

## Summary

In the context of the economic and material constraints experienced by some countries while trying to provide quality education to all, this book investigates how the teaching and learning of secondary English can be improved despite such constraints. The study highlighted in the book takes its starting point from previous research and commentaries concerned with the constraints and performance of Zambian schooling over two decades (1980–2000). It examines this research and writing critically, and concludes that two widely-accepted theses are broadly correct. First, the poor state of Zambian schooling is primarily due to its poor resourcing by the national government, which in turn is a consequence of the poor state of the national economy and of policies pursued under pressure from international financial agencies. Second, both national needs and educational logic strongly suggest that Zambian schooling should be improved from the bottom up, that is, with priority initially being given to universal basic education and only subsequently to the further development of secondary and tertiary education.

In order to give it a sharp focus, the study of the book concentrates on the teaching and learning of English in Zambian secondary schools. As the main language of government, commerce and education in Zambia, but as the first language of only a small minority of students, English is both a key subject and a very challenging one for these schools. The author undertook a wide-ranging review of literature to establish a tentative best understanding of what good practice in the teaching and learning of English in Zambian secondary schools might be if there were no severe financial constraints. That understanding was then used as an initial framework for the empirical study. In unravelling the circumstances that lead to poor outcomes, the book provides evidence of the current nature of teaching and learning processes in English lessons and constraints that teachers and pupils experience.

The author argues that it is primarily through exploring the perspectives of teachers and students that useful insights can be gained into both current practice and effective practice in the distinctive Zambian context in the teaching and learning of English, into constraints that limit the effectiveness of current practice, and into the most important ways in which practice might be improved. In this respect, the author employed a case-study approach, which facilitated a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the solicitation, triangulation and analyses of data from multiple sources. In the first phase, the study used purposive sampling, collecting data primarily through questionnaires from six schools. In the second phase, data was collected in three other schools through focus groups and interviews; these were complemented by participant observation.

The study highlighted here generates a great deal of evidence to confirm the importance of financial constraints in limiting the effectiveness of teaching and learning in Zambian secondary schools. Other major findings laid down in this book include the following:

- Some teaching methods, such as the use of drama and role play, quizzes and games, which are widely regarded as elements of good practice in the teaching and learning of English, are not used frequently in Zambia. Nor are they highly valued by Zambian students and teachers, because such methods are not seen as contributing directly to academically-successful learning.
- A range of other teaching methods that are also widely regarded as elements of good practice in the teaching and learning of English – such as explaining to whole classes, group discussions, reading aloud in class, individual reading and writing and receiving feedback on written work – are used quite frequently and are more highly valued by Zambian teachers and students.
- Major constraints limiting the frequency and effectiveness with which such teaching methods are used were reported as including a shortage of teachers; teacher absence, lateness and lack of preparation; large and overcrowded classes; and lack of sufficient appropriate reading materials. Students complained especially of slow and inadequate feedback on their writing, which they viewed as a major constraint on their learning.

- Apart from resource constraints, a government policy of over-recruitment of pupils to secondary schools and pursuit of an ‘integration’ programme, whereby students with a visual or hearing impairment or other disability are sent to mainstream schools without appropriate resources or specialist expertise, was perceived by students and teachers as disadvantaging all concerned through reducing the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Conclusions drawn from evidence of teachers and students imply that a strategy lessening the constraints on teaching and learning might be the way forward. The situation at the time of writing (2008) is considered on the assumption that little improvement in the resourcing of secondary education is likely in the near future. A more optimistic assumption is also made that over a long period, such increased resources as they become available will and should be used to allow greater numbers of young people to benefit from secondary schooling. The reforms the author suggests are within the frameworks of democracy adapted to inside secondary schools and the framework on teacher cognition. The author has created a model based on – but necessarily going beyond – the evidence of teachers’ and students’ thinking, of ways in which those concerned with secondary education (including central government, school leaders, teachers and students) might modify their thinking, their policies and their practices so that with the already-available resources, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in English and other subjects may be possible. The proposals in this model are developed to meet the important criterion that their contribution to more effective teaching and learning would be likely to be maintained when the financing of schooling is improved. The model has three principles: first, making use of pupils’ expertise as educators; second, moving towards a flexible and democratic regime; and third, maximising the use of teachers’ expertise and existing skills.

The structure of the book is as follows: chapter 1 sets the overview, background and methodology of the study highlighted. Chapter 2 focuses on educational crisis in Zambia and lays a foundation about the context of the problems facing the education sector, that is, the economic and social dilemmas in the context of which the Zambian education system operates. Chapter 3 follows from chapter 2 and centres on analysing literature on good and effective practice of English teaching, drawing from literature in countries with fewer economic constraints than Zambia. This chapter lays further foundations for the precise formulation of research questions about the teaching and learning of secondary English in Zambia. Evidence gener-

ated in the empirical study is presented and explained in chapter 4 as findings from pupils' and teachers' perspectives. This final chapter seeks resolution of the problems formulated at the start of the research. It makes clear the research findings and seeks to propose ways of improving the teaching and learning of secondary English, perhaps by providing a model under which such improvement could be undertaken.