability to communicate and use correct English.
21. I find it difficult to take ELCS lessons seriously\*
22. Teaching ELCS is important because it is a lifelong skill which students will also use at university/tertiary institutions.
23. ELCS learning should be left to Arts students and not Sciences and Commercial students\*
24. When i was asked to teach ELCS, i thought it was a really good idea to learn and teach ELCS.

\*Items negative and the score is reversed.