

Teachers' Perceptions Towards the Usefulness of Lesson Plan Manuals in the Teaching of Language Arts at the Junior Secondary School level

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of Lesson Plan Manuals (LPMs) in the teaching of Language Arts at the Junior Secondary School level within Bo using data from an MA dissertation. Since the introduction of the Lesson Plan Manuals in 2016, a study to assess the impact of their use in schools has not been done. It is based on this that an assessment was carried out to seek the opinion of Language Arts teachers with regards to the use of the Lesson Plan Manuals. It was also intended to investigate whether pupils' performance in Language Arts has improved or not since the introduction of the Lesson Plan Manuals. The study adopted a qualitative study design and non-probabilistic sample design paradigms. A total of forty (40) Language Arts teachers at the Junior Secondary School level were purposefully selected to serve as respondents for this study. Twenty-five (25) respondents completed and returned the five-point Likert scale that was used for data collection. Respondents were also interviewed in focused group discussions on some key issues that were not captured in the questionnaires. The results indicate that Lesson Plan Manuals in Language Arts are available in most schools. However, not all pupils have access to these manuals, which makes it difficult for most of the learners to follow the steps and actively participate in the lessons. It was also revealed that with the use of the Lesson Plan Manuals, the performance of pupils has gradually improved, although some teachers need training in the use of these Lesson Plan Manuals.

Key words: Lesson Plan Manual, Language Arts, Teaching, Reading Skills, Performance

INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of English as a second language often have a number of challenges ranging from poor lesson plan preparation by teachers, lack of requisite resources, non-conducive classroom environment, negative attitude of learners etc. A combination of these factors are often the reasons why pupils' performance in examinations has been abysmally low. Ideal teaching that provides the learners the opportunity to learn concepts and relate appropriately to one another in a learning situation requires adequate professional preparation and planning (Woodward, 2009). It is obvious that learning and comprehension of ideas could only occur when the teacher provides the learners their needs, and such needs have to be carefully described in the lesson plan, a structure that dictates the way a lesson should be taught and the activities learners need to do during the lesson (Milko-va, 2012; Woodward, 2009; Serdyukov & Ryan, 2008). When lessons are planned very well, with a focus to making sure learners' interests are reflected the outcome is that learners acquire the skills and concepts taught in a productively remarkable way (Strassle, 2014). Also, teacher planning is considered an important aspect for educational researches

and policy. Also, teacher planning is considered an important aspect for educational researches and policy designing in which 1.) decisions about planning activities are identified as one of the major problems affecting the quality, quantity and nature of classroom instruction, 2.) planning decisions may have effects on instruction, 3.) the cost of altering and adjusting planning decisions is less thereby making planning to serve as a powerful tool that improves classroom instruction (Smith, 1977:1).

The main reason for planning a lesson is to improve on the delivery method in the classroom so as to enable both the learner and the teacher to have a clear idea as to what is to be learned and taught in a particular lesson. This is aimed at improving the performance of learners when it comes to assessment of learning. However, in Sierra Leone, the performance of many learners particularly at public exams is abysmal especially in Language Arts. Based on the performance of pupils particularly in Language Arts at the BECE level, one may tend to believe that there might have been a neglect in the use of lesson plan which is supposed to guide the teaching process or that there may be no adequate lesson planning done on the part of the teacher. Recent studies have shown that pupils' reading comprehension ability is so low,

and this might be a cause for their poor performance in public examinations as they cannot read well. The Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA) conducted in 2018 indicated that pupils who completed 8 to 11 years of schooling, i.e. JSS 2 and SSS 2 respectively, most of them only demonstrated skills equivalent to those expected from a primary school pupil. This shows that most of the pupils who enter for public examinations are not adequately prepared for such examinations. The Montrose (2021) baseline study on children's developmental reading skills using the Early Grade Reading Assessment tool indicated that learners' performance in the sub-tasks of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, reading fluency and reading comprehension were unsatisfactory.

During the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 2014, educational institutions were temporarily closed for long periods of time, which negatively affected all learners. In 2015 when the EVD was contained, the Government of Sierra Leone with funding from DFID developed the Accelerated Curriculum. This was aimed at providing requisite training for teachers to use a revised curriculum that would make for the lost time during the Ebola pandemic. Even with this intervention, the performance of pupils did not improve. In 2015, the Secondary School Education Improvement Project which was part of the UK Department for International Development support to Post-Ebola Recovery Priorities in Education funded the preparation of Lesson Plan Manuals (LPMs) in Language Arts and Mathematics for JSS and English Language and Mathematics for SSS. The main objective of the LPMs was to ease teaching on the part of the teachers by providing the requisite guidelines according to how they should teach and to provide the pupils the resource materials that aid their learning. This was based on the assumption that using the Child Centered Teaching Techniques (CCTT) posed a lot of difficulties for the teacher to complete a lesson within forty minutes due largely to the many activities the pupils had to do. However, from an observatory outlook, the Language Arts Lesson Plan Manual, since its introduction in the school system, has been differently viewed by Language Arts teachers. While many Language Arts teachers view the Language Arts Lesson Plan Manual as a suitable aid and guideline to their teaching, a lot more consider it also as a teaching methodology that is not exhaustive in itself and therefore requires the teachers' additional inputs.

This study therefore seeks to sound the views of Language Arts teachers about the usefulness of the Lesson Plan Manual in the teaching and learning Language Arts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that this study is concerned with is Language Teaching Methodology. In the most obvious sense, Language Teaching Methodology is an approach that tends to clarify the best ways a language should be taught and also the ideal means through which learners learn the concepts and theories taught.

A lesson plan is considered to be a detailed description by a teacher about a course to teach or the path the lesson is expected to take. A lesson plan is developed on a daily basis by a teacher to guide the learning process. The details

in the lesson plan vary according to how a particular teacher prefers (Milkova, 2012, Borich, 2007, Cicek, & Tok, 2010).

According to Woodward (2009), lesson planning is what working teachers do when they decide that they are planning lessons and courses. He further states that when we say planning, it involves a number of factors which are not limited to the consideration given to students, thinking about the nature of content to be taught; the materials and activities that a lesson should include etc.

According to Woodward (2009:1), a good lesson plan is the type where there is enough language learning going on and where the learners and the teachers:

- feel comfortable physically, psychologically and socially
- know one another no matter how little
- know the purpose why they are together
- should infer what they wish to get out of the lesson
- where the participants are knowledgeable about what to learn
- are aware of what they have learned
- have the feeling of the way they learn best
- know the reasons they are doing some activities
- do and learn things that are worth doing and learning outside the classroom
- take the initiative to learn the difference between good and bad and make decisions and judging objectivity.
- begin to show signs that good characteristics will continue after schooling.

Looking at the above variables that Woodward thinks a lesson should have before it is considered a good lesson, they are indeed variables that characterize a good lesson even though some of these variables are hard to be applied and or achieved in certain lessons due to certain prevailing occurrences. Learners do not necessarily need to know the reasons for undertaking certain activities in a lesson. Sometimes, through conditioning, they come to learn at the end of the lesson the reasons for having undertaken a particular activity during the lesson (McComas, 2014, Manmeet, 2013).

A lesson plan is considered to be a teacher's guide for the lessons to be taught and it significantly serves to give the teacher a strong direction as to where they expect their learners to be by the end of the lesson. This is so because for every lesson the teacher must clearly state what h/she intends to achieve by the end of the lesson in the form of objectives that have to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound. Research proves that the way the learners learn equals to the way the teacher plans (Milkova, 2012; Serdyukov & Ryan, 2008).

Since (Milkova, 2012) states that we acquire the ability to learn to plan lessons very well, the result that may show is a positive one. She states the following as characteristics of good lesson planning.

- Every lesson plan should be written.
- The objectives of the lesson should be clearly stated.
- The lesson plan should have bearing to appropriate teaching method and how it can be used.
- There should be continuous review of the content of the lesson plan.

- Relevant examples or illustrations should be included in lesson planning.
- The lesson plan should be inspirational and motivational.
- The time for a topic to be taught should be suitably pre-determined.
- Lesson aids that support the lesson should be clearly stated.

Enero (2012) and Woodward (2009), gave certain pre-requisites for lesson planning which are summarized as follows:

- When planning a lesson, the teacher must first have adequate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter to be taught as no teacher will effectively teach a topic that they do not know.
- Before planning a lesson, know the learners or the children for whom the lesson is meant. To plan good for a lesson requires knowledge of the teaching units to be taught and to whom they are taught.
- The teacher should be familiar with different teaching structures, approaches, methods and techniques suitable for teaching lesson.
- The teacher should consider the type and nature of materials needed for the teaching of a particular lesson. A teacher needs materials that facilitate the teaching process.
- The teacher should have adequate understanding of the objectives of the lesson including aims of the subject and those of the specific lesson

Considering the importance of lesson planning in the teaching process, the Lesson Plan Manuals were developed to enhance effective teaching and learning as some teachers do not make efforts to prepare lesson plans. The Lesson Plan Manuals also help to save time as all the topics in the syllabus were outlined and lesson plans developed for each topic.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this study is to assess the perceptions of Language Arts teachers towards the usefulness of Lesson Plan Manuals in the teaching and learning of Language Arts in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone.

The following objectives were set in order to achieve the aim of this study:

- i. To find out whether the Language Arts Lesson Plan Manuals are available in the schools.
- ii. To determine whether pupils have access to the Language Arts Lesson Plan Manuals in their schools.
- iii. To determine whether some areas/steps in the Lesson Plan Manuals need to be improved on.
- iv. To find out whether there has been any improvement in the performance of pupils with the use of Lesson Plan Manuals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

- i. Are the Lesson Plan Manuals available in the schools?
- ii. Do pupils have access to the Language Arts Lesson Plan Manuals?

- iii. Do some areas/steps in the Lesson Plan Manuals need to be improved?
- iv. Have pupils' performance improved with the use of the Lesson Plan Manuals?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study was a cross-sectional descriptive design. This design is preferable in subjects expected to respond to a series of statements or questions using a questionnaire or an interview pertaining variables that are measured in time for a defined population. (Jackson 2003). Respondents were Language Arts Teachers who were selected from five Junior Secondary Schools in Bo to respond to five-point Likert scale questionnaire which required them to give their views on the use of the Language Arts Lesson Plan Manual. Questionnaires were distributed to forty (40) respondents. However, twenty-five (25) respondents representing 62.5% completed and returned the questionnaires. Also, interviews were conducted to obtain the views and responses of five respondents, four of whom are teachers and the other one an administrator. In total, 30 respondents represented in data were analysed.

The data were analysed by the use of arithmetic means and results presented using tables and graphs. Responses obtained through interviews were analysed qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 25 fully filled and usable questionnaires out of 60 were obtained from respondents for the study. This represents 62.5% response rate and a non-response rate of 37.5%.

Demographic Information

This section outlines the demographic information of the respondents, which include qualification, teaching experience and gender.

The table above shows that majority of the respondents (84%) were trained and qualified to teach at the Junior Secondary School level.

This table shows that 64% of the respondents had taught for at least five years, which means majority of them were experienced teachers,

The data in the table above shows a predominance of male respondents over females. This is the general situation at the secondary school level. As we move on to the senior secondary school level, we find fewer female teachers

Availability of Lesson Plan Manuals in Schools

The first research question was to find out whether the Lesson Plan Manuals were available in the schools. The responses obtained are represented in figure 2 below.

Premised on the many complaints and side talks from teachers about the inadequacy of the Lesson Plan Manuals and sometimes the lack of Lesson Plan Manuals in some schools since this lesson plan format was introduced in the

Sierra Leone Educational system in 2015, a question was designed to elicit teachers' responses about the availability or unavailability of the Lesson Plan Manuals in schools. From the responses obtained, 72% of the respondents strongly agreed and 28 % agreed that Lesson Plan Manuals are available in the schools. This means that all of the respondents agreed that the Lesson Plan Manuals are available in schools. The issue that needs be addressed therefore has to do with making the Lesson Plan Manuals accessible to the learners.

Access to Lesson Plan Manuals

Access to Lesson Plan Manuals is very key when it comes to classroom teaching and learning. Figure 2 below represents the views of respondents regarding the accessibility of Lesson Plan Manuals in the schools.

In terms of accessibility of the Lesson Plan Manuals, 56% agreed that their pupils have access to the Lesson Plan Manuals, while 40% disagreed and 4% were not sure. This shows from the responses that accessibility of Lesson Plan Manuals poses a challenge in some schools as 40% is a relatively high percentage for non-accessibility. Schools administrators need to put mechanisms in place in order to make Lesson Plan Manuals accessible to both teachers and pupils

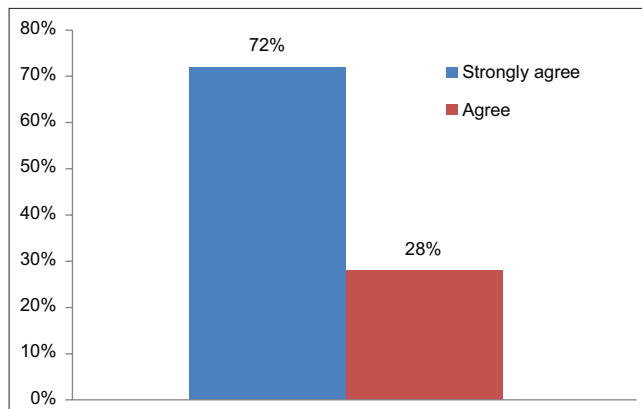


Figure 1. Distribution of responses on the availability of LPMs in schools.
Source: Field survey data 2021

Some areas/steps of the Lesson Plan Manuals should be Improved

Respondents were asked to give their views as to whether some areas or steps in the Lesson Plan Manuals need to be improved, and their responses are presented in the figure below:

All the respondents were of the opinion that some modifications need to be done on some areas. This is in line with some of the discussions with teachers who said teachers need to be adequately trained in the use of these Lesson Plan Manuals. It became evident from some of the discussions that some teachers cannot adapt Lesson Plan Manuals to their everyday teaching.

Pupils' Performance Is Much Better Now Than Before

Respondents were asked to determine whether pupils' performance has improved now than before, and their responses are presented in the figure below.

If pupils' performance has not become worse now than before, then we expect that it has become much better now than before. In order to be assured of this conclusion, a statement was designed to obtain responses from participants about how better their pupils' performance has become as a result of the use of the Lesson Plan Manual. As indicated above 60% agreed that the performance of pupils has improved with the introduction of the Lesson Plan Manuals. However, 20% of the respondents

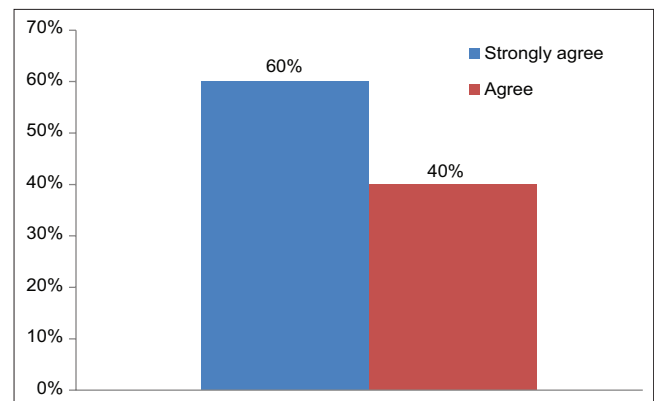


Figure 3. Distribution of responses on whether the areas/stages or steps are to be improved.
Source: Field survey data 2021

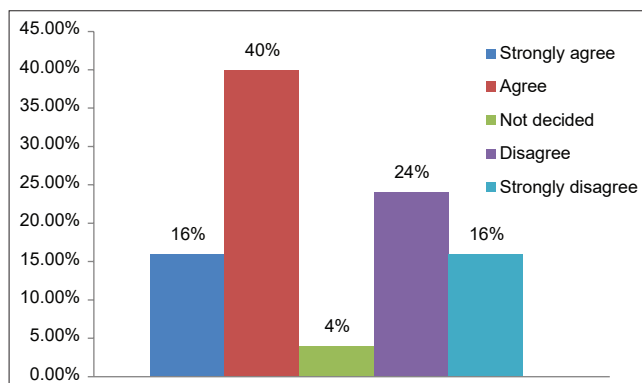


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by how their pupils access the LPM.
Source: Field survey data 2021

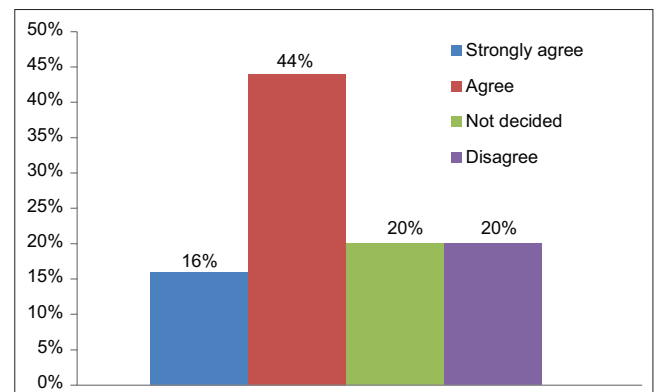


Figure 4. Pupils' performance has improved with the use of Lesson Plan Manuals.
Source: Field survey data 2021

Table 1. Qualification of respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
M.Ed	1	4.0%
B.Ed/B.A Ed	7	28.0%
HTC (Secondary)	13	52.0%
HTC (Primary)	1	4.0%
Diploma	1	4.0%
BA//BSc. General	1	4.0%
M.Sc.	1	4.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Source: Field survey data 2021

Table 2. Teaching experience

Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than five years	9	36.0%
5-10 years	6	24.0%
11-15 years	6	24.0%
16-20 years	2	8.0%
21-25 years	1	4.0%
26-30 years	1	4.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Source: Field survey data 2021

Table 3. Gender of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	21	84.0%
Female	4	16.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Source: Field survey data 2021

disagreed and another 20% were undecided. Respondents were not sure whether pupils' performance had improved as result of using the Lesson Plan Manuals. They claimed not to have any figures at hand to justify their position. Those who said the pupils' performance had improved cited some instances where more candidates have been passing Language Arts at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussions of results, the following conclusions were reached and recommendations made

The Lesson Plan Manuals in Language Arts are available in schools and pupils and teachers have access to them. The only problem is that some parents are reluctant to sign for the Lesson Plan Manuals because of the policy that when a pupil misplaces the Lesson Plan Manual, they must pay for it.

Although the Lesson Plan Manuals are available in schools, they are inadequate for the number of pupils in most schools. The distribution of the Lesson Plan Manuals to the schools was not done based on the enrolment in the schools. Some highly populated schools were supplied few Lesson Plan Manuals which makes it difficult for all the pupils to access the Lesson Plan Manuals. This means that pupils do

not have the opportunity to extensively use the Lesson Plan Manuals as most of them are not allowed to take them home.

The steps and some aspects, particularly Literature and Creative Composition of the Lesson Plan Manuals are not exhaustive. The teachers suggested that there is need to improve on these areas of the Lesson Plan Manuals if the performance of pupils is to improve.

The following recommendations have been presented:

- Government should ensure there are adequate number of the Lesson Plan Manuals and the Pupils' Handbooks in all schools across Sierra Leone.
- Developers of the Lesson Plan Manuals should review some aspects of the Lesson Plan Manuals so as to fully cater for all topics in the Language Arts Syllabus.
- There should be in-service training of Language Arts teachers on the use the Lesson Plan Manuals.

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