

An investigation into English second language competence and performance of Shona and Ndebele first language learners

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Abstract

The thrust of the study was to investigate the common ESL practices towards proficiency amongst O^o level learners who are L1 speakers of either Shona or Ndebele and who are from either a rural or an urban setting. The aim of the study was to scrutinize how a learner's first language and the rural and urban environment influence ESL proficiency. The aim was to establish how rural and urban settings condition ESL proficiency and how ESL proficiency differs between these two settings. The other aim of the study was to establish the strategies that are used by teachers and learners in ESL teaching and learning and also to evaluate the effectiveness of such strategies. The study was qualitative in nature although a limited quantitative design was employed in the presentation of frequency tables. The study used a case study design. The information that was used in this study was gathered through the use of proficiency tests that were administered to forty O^o level learners and through content analysis of learners' essays which were extracted from their essay exercise books. Sixteen O^o level English language teachers, six English language examiners, one subject manager of English language and two curriculum developers were interviewed. The secondary data also played an important role in the study. The results of the study showed that teachers and learners use a number of strategies in the teaching and learning of ESL of which some of the strategies that they use have previously not been documented by other L2 researchers. It was also realized that learners in rural areas are at a disadvantage as compared to those in rural schools and such challenges include lack of exposure, inadequate reading materials, faulty instruction, unavailability of libraries and some other social issues. The major conclusion that was made in this study was that ESL learning and teaching strategies are of crucial importance to competence and performance in ESL proficiency.