Learning from Africa: English

A report of Umalusi's research comparing English syllabuses and examinations in South Africa with those in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia

An Umalusi Research Report
January 2008

PUBLISHED BY

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ISBN 978-0-9814176-3-9

Layout & Design
CJ Graphics

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Acknowledgements

The report was written by Dr Stephanie Matseleng Allais and Ms Ana Ferreira.

This research was designed by Stephanie Matseleng Allais. We are grateful to Professor Yael Shalem for her assistance in the research design, and to Professor Harold Noah for reading drafts of the report and assisting in thinking through our approach to the research as well as its implications.

Dr Heidi Bolton, Ms Liz Burroughs, and Dr Jeanne Gamble were critical readers.

The analysis was carried out by the following researchers: Ms Ana Ferreira, Dr Natasha Distiller, Ms Melanie Grobler, Ms Harriet Davis, and Ms Kay Jaffer.

The research was managed by Ms Shireen Badat with assistance from Ms Ramadimetja Phaladi.

Umalusi's Research Forum provided guidance at various points. Members of the research forum over the period during the research included:

Professor Linda Chisholm, Human Sciences Research Council
Professor Magdalena Fourie, University of Stellenbosch
Professor Zelda Groener, University of the Western Cape
Dr Anil Kanjee, Human Sciences Research Council
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Professor Nan Yeld, University of Cape Town

Introduction

This short subject report is an addendum to the report emanating from an Umalusi study aimed at understanding how the South Africa senior secondary school certificate compares with those of three other African countries. The full research report is entitled *Learning from Africa: A report of Umalusi's research comparing syllabuses and examinations in South Africa with those in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia*. The research, in comparing South Africa's Matric certificate with the senior secondary school certificates of Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia, explored various aspects of the curriculum and examinations systems, including the intended and examined curriculum in four subjects.

The aim of the research was to learn from English-speaking African countries in different regions, in order to contribute to improving the intended and examined curricula in the Further Education and Training band in South Africa. Umalusi believes that it is valuable to understand our systems better by considering those in other countries, and hopes that this kind of comparative analysis will allow South Africans to stand back and achieve a distance from our internal debates. The research also cautions South Africa not to assume that our education system is superior to those found elsewhere in Africa.

The South African context of the research is a new curriculum which is in the process of being implemented in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (senior secondary school). The FET phase, which covers the final three years of secondary schooling (Grades 10 to 12), culminates in the National Senior Certificate, the certificate which is to replace the current Senior Certificate. The implementation of the new curriculum began in Grade 10 in January 2006, and the first cohort of

Grade 12 learners will write the new National Senior Certificate in 2008.

The research aimed to understand how South Africa compares with the other countries, in terms of both the old curriculum and examinations, which were still in use at the time of conducting the research, as well as the new curriculum. It attempted to understand what we can learn from the other countries with regard to systemic issues, as well as lessons for our new curricula and examinations on the basis of the subject comparison.

The study was conducted through meetings and open-ended interviews with officials in all four countries, supplemented by analysis of documentary information. Syllabus—and 2004 examination documentation was collected from each country and analyzed by groups of South African experts.

The full report provides a synthesis of what was learnt from the comparative study. It deals mainly with three issues:

- An overview of aspects of the education systems in the four countries. i.e. years in school, examinations and certification;
- A brief overview of comparisons of the intended and examined curriculum in four subjects at school-exit level, i.e. Biology, Science, English and Mathematics;
- Some reflections on the new curriculum in South Africa.

This short subject report, which provides a more detailed analysis of what evaluators found in their comparison of the English courses across the four countries, should ideally be read in conjunction with the main report.

The draft base report, which contains more detailed elaborations of the findings, is available on Umalusi's website as *Evaluating syllabuses and examinations: An Umalusi technical report comparing the syllabuses and examinations from Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia*, and may be of interest to subject experts.

English courses in the four countries

The English courses under consideration are not narrowly equivalent, and are shown in Table 1 below, as well as discussed further in the text which follows.

Table 1: English courses in the four countries

Certificates	Courses in the study	Rules of combination for English courses
Ghana Secondary Senior School Certificate	English (compulsory) Literature in English (elective)	Learners must enroll for English, but can additionally enroll for Literature in English.
Kenya Secondary School Certificate	English (compulsory)	All learners must enroll for English.
Zambia School Certificate	English Language (compulsory) Literature in English (elective)	Learners must enroll for English Language but can additionally enroll for Literature in English.
South Africa Senior Certificate (old)	English First Language Higher Grade English First Language Standard Grade English Second Language Higher Grade English Second Language Standard Grade	Learners must enroll for two languages, one of which must be at First Language level, and the second at either First or Second Language level. One of these languages must be the medium of instruction, which for most learners is English, and for a minority is Afrikaans. No indigenous languages are media of instruction in senior secondary school.
South Africa National Senior Certificate (new)	English Home Language English First Additional Language English Second Additional Language	Learners must enroll for two languages, one of which must be at Home Language level, and the second at either Home Language or First Additional Language level. One of these languages must be the

continued/p.6

Table 1: English courses in the four countries continued

Certificates	Courses in the study	Rules of combination for English courses
South Africa National Senior Certificate (new) continued		medium of instruction, which for most learners is English, and for a minority is Afrikaans. No indigenous languages are media of instruction in senior secondary school.

Ghana offers two English courses: a compulsory course in English which includes some literature, and a separate *Literature in English* course offered as an elective. Kenya offers a single compulsory course in English which covers both language and literature. Zambia offers two English courses, an English Language course, which is compulsory course and does not include a literature component, and a separate *Literature in English* course, offered as an elective. South Africa is the only one of the four countries in the study to have different courses for English First and Second language. The old South African curriculum differentiates between levels of difficulty (Higher and Standard Grade). In the new curriculum, there is no Higher and Standard grade differentiation, and the courses are referred to as Home Language and First Additional Language. There is also a Second Additional Language (third language) course. All of these courses contain both language and literature components; there is no separate literature course.

Thus, of the nine courses under analysis in this research, seven are general English courses which are compulsory (or, in the case of South Africa, virtually compulsory); and two are specialist literature courses which are optional. The most obvious points of comparison in the discussion which follows are among the general English courses. They comprise what are considered to be essential language skills for all students and a comparative analysis of these syllabuses provides interesting insights into how English and English literacy skills are perceived in each of these contexts.

The situation is different with the specialist literature courses. In Ghana and Zambia, the countries in which these elective courses are offered, approximately 10% of the students take these courses. These courses

therefore cater for the top English students who have a particular interest in literature. Despite the fact that it offers a specialist literature course, Ghana includes a literature component in its general language course; whereas Zambia does not.

A discussion of the different intended curricula, followed by a discussion of the examined curricula from the four countries.

However, it must be noted that the discussion below focuses disproportionately on the South African curricula. There are at least three reasons for this. Firstly, the evaluation is a South African one, aiming primarily to learn about the South African curricula through a comparison with others; in addition, evaluators were all South African, and have far greater knowledge both of the curricula and of contextual factors. Secondly, there are two curricula, the old and the new in South Africa. Thirdly, South Africa is the only country to have a distinction between different levels of English (first and second language in the old curriculum: home, first additional, and second additional in the new curriculum). The existence of these different courses leads to far more curricula in English, particularly when added to the existence of levels of difficulty in the old South African curriculum (Higher and Standard Grade). The sheer number weights the discussion towards South Africa, as do the problems with the nature of the distinction that is intended in creating different courses in relation to the actual curriculum documents.

The intended curriculum

Aims

For the compulsory or virtually compulsory language syllabuses in all the countries, there is an acknowledgement that English is an additional language for learners, one that is required for education and/or for the world of work. The aim of developing communicative competence is emphasized, although the Ghanaian general language course does suggest that students at this level should already be communicatively competent in English and that this competence is being extended. The old South African English First Language syllabus and the new Home Language curriculum statement assume that the students they cater for are already fully communicatively competent in English. In the South African context, the old English Second Language syllabus and the new English First Additional Language curriculum statement bear the official responsibility of developing the communicative competence of those whose primary language is not English.

There is little explicit awareness in any of the curriculum documents of the multilingual African contexts in which these syllabuses are being enacted. Apart from in the new South African curriculum statements, no reference is made in any of the curriculum documentation to the students' multilingual resources, or to the cultural, identity, and cognitive implications of learning another language and of learning in another language. The aims of the old South African English Second Language syllabus make explicit reference to a broader sociocultural context and the need for the language curriculum to operate within a framework which supports access and diversity at various levels.

Views of language

The English evaluators in this study argue that most of the language syllabuses are firmly located within a liberal humanist paradigm which is primarily concerned with enhancing individual communication skills and which sees language as a set of skills which are neutral, value-free and can be acquired by all. They argue that there are other ways of thinking about language, literacy and language pedagogy. When literacy is viewed as a social practice, its context-embeddedness and its ideological implications are foregrounded. Such a view of language and literacy would require a critical pedagogy which would interrogate the use of language, and the construction of texts and their relations to social power. The evaluators felt that the new South African curriculum shows some advance in this respect, arguing that it provides the most comprehensive and multifaceted definition of language in the present study.

The most emphatically stated aim of the new South African curricula (the section dealing with purpose is identical across all three courses) is to do away with language barriers and to enable communication across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Unlike the English curricula in the other countries and the old South African curricula, these new curricula display heightened awareness of their social contexts in terms language, culture, and even history, and seem to take particularly seriously their role as instruments of re-socialization. Attention is paid to the multiple functions of language and its social embeddedness, as well as to its role in cognition and the acquisition of knowledge. In addition to the general language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the curriculum highlights the need to expand learners' repertoires to include twenty-first century literacies is such as those pertaining to media, information technology, and cultural and critical literacies. Language-specific outcomes include the skills of using language for academic learning, for analytical and independent thinking, and for critical and creative thinking; to explore human experience; and to express and develop values such as reflecting on alternative worldviews and engaging ethically with various human rights issues.

Critical readers of the evaluators' reports contested their views, arguing

that Umalusi needs to explore whether or not the focus on alternative literacies is appropriate in the context of learners who have not in fact mastered the language sufficiently for basic communicative competence, and whether a more traditional curriculum focused more directly on mastering the reading of continuous prose may not be of more service in the South African context.

Evaluators pointed out that the purpose of the three new South African language curricula is identical. It seems odd, they argued, to design three separate courses, without having different purposes in mind for each of them. The issue of lack of differentiation between the three courses is one which emerges consistently throughout the research, and is discussed in more detail below.

The role of literature

The literature component of the compulsory courses is generally held to provide rich opportunity for the ongoing development of reading skills and to provide meaningful exposure to language in action. As such, the aims of these literature syllabuses tend to be rather instrumentalist, using literature as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. This tends to be the case whether the stated aim of the course is to develop communicative competence in English, or to develop moral individuals capable of independent thought.

The importance of the study of literature is mentioned in both the Kenyan and old South African First Language syllabuses, and Ghana's specialist literature optional course states a number of very explicit aims around developing a love and appreciation for literature and a flair for writing. In these syllabuses, literature is linked to conceptual development and, in the Kenyan syllabus and the Ghanaian specialist syllabus, with critical thinking. The old South African English Second Language syllabus and the Zambian compulsory course make no reference to the significance of literature in their aims.

It is interesting to note that reference to literature is absent from the aims of the new curricula in South Africa. Other syllabuses foreground literature by referring, in their aims, to its role in developing language and

thinking skills. In the new South African curriculum, while literature is evident under the reading outcome, its role seems to have shifted somewhat—literature seems to be less explicitly valued in its own right, and more seen as a tool for teaching reading.

Evaluators mentioned but did not problematize the fact that the aims of the new curriculum statements for all three English courses in the new South African curriculum are identical, arguing that aims could be identical, but methods should be different for the different courses. However, if aims are supposed to create a sense of purpose for an intended curriculum, this seems to be problematic, as the existence of three different courses implies that they serve different purposes.

Content

Language

All the compulsory language courses develop reading skills using both literary and non-literary texts, although the Zambian compulsory course seems to include literary texts only in the most cursory way, perhaps because there is a separate literature curriculum. Most of the compulsory language syllabuses mention the same kinds of texts as suggested teaching resources, but evaluators argued that the South African syllabuses demonstrate a greater awareness of texts that go beyond the more conventional types, as is discussed later. The differences in text selection emerge more clearly in the non-literary texts selected for the assessment of language and reading comprehension in the examination papers.

Literature

Although the study of literature across all courses includes some attention to literary concepts and forms, it stands to reason that the specialist literature courses are the ones that should teach literature in a way that goes to the core of what constitutes literary study. In this regard, in terms of establishing a literary knowledge base of considerable breadth, the Ghanaian Literature in English course is particularly successful. The Zambian Literature in English course covers a range of texts but does not deal with as many genres—it omits poetry and makes no reference to oral literature. It does not make a point of establishing the literary terrain by dealing systematically

with literary concepts and terminology as the Ghanaian curriculum does. The Ghanaian and Kenyan courses, compulsory and elective, foreground oral literature, something not evident in the South African syllabuses. Although South African and Ghanaian syllabuses strike a balance between texts by writers from Africa and those by other writers; the Kenyan and Zambian syllabuses prioritize the selection of texts by African writers.

A key problematic area across courses in all the countries is a lack of clear specification in syllabus documentation regarding the number and types of texts to be covered in each year of study. Although courses differ slightly in the amount of detail provided on this aspect, none of the curricula provide the kind of detailed specification needed to ensure that teachers have unambiguous guidelines about the amount of reading the syllabus requires.

For the new curricula in South Africa, comprehensive lists of literary and non-literary texts provide guidance on *selection of text types*, while the assessment standards provide guidance on putting these texts to use. However here also, no clear specification is provided as to how many texts and how many types of texts, literary and non-literary, should be covered in each year of study other than what can be gleaned from sample assessment programmes provided in the *Subject Assessment Guidelines*.

With regard to types of literary texts in the new South African curricula, folklore, film study, biographies and autobiographies are added to the usual four genres—novel, drama, short stories and poetry. The range of literary texts therefore is broader than those of previous South African syllabuses, at least as far as the intended curriculum is concerned. Literature examinations from Grade 10 to Grade 12 assess the novel, drama, and poetry. Presumably at some point a circular will inform teachers of what specific works are prescribed for the Grade 12 syllabus. This seems to happen only because literature is externally assessed in Grade 12. The examination paper for 'Language in context' provides no such guidance in terms of types or number of non-literary texts since it refers in an open-ended way to 'a variety of texts'.

It is likely that, in all countries, additional information about texts is supplied to schools in separate documentation, but evaluators felt that it

would be helpful to include it as part of syllabus documents. They argued that without clear guidelines there is the danger that these syllabuses could be interpreted in ways that result in reading-impoverished courses which would deprive students of vital opportunities for furthering their language proficiency. Not having clear guidelines about classroom coverage creates the danger that only the texts that are evaluated under examination conditions will be covered. Given the narrow range of text types that tend to be evaluated in examinations, this could also lead to limited variety in choice of classroom texts.

Because there is no specific stipulation provided as to how many texts should be covered in each year of study, it appears—at the level of the intended curriculum—that there are scant differences among the three different language curricula. In the *Subject Assessment Guidelines*, however, some differentiation between these curricula at the level of the literature syllabus do emerge. This is discussed further in the section on assessment specifications.

A further issue emerges with regard to the literature component of the new South African curricula. While a skills-based approach to language learning understandably treats both literary and non-literary texts as 'reading content', the curriculum statement appears to significantly dilute what has come to be known as 'the literature syllabus', even to the extent that it may be possible for a teacher to cover all (or most) of the assessment standards without adequate focus on extended literary texts. This is the danger in backgrounding the role of extended narrative texts and sustained reading in any language syllabus.

A reading of the *Subject Assessment Guidelines*, suggests there is a mismatch between the weighting of literature in the curriculum statements and its weighting in summative assessment guidelines. In the curriculum statements, literary texts are explicitly dealt with in only one of the four assessment standards under only one of the four learning outcomes (Reading). In concrete terms, specific attention to literary texts takes up only 4 of the 27 pages given to the elaboration of assessment standards. A close look at the structure of the summative assessment for Grade 12, however, reveals that literature has an entire examination dedicated to it, which accounts

for 80 of the 300 marks allocated to the final examinations. Therefore, despite its low profile in the curriculum statement, literature weighs in at over 26% of the summative assessment at Grade 12 level.

Writing

There is also, in the new South African curricula, a lack of specification about the amount of writing that students should be doing during the course of each year of study. Although different types of writing are specified by each syllabus, no indication is provided of how much extended writing should be required from students. Again this raises concerns about whether students are being given enough opportunities to develop their writing skills outside of formal assessment situations. It is also worth noting that although most syllabuses, in their assessment specifications, require essay responses in the Literature examinations, the IEB syllabus in South Africa is the only one which provides explicit guidance on the teaching of the literary essay as a genre.

A lack of continuity across the different documents which comprise the new South African curricula is evidenced in discussion of the writing component in the various curriculum documents. In the *Subject Statements*, the writing component is dominated by a process-writing approach. The *Learning Programme Guidelines* then apply a genre-based approach to writing, by providing extensive useful input on different genres of essays which learners are required to write. And finally, in the *Subject Assessment Guidelines*, the literary essay, which is not mentioned in either of the other two documents, makes an appearance. Although these various documents do not actually contradict one another (they are not dealing with things that are mutually exclusive), there is poor articulation among them. The implication for teachers is that it is not possible to fully understand any aspect of the curriculum *without* scrutinizing all three documents thoroughly and synthesizing their content.

Critical language awareness and alternative literacies in the new South African curricula

The inclusion of critical language awareness in the new South African curricula provides the critical orientation to language that was absent in the previous South African curricula, and it is also absent in the curricula

of the other three countries in the study. However, reference to this new area of language is embedded into the learning outcomes and assessment standards in ways that may not be helpful to teachers who are not already conversant with critical language awareness. One of the evaluators in the study cited strong anecdotal evidence that experienced educators had perceived references to critical language awareness as merely emphasizing the need to apply 'critical thinking' to language rather than as introducing an entirely new language paradigm. This suggests that new material cannot simply be inserted into the curriculum and assumed to be understood by all.

The incorporation of alternative literacies into the new South African curricula widens the notion of what counts as a 'text' and thereby broadens the range of texts that can function as classroom resources. These inclusions are supported by a detailed outline of the kinds of non-literary and 'everyday' texts that teachers could work with in the classroom—and attention is drawn to the need to both 'use' and 'produce' these texts (*Subject Statement*, pp. 44-45).

However, with regard to the use of non-literary texts, many schools in impoverished rural areas do not have easy access to 'everyday' texts which can be exploited for the purposes of teaching literacy. Although this lack is acknowledged in the curriculum, no assistance is provided beyond an injunction to teachers to be "resourceful and innovative" (*Learning Programme Guidelines*, p. 32). This hardly seems adequate given that learners in all state schools, regardless of socioeconomic level or geographic location, are required to write the same national exit-level examination.

Skills versus content in English in South Africa

In the new South African curricula, the focus is on skills almost to the exclusion of specification of content. These skills are exercised both in relation to various communicative situations (listening and speaking) and in relation to the reception and production of texts (reading and writing). The assessment standards and their sub-points break these skills down, describing them in ways that are intended to help teachers determine whether or not the outcomes are being achieved. The learning programme

guidelines state that the learning outcomes and the assessment standards need to be 'unpacked' in order to 'identify' the content, or knowledge, skills and values, contained in each (*Language Learning Programme Guidelines*, p. 28). The implication is that any content that can be made to serve one or more of these outcomes can be regarded as suitable. Therefore, although some content specification exists in the assessment standards, any content knowledge is secondary to 'applied competence' (*Language Learning Programme Guidelines*, p. 11), i.e. the skill used to deploy it. For example, in the grammar component of the syllabus, one of the desired skills is the ability to analyze the function of a particular part of speech in context. Content knowledge, such as the ability to recognize or define parts of speech, is therefore not prioritized as it might be in a specialist grammar syllabus.

Coherence, sequencing, progression, and pacing

The evaluators argued that in English, curriculum coherence, sequencing, progression, and pacing are inextricably interwoven, and as such they are discussed together. The evaluators struggled to find a single, explicit organizing principle in the English courses examined, but argued that there were mechanisms for ensuring curriculum coherence. Table 2 below provides a summary of the mechanisms for curriculum coherence in the courses studied.

Table 2: Organizing principles of the curricula

Country	Organizing principle
Ghana (Language)	There is no explicit organizing principle, but the syllabus is tightly organized into 5 sections each year, which are presented in the following order: Listening/Speaking; Reading/Listening; Comprehension/Summary; Grammar; Composition; Literature. It is made clear that the unit topics presented within each section should ideally be dealt with in a linear order. No mention is made of integrating skills across different sections.
Ghana (Literature in English)	The underlying principle according to which the syllabus is organized is that of genre study.
Kenya	The underlying principle according to which the syllabus is organized seems to be one of cumulative language skills integration.

continued

Table 2 continued

Country	Organizing principle
Zambia (English Language)	The underlying principle according to which the syllabus is organized is an integrated skills-based approach which develops listening, speaking, reading, writing and language structures concurrently.
Zambia (Literature in English)	There is no clear organizing principle.
South Africa old syllabus, first languagel	The broad principle according to which this syllabus is organized is one of skills development where key areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking and language structures are taught in integrated ways or, where necessary, concurrently.
South Africa old syllabus, second language	As with first language, skills development is the focus. It is emphasized that all 5 skills need to be taught concurrently and in an integrated manner over the three years, with learners moving to higher levels of competence.
South Africa new curriculum, home language	The curriculum documentation is organized according to an integrated skills-based approach which aims to develop the learning outcomes of listening, speaking, reading, writing and the understanding and use of language structures concurrently.
South Africa new curriculum, first additional language	The curriculum documentation is organized according to an integrated skills-based approach which aims to develop the learning outcomes of listening, speaking, reading, writing and the understanding and use of language structures concurrently.

All the courses, barring the specialist literature elective courses offered in Zambia and Ghana, take reading, writing, speaking, listening and the understanding and use of language structures as the basic components around which they organize their programmes.

Although most syllabuses in the study give some indication of how much lesson time should be allocated for English, some even specifying which areas of English teaching should be allocated more time, none of the syllabuses provide any real guidance on how to pace work within a year of study.

The Kenyan and Ghanaian syllabuses, both compulsory and elective, provide the clearest guidelines on progression of content, although these are provided in the form of lists which atomize knowledge and could lead to technicist and superficial approaches to teaching. The South African old English First Language syllabus provides less clear guidelines. It places most of the syllabus specifications in the Grade 10 year and merely indicates

that these areas need to be reinforced or extended in Grades 11 and 12. Although this format provides a less fragmented approach to content, it could encourage repetition rather than extension of knowledge. The Zambian and old South African English Second Language syllabuses do not provide guidance for teachers on progression.

There is a lack of clear guidance on sequencing and progression in the new South African curricula. Beyond the idea that learners should be mastering skills at increasing levels of competence, there is little explicit sequencing of skills or content across the grades, and little indication of how far along the curriculum teachers should be by the end of each year of study. Because of the overwhelming similarity of the assessment standards for each consecutive grade, there is likely to be a strong tendency to repeat very similar work from grade to grade, even if the texts being used differ. Perhaps this is precisely the aim of the curriculum: for skills to be repeated and reinforced each year, varying the texts and contexts in which the skills are exercised. This may be particular to general English language courses: here although skills are mastered progressively, the skill remains the same. Teachers are therefore continuously working with the same core skills that develop over time and cannot be divided into particular 'stages'. Although there is a demonstrable lack of guidance in this regard, the implicit way in which the curriculum presents this progression is likely to be echoed by language teachers' intuitive sense of how skills are acquired, how their learners are developing and how their skills can be extended. A problem arises in that this level of intuitive understanding of the subject or discipline develops over time and may not be accessible to newcomers to the teaching profession.

In the new South African curricula, in order to provide coherence, the curriculum statements recommend that texts be selected and organized thematically so that a range of genres dealing with the same issues can be used to work in interwoven ways with all the core skills. Teachers are informed that texts selected for reading should become progressively more sophisticated and challenging from grade to grade but no guidance is provided on how to ensure this. Texts produced by learners should also show increasingly sophisticated mastery of skills and some guidance is provided in this regard. It is suggested that the different genres of essay

which learners are required to write constitute in themselves different levels of difficulty. Narrative and descriptive essays are at the easier end of the scale while argumentative and expository essays are at the more difficult end. While this approach has some validity, it can often be the topic and/or context of the task that determines the level of challenge: writing a sophisticated, complex narrative essay can in fact be more demanding than writing a straight-forward discursive essay.

Cognitive demand

As discussed before, in general evaluators felt that cognitive demand was not something that could be comprehensively dealt with in the intended curriculum and argued that it is largely in examinations where the levels of cognitive demand of a curriculum is realized. Nonetheless, evaluators did explore attempts made in curriculum documents to deal with levels of cognitive demand.

Evaluators argued that the two Ghanaian syllabuses and the old South African English First Language syllabus are the only curriculum documents that engage explicitly with the need to differentiate between various levels of cognitive depth. Nevertheless even these three syllabuses do not provide explicit guidance on how to translate this understanding into practice. Across all syllabuses examined in this study, this aspect of the intended curriculum seems to be the least elaborated. It would appear that teachers either need to work with their own intuitive sense of what constitutes cognitive progression, or they would need to consult examinations in order to understand the different levels of cognitive depth at which to engage their learners.

For the new South African curriculum, the level of cognitive demand is embedded in the sub-points of the assessment standards and competence descriptions. The curriculum documents state that looking at the verbs, adjectives, and concepts listed in the assessment standards across the grades should render conceptual progression clearly evident (*Language Learning Programme Guideline*, p. 35).

In order to show how this is supposed to work in the new South African curriculum documents, assessment standards for one of the

outcomes (listening) is provided in Table 3 below[1].

Table 3: Selected sub-points drawn from assessment standards in the listening and speaking learning outcome (Learning Outcome 1)

Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Demonstrate planning and research skills for oral presentations: • research a topic by referring to a range of sources	Demonstrate planning and research skills for oral presentations: • research a topic by referring to a range of sources	Demonstrate planning and research skills for oral presentations: • research a topic by referring to a *wide* range of sources
Demonstrate the skills of listening to and delivery of fluent and expressive oral presentations: • **identify** and use rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, pauses and repetition	Demonstrate the skills of listening to and delivery of fluent and expressive oral presentations: • use and **evaluate** rhetorical devices such as *anecdotes*, rhetorical questions, pauses and repetition	Demonstrate the skills of listening to and delivery of fluent and expressive oral presentations: • use and **evaluate** rhetorical devices such as *anecdotes*, rhetorical questions, pauses and repetition
Demonstrate critical awareness of language use in oral situations: • recognize and challenge *obviously* emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice and stereotyping such as in propaganda and advertising	Demonstrate critical awareness of language use in oral situations: • recognise and challenge *subtle* emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice and stereotyping such as in propaganda and advertising	Demonstrate critical awareness of language use in oral situations: • recognise and challenge *subtly* emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice and stereotyping such as in propaganda and advertising

Italics have been inserted by evaluators, to show where the terminology shifts in the assessment standards across the grades; verb changes are indicated in bold. Evaluators found similar examples of differentiation embedded in the assessment standards across the Subject Statement. Based on their analysis of these differences, they felt the shifts evident in the terminology of the assessment standards are potentially meaningful. It would appear that the purported move towards more sophisticated levels of engagement with texts and other language activities is borne out by differences that reflect increasing complexity. For example, the progression from recognizing *obvious* emotive language, to *subtle* emotive language signals a move towards greater depth of language awareness. In other

[1] Expanded versions of the tables in this section can be found in the technical report for this research, available at www.umalusi.org.za

instances, the differences reflect progression in types of cognitive processes, moving from simpler cognitive operations to more complex ones, in the style of Bloom's taxonomy. For example, there is a clear conceptual progression in the move from 'identify and use' to 'use and evaluate'. Other assessment standards reflect ability to work with increasing amounts of information, such as adding anecdotes to the list of rhetorical devices used.

It needs to be noted, however, that these shifts in meaning are embedded in the document and that nothing in the *Subject Statement* explicitly prepares the reader to pay attention to nuances of meaning in the phrasing of the assessment standards. Only a very close reading of these assessment standards will reveal these key differences and enable the implications for teaching to be inferred. In addition, the discussion above refers to assessment standards which demonstrate the most obvious differentiation across the grades. Many assessment standards do not demonstrate discernible shifts in phrasing and therefore do not provide differentiation across the grades. Further, even though the language distinctions may capture what curriculum designers require of learners, these nuances in meaning are nevertheless open to interpretation and there is no guarantee that teachers will interpret them in precisely the way they were meant.

There is a similar lack of differentiation between the Home Language and First Additional Language curricula. Table 4 on the next page, uses the assessment standards selected in Table 3 to compare the assessment standards of the Home and First Additional Language curricula at Grade 10 level.

On the whole, there are even fewer differences between the assessment standards of Home Language and First Additional Language levels than there are across the grades of Home Language. When these differences do occur, they reflect the types of progression discussed above.

What also comes across in comparisons of assessment standards across the curriculum statements for the new English courses in South Africa is there are shifts in terminology which seem meaningless and obscure. For example, looking at the writing assessment standards across grades, it is not immediately obvious what the difference would be between using a variety of sentences 'effectively' (Gr 11) or 'for effect' (Gr 12) (p. 33). The

Table 4: A comparison of selected assessment standards in the listening and speaking learning outcome (Learning Outcome 1) of Home Language and First Additional Language

HOME LANGUAGE Grade 10	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE Grade 10
• research a topic by referring to a range of sources • **identify** and use rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, pauses and repetition • recognise and challenge obvious emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice and stereotyping such as in propaganda and advertising	• esearch a topic by referring to a range of *supplied* and relevant sources • use *familiar* rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, pauses and repetition • recognise and challenge obvious emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice and stereotyping such as in propaganda and advertising

point being made here is that if the phrasing of these assessment standards does indeed need to be scrutinized with care, then arbitrary and meaningless changes of phrasing must be avoided.

In an effort to further benchmark learner achievement, the learning outcomes and assessment standards have been summarized into 'competence descriptions'. For each grade, each learning outcome has a possible seven levels of competence[2]. A learner would therefore be awarded a rating on a scale of 1 to 7 which would correspond with a particular competence description and would identify him/her as anything from 'inadequate' to 'outstanding' (from 0-29% to 80-100% respectively).

The main function of competence descriptions is to differentiate learner achievement. This differentiation should be evident within the grade, so that learners and learner-performances can be ranked. To illustrate this, Table 5 shows an extract from a Grade 10 reading outcome. Italics have been added by the evaluators to show changes across the competence descriptions, and bold has been used specifically to indicate verb changes.

Differentiation should also be evident *across the phase*, so that different grades are understood to set their expectations of learner performance at different levels. Table 6, however, illustrates the progression in expectation

[2] The Subject Statement outlines competence descriptions on a 6-point scale. The Subject Assessment Guidelines refers to a 7-point scale but fails to update the competence descriptions accordingly. The discussion of the competence descriptions is therefore perforce bound to the 6-point scale. The lack of alignment between documents is elaborated on in the section on the packing and provisioning of curriculum documents.

Table 5: Competence Descriptions showing the difference between level 6 and 5 within a grade for the reading and viewing outcome (Learning Outcome 2), Grade 10 Home Language

Code	Scale	HOME LANGUAGE – Grade 10
6	80-100% Outstanding	*confidently and effectively* identify, interpret, analyze and explain texts when reading and viewing; demonstrate clear insight and *firmly* assert and justify own opinions; read aloud showing excellent fluency and expression; show sensitivity to different views and cultural issues
5	60-79% Meritorious	identify, interpret, analyze and explain texts mostly *with* confidence when reading and viewing; with *insight* assert and justify own opinions; read aloud showing very good fluency and expression; show sensitivity to different views and cultural issues

Table 6: Competence Descriptions showing differentiation across a phase for the reading and viewing outcome (Learning Outcome 2) of Grade 10-12 Home Language

Code	Scale	Competence description Grade 10	Competence description Grade 11	Competence description Grade 12
5	60-79% Meritorious	identify, interpret, analyze and explain mostly with confidence when reading and viewing; with insight **assert** and **justify** own opinions; read aloud showing very good fluency and expression; show sensitivity to different views and cultural issues	*confidently and effectively* interpret, analyze, **evaluate** and explain when reading and viewing; demonstrate *good insight* when *asserting* and clearly *justify* own opinions; read aloud showing very good fluency and expression; show sensitivity to different views and cultural issues	*confidently and effectively* interpret, analyze, **evaluate** and **synthesize** texts when reading and viewing; demonstrate *considerable* insight, and clearly **assert** and **justify** own opinions; read aloud showing very good fluency and expression; show sensitivity to a range of different views and cultural issues

of learner performance for the same reading outcome from Grade 10 to Grade 12.

And finally, differentiation should also be evident *across the language levels*, so that different language courses are also understood to set their expectations of learner performance at different levels. Table 7 on the next page provides an extract of competence descriptions for the reading outcome in Grade 10 Home Language with that of Grade 10 First Additional Language.

As with the shifting terminology of the assessment standards, some

Table 7: Competence Descriptions showing differentiation across language levels for the reading and viewing outcome (Learning Outcome 2), Grade 10 Home Language and Grade 10 First Additional Language

Code	Scale	HOME LANGUAGE	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE
4	50-59% Satisfactory	with reasonable confidence identify and interpret texts when reading and viewing, but experiences some *difficulty* in analyzing and explaining; with reasonable insight assert and justify own opinions; read aloud with reasonable fluency and expression; show reasonable sensitivity to different views and cultural issues	with reasonable confidence identify and interpret texts when reading and viewing but needs assistance when analyzing and explaining; show reasonable insight and *sometimes* assert and justify own opinions; read aloud with reasonable fluency and expression; show reasonable sensitivity to different views and cultural issues

of the changes above appear meaningful and others do not. In the assessment standards within a grade, there are changes in degree from excellent-very good-reasonable-adequate-limited-hardly any. These are self-explanatory and may be useful, at least in relation to one another. In the assessment standards across grades, the sense of progression with regard to cognitive processes is captured by the changing verbs. The cognitive processes considered by Bloom to be the most demanding, evaluation and synthesis, are thus only expected to be evident in Grades 11 and 12—for example, 'analyze and explain' becomes 'analyze, evaluate and explain' in Grade 11, and 'analyze, evaluate and synthesize' in Grade 12.

This type of specification of assessment criteria is supposed to reduce the subjectivity of assessment. In a general language course, in this case English, where there are few 'facts' and little 'information' that can be neatly assessed, the subjectivity of the marker can indeed be an issue. In the previous South African English First Language syllabus, there was no guarantee that what constituted a 'B' for one teacher was the same as what constituted a 'B' for every other teacher. Nevertheless it is also necessary to add that over time and through collaboration, English teachers can and do develop a reasonable level of common understanding of what quality of work constitutes what level of achievement. This, however, is not automatic. One of the evaluators in the study cited personal experiences with the marking of the final English national examination which provided strong evidence of teachers' widely differing interpretations

of learners' levels of achievement. Whether or not the competence descriptions for general English courses assist in standardizing interpretations of learner achievement across the schooling system remains to be seen.

In terms of clarity of differentiation between levels of cognition, the Ghanaian syllabuses seem to have lessons for South Africa. In the introductory sections of the curriculum, there is a concise discussion on the different levels of cognition based on Bloom's taxonomy. Even the old South African syllabuses, in their need to differentiate between Higher and Standard Grade, ultimately provided clearer principles for attaining different levels of cognition. What neither of the old South African syllabuses did effectively, however, was to provide guidelines on how to activate these different levels of cognition. Perhaps in an embedded way, the assessment standards of the new South African syllabuses attempt to provide the guidelines for the operationalization of these levels; however, without elaboration of the principles upfront, the nuanced differences may pass undetected, or may be regarded as insignificant. Evaluators agreed that it was imperative that teachers are advised at the outset to pay attention to the shifting terminology across the assessment standards, and that attempts should be made to establish a common understanding of some of the key shifting terminology

The new South African curriculum statements explicitly state that they aim for high knowledge and high skills. They include increased continuous assessment requirements and an additional external summative examination. It could therefore be deduced that greater demands are being made by these curricula, but it is by no means clear whether these features will result in greater cognitive depth, wider content/skills coverage, or, in the worst case scenario, simply more repetition of the same thing. It is also possible that the elaboration seen in the documents may not be very meaningful outside of a specific context, and will only serve to further complicate and lengthen documents.

What does seem clear, however, is that in the absence of the examined curriculum it is difficult to pinpoint cognitive depth. Perhaps it should be accepted that the intended curriculum sets up the broad parameters of the course of study, and it is the examinations which specifically set 'the

standard', or level of cognitive demand. The very fact that there are few discernible differences between the Home Language and First Additional Language curriculum statements supports the idea that it is ultimately in the examinations that differentiation will be made evident.

Pedagogy and methodology

With the exception of Ghana, all of the general language syllabuses adopt an integrated approach to the teaching of key language skills, stressing that these operate in interdependent ways in authentic contexts and that teaching English in this way is more likely to develop genuine communication skills. The Zambian syllabus, however, demonstrates the most explicit attention to pedagogy by foregrounding *approaches* to language teaching (i.e. the communicative approach and the text-based integrated approach) thereby signaling the principles which should underpin the teaching of English. While the Ghanaian syllabus provides considerable methodological guidance in the form of examples of activities, it provides no guidance at the level of general pedagogic approach.

The new South African curricula advocate two main pedagogic approaches: the communicative approach, where maximum exposure to and practice with the language in various contexts is sought; and the text-based approach, where engagement with and production of texts in context is key. This approach mirrors the pedagogy espoused by the Zambian compulsory English course.

Evaluators in the study felt that structured and useful input is given on language pedagogy in general in the new South African curriculum statements, making this syllabus more detailed and supportive on this point than any of the other syllabuses in the study. However, the lack of differentiation between the different language courses at the level of pedagogy could encourage a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the teaching and acquisition of language skills which belies the complexities of language teaching and learning. Given the linguistically diverse learner population in South Africa, all teachers need to become familiar with approaches to teaching language acquisition as well as those which extend the language proficiency of native speakers.

Assessment specifications

The Kenyan, Ghanaian, and old South African syllabuses all provide some guidance on assessment. Guidelines include some input on assessment strategies to be applied in the classroom, as well as information enabling teachers to prepare their students for summative assessment (i.e. the structure and coverage of the final examinations). Neither of the Zambian syllabuses provides detailed guidance on assessment. It would appear that teachers would need to study the examination papers of previous years in order to determine how to prepare their learners for their final examinations, unless additional documentation is supplied to teachers which was not accessed for this research.

Regarding the new South African curriculum, one of the most salient features of outcomes-based assessment is the foregrounding of the role of assessment. Throughout the curriculum documentation, learning and teaching are consistently linked to assessment. The assessment standards, which form the bulk of the curriculum statements, are framed in assessment terms, describing what a learner should do in relation to each outcome. Assessment, therefore, is not seen as an 'add-on' aspect of the curriculum but as an integral part of teaching and learning which must be foregrounded in the planning and design of any learning programme.

This curriculum therefore contains by far the most detailed discussion of assessment of any in this study. Information about both school-based and external assessment is provided. Guidelines include explanations of types, purposes, and methods of assessment, as well as guidance on recording and reporting on assessment (including rating scales and rubrics). Much of this information is not subject-specific and many of the sections of information on assessment are identical in the curriculum documents for all subjects.

As discussed above under *Cognitive Demand*, detailed assessment criteria and competence descriptions are provided for the various learning outcomes within the curriculum, in an attempt to reduce subjectivity. However, evaluators argued that the difficulty with reliable criterion-based assessment lies in the fact that each criterion needs to mean practically the same thing to a multitude of different people. What emerges from a

close look at the competence descriptions in the English curriculum statements is that even in cases where wording is not ambiguous, they are still open to interpretation. Because of this, the individual competence descriptions only become meaningful by virtue of their placement in relation to one another. For example, in the ranking scale, the difference between the terms 'satisfactory' and 'adequate' seems negligible; these terms are often considered to be synonymous. Yet, in this context, and as labels for different levels of achievement, they are being pegged differently and, ideally will come to have particular and distinct meanings over time for the teachers that work with them. The evaluators feel that it is possible that over time the competence descriptions may come to be interpreted and applied with some consistency. Although they may prove useful in curtailing subjectivity, they will by no means eliminate it.

The need for interpretation is not necessarily a problem—a curriculum document can only ever be a document that speaks to expert practitioners, and teacher education and support within schools must ensure that teachers are inducted into common understandings of what performances are expected from learners. However, evaluators raised two issues related to criterion-based assessment that for them are particularly concerning. Firstly, there seems to be a tendency for criterion-referenced assessment to encourage, however inadvertently, technicist and managerial approaches to assessment, because it tends to lead to lists of assessment criteria to be smartly ticked off with every task. This is not suited to an integrated and in-depth engagement with the subject of English. Secondly, it is not clear how the competence descriptions are related to summative assessment. One would assume that if school-based teaching is becoming criterion-based, then the external examinations would need to follow suit; yet there is no indication in any of the documents pertaining to assessment that examinations (both school-based and external) will be handled any differently from the way they have been handled in the past. This suggests that there may well be a mismatch between the intended curriculum and the examined curriculum at the level of assessment paradigm.

With regard to the planning and structuring of assessment, the *Subject Assessment Guidelines* provide all the relevant information. In Grades 10,

11, and 12, school-based, continuous assessment counts for 25% of the final grade mark, while the other 75% is comprises the summative year-end examinations. In Home and First Additional Language learners are expected to complete 16 tasks in Grades 10 and 11, and 14 tasks in Grade 12. In Second Additional Language learners are expected to complete 13 tasks in Grades 10 and 11, and 12 tasks in Grade 12. The final 'task' consists of three examination papers, or two in the case of Second Additional Language.

In Grades 10 and 11, all assessment is internally set, marked and moderated. Although Grade 12 work is also internally set and marked, it is externally moderated. Grade 12 teachers are required to compile a portfolio containing the assessment programme, the requirements for each assessment task, the assessment tools and record sheets with the learners' marks. It is not clear whether Grade 10 and 11 teachers also need to compile such a portfolio and to have it internally moderated.

The document also indicates that there should be mid-year examinations in Grades 10 to 12, and September examinations in Grade 12, and provides the structure and format that these examinations should take. Although these are 'suggested' outlines and 'suggested' formats, it is not clear how much leeway there is for teachers to follow alternative plans of assessment or how any of this will be monitored in Grades 10 and 11.

A writing examination has been re-introduced and details of its structure are also provided. This move is welcomed by those who were concerned that learners were not getting sufficient writing practice across a range of genres because they were limiting themselves to working only on the two genres required by the portfolio.

It is interesting to note that, at first glance, there seem to be no major differences in the number, content, format, and time and mark allocation of the examinations for the Grade 12 examinations for Home Language and First Additional Language. Both of these syllabuses have three examinations: Language in context, Literature, and Writing; and both have an oral component which is administered during the year and goes towards the year-end examination. However there are significant internal differences in the format of the Literature examination. While the Home Language

examination requires students to answer three questions, one each on poetry, the novel and drama; the First Additional Language examination requires students to answer questions on any two genres from a choice of four: the novel, drama, short stories and poetry. This means that students writing the latter paper can avoid certain literary genres while those writing the former cannot. It would also appear that while the Home Language examination makes it mandatory for students to write an essay, in the First Additional Language paper it is possible to avoid writing an essay by selecting genres that are assessed via contextual questions. In the three papers of each of these syllabuses there are also differences in length of reading material in the Language in context paper, and differences in length of writing required in answer to questions across all three papers, although particularly relevant in the literature paper. And finally, given the reduced demands of the literature paper for First Additional Language, there has been a slight downward adjustment of the total marks for this paper (it is allocated 10 marks less than the Home Language literature paper)—and this amount has been added to the total marks for the Language in context paper (which is now allocated 10 marks more than its Home Language counterpart).

This difference is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it suggests that teachers of First Additional Language are likely to choose to teach only selected genres, using the extra time to get to grips with these particular works of literature and to devote more attention to language aspects of the syllabus. (Consequently they will be deciding in advance of the examination what genres their learners will be answering.) The fact that teachers of Home Language are compelled to cover all three genres ensures that literature will perforce occupy a more prominent place in their English curriculum. This suggests that it makes little difference that the intended curricula for these two courses are virtually identical—at the level of outcomes and assessment standards—because the enacted curriculum is far more likely to be shaped by the demands of the examined curriculum.

Given the fact that these two courses are supposed to be serving different constituencies of students, it seems wholly appropriate for these differences to exist. Inevitably teachers of First Additional Language will

need to spend more time working towards language proficiency and full communicative competence than Home Language teachers and should therefore not be required to apply the same level of demand to their coverage of literature. In this vein, it is interesting to note that in the latest version of the *Subject Assessment Guidelines*, what was the Literature paper for Second Additional Language has been subsumed into what was the Language in context paper; and the literature section accounts for only one small section of this larger paper. Again, given the curriculum's stated emphasis on developing listening and speaking skills, it stands to reason that literature would need to play a smaller role than broader communication skills. Nevertheless a cautionary point needs to be made regarding the importance of reading-intensive work in developing language proficiency. Although this need not be the case, there could be cause for concern that this shift in emphasis away from literature could result in reading-impoverished courses.

Provision and packaging of a curriculum/syllabus documentation

The evaluators in the study did not feel that it would be appropriate to comment in any detail on the provision and packaging of the curriculum documentation provided for the English courses of Kenya, Zambia, and Ghana. It was felt that only teachers or other curriculum users in the relevant countries would be in a position to comment on whether or not the education departments provided them with easy and efficient access to the curriculum documentation. There is no reason to assume that any difficulties experienced by evaluators in gaining access to the full complement of documents needed for the purposes of this research would be experienced by educators in those contexts. As a general comment, however, evaluators did feel that in some cases documents could have been more clearly labeled. Where a syllabus comprises more than one document, it would be helpful to have a circular which identifies and outlines all the various documents which together comprise the curriculum. There were occasions where evaluators were not able to determine whether certain curriculum documents had not been made

available to them, or whether they did not exist.

Presentation of the old South African curriculum has been somewhat problematic for some time. There is no date on the original *English First Language Syllabus*, so it is not clear when it came into effect. The IEB works with a Core Syllabus document which was published by the National Department of Education in 1984 and implemented by the IEB in 1996. The relationship between these two documents and the significance of the various dates is not clear, although it seems likely that the Core Syllabus document is merely an unelaborated version of the longer syllabus document.

For the old curriculum in South Africa (the Senior Certificate), in order to standardize assessment across all 11 official languages, a *Language Standardization Policy* was implemented in 2001/2002. This policy outlines the syllabus requirements and the structure of the final-year assessment, including the public national examinations as well as the continuous assessments requirements relating to portfolio and oral components of the syllabus.

The English Second Language syllabus is an interim syllabus that was implemented in 1995/1996. References are made in both the syllabus documents and Language Standardization Policy to additional documents. Overall, this syllabus seems to have evolved over time and now comprises more documents than were able to be accessed for the purpose of this research.

The new curriculum in South Africa consists of *Subject Statements, Learning Programme Guidelines* and *Subject Assessment Guidelines* for each of English Home Language, First Additional Language, and Second Additional Language. The *Subject Statements* exist in separate documents for each language level; the others each exist as one document containing information for all three language levels.

With regard to the new South African curriculum, it needs to be emphasized that curriculum documentation has been in a state of flux and that this is an unavoidable consequence of a reforming education system. It would appear that, as the first cohort of students to write the National Senior Certificate enter their Grade 12 year, work on the curriculum documentation is coming to a close. Nevertheless, the new

curriculum is already coming to the end of its second year of implementation in Grade 10, and its first, in Grade 11 classrooms. The evaluators in this study believe that the effective implementation of the new curriculum has been significantly undermined by the inefficient roll-out of the curriculum documentation over the past few years. In addition to contradictory drafts being in circulation, documents are not always sent to schools timeously and official websites are often either inaccessible or carry outdated versions of documents. Evaluators believe that the resulting lack of clarity has had an impact not only on teachers' ability to implement the curriculum but has engendered considerable negativity towards the new curriculum.

Understandably different versions of the same document have been compiled and circulated over the past couple of years and latter documents will supersede earlier ones. However, evaluators argued that this process has been managed inefficiently. Evaluators were very concerned to discover that there existed, even at the time of the final compilation of this report, different versions of the Subject Statement **with the same printing date** (2003) in public circulation. And, of greatest concern was the fact that the one that was taken to be the more recent version (only because it is the one available online) contains changes to the phrasing of the assessment standards and competence descriptions. This means that the Subject Statement was not simply reprinted, it was amended. However, because no amendments were signalled by the Department and because the earlier printing date was not altered, it is virtually impossible to tell these two versions apart. If the Department wants teachers to take seriously the nuanced phrasing of its assessment standards, how can it not signal these changes? And, conversely, if perhaps this phrasing is less significant than the evaluators have assumed, then why was it necessary to make the kinds of minute changes that would only be significant if nuance does indeed need to be attended to?

Similarly, it is hard to comprehend how one document—the *Subject Statement* which is currently in use—can provide a 6-point scale for the competence descriptors while the *Learning Programme Guidelines* and the *Subject Assessment Guidelines* refer to a 7-point scale. It is left up to the reader to deduce that the latter documents supersedes the *Subject Statement*,

because nowhere do these documents signal this. In addition, nowhere are the Competence Descriptions adjusted to reflect the change to 7 levels. This kind of inattention to important detail and seeming disregard of the reader can only undermine curriculum change.

Beyond this, the structure and content of the curriculum documentation itself make these documents a challenge to use. Since the curriculum comprises multiple documents, it is essential that the purpose of each document and its relationship to other documents is made explicit, preferably on the inside cover of each document. During the course of this analysis, it became clear that it is not possible to work with individual documents in isolation. Although a particular document may appear to explain an issue in full and with clarity, there will often be, in another document, further discussion of the same issue. At times, this may simply be repetitious, or merely provide useful elaboration, but at other times it provides additional important information without which the issue cannot be fully understand in the context of the whole curriculum. Clearly, insufficient attention has been given to the continuity and consistency between these documents. They require streamlining and cross-referencing in order to make the process of juggling between documents less complicated. Ideally, the curriculum should be published as one composite document for each language level, containing the *Subject Statement, the Learning Programme Guidelines*, and the *Subject Assessment Guidelines*.

Furthermore, it is also not always clear where 'policy' ends and 'guidelines' begin. For example, the status of the *Learning Programme Guidelines* seems unclear. Evaluators were not certain whether all teachers had been made aware of the existence of this particular document. Given that it contains a great deal of valuable information that functions as more than just casual guidance, they felt that more should be done to ensure that teachers include this document in their reading of the syllabus.

Evaluators argued that one of the most problematic aspects of the new South African curriculum is the demands that are made of the teacher with regard to curriculum planning. The curriculum states that language teachers should themselves design their learning programmes, working in collaboration with other language teachers in the school. They are tasked with setting up a subject framework for the phase (Grades 10-12), which

would then be translated into grade-specific work schedules and a three-year assessment plan. The work schedule should indicate the sequence in which content and skills will be covered in each year of study, and should be accompanied by a comprehensive list of texts and other support materials needed for the phase. Finally, each teacher should devise lesson plans which should include information on learning and teaching activities, as well as indicate the relevant learning outcomes and assessment standards. The same demands are made across all language levels of the new South African curriculum.

Confident, competent, and experienced language teachers with a great deal of stamina and time on their hands may well rise to the challenge of designing their own learning programmes, relishing the autonomy and flexibility which the curriculum allows them. However, a system perceived to be empowering is likely to be perceived as equally disempowering by inexperienced teachers lacking in confidence and requiring support and guidance. Levels of confidence and experience aside, the unreasonableness of this demand is a significant weakness of this new syllabus, and the fact that only well-resourced schools with experienced teaching staff are likely to rise to the challenge means that differences between 'good schools' and 'bad schools' are likely to be further entrenched.

If requiring teachers to design learning programmes is indeed an unrealistic expectation, then it is necessary to consider the likely alternative scenarios. Teachers may carry on teaching as they always have been, adapting only slightly to the most salient demands of the new curriculum. Teachers may use the literary set works to structure their learning programme. This is likely to result in an over-emphasis on literature and under-emphasis on other areas of the syllabus. Teachers may use the examples of learning programmes provided in the learning programme guidelines as blueprints for their own programmes. Although this is unlikely to produce innovative teaching, such an approach could be useful to those teachers who need time to adjust to the new curriculum. Teachers may use text books thereby relinquishing the responsibility of designing learning programme to the text book writers. In the case where school text books have been written according to the specifications and fully reflect the spirit of the new curriculum, this may be a reasonably effective

option. Where textbooks are outdated or inadequate, using textbooks would be an undesirable option. Or, teachers may wait for the first matriculation examinations in 2008 and then adjust their current learning programmes to match the demands of the examinations. Although the 'backwash effect' of the final examinations is known to have powerful effects on classroom practice, formal written national examinations are perforce limited in scope, and it would be pedagogically unsound to structure an entire programme around the principle of 'teaching to the exam'.

Evaluators felt that the Department of Education could take some action to alleviate the demand of designing a learning programme. This could take various forms. One immediate mechanism would be a clearer specification of content in terms of texts. In addition, for example, fully fledged learning programmes for each grade could be designed and circulated; these could be open for teachers to use, adapt or not use at all, depending on the teachers' willingness to design their own learning programmes. The department could provide stringent guidelines and criteria for the publication of text books, and supply schools with copies of these books.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, these documents are not easy to read. They are couched in a discourse that is likely to be unfamiliar to many teachers, and unless teachers are able to read the curriculum with in-depth understanding, there is little hope of it becoming meaningful to them. Many of the key concepts are embedded in language that may appear deceptively simple but where slight shifts in terminology evoke nuances of meaning that are critical to the effective implementation of the curriculum. Teachers need to develop an intimate knowledge of the curriculum documentation in order to be able to work with it in the way that is intended. The fact that this level of close reading is needed also means that curriculum writers need to avoid making arbitrary changes to wording or phrasing as these are likely to provoke confusion.

Lack of differentiation in the new South African curriculum

While this issue emerges throughout the discussion above, particular attention is focused on it here.

Evaluators repeatedly pointed out that the *Curriculum Statements* for English Home Language and English First Additional Language, as well as for English Second Additional Language, are almost identical. As discussed above, there are minor adjustments to the wording of assessment standards, and these are discussed under *Cognitive Demand* above. The list of texts to be used as classroom resources is identical for both of these language levels; at Second Additional Language level the lists are slightly shorter and a few literary and non-literary texts are omitted. The implication is that the same text types of text can be used equally effectively at any language level. It is often possible to use the same text for different levels of language teaching. The curriculum makes this point when it states that "the level of analysis and engagement will differ according to the level at which the language is taught" (*Learning Programme Guideline*, p. 19). This seems to be an unrealistic expectation. Variation of length, density of register, suitability of content, and complexity of structure in texts obviously affect the level of accessibility of texts which in turn would make them more or less suitable for teaching learners at different levels of language proficiency. The curriculum states that "increasingly complex and dense texts should be introduced to learners" (*Learning Programme Guidelines*, p. 12) but does not provide any guidance on how to determine the level of accessibility of a text.

Evaluators felt that, given that these three curricula are, at least hypothetically, aimed at three different groups of language learners with different levels of competence and aiming at different levels of mastery, differentiation should be evident in various areas of the curriculum and not only in the assessment specifications and the examined curriculum. A careful reading of the curriculum documentation reveals that the extent of the pedagogic differentiation which is provided lies in the weighting of the different language skills. Within an integrated skills approach, Home Language learners are expected to focus on the skills of reading and

writing; First Additional Language learners are expected to focus equally on listening, speaking, reading and writing; and Second Additional Language learners are expected to focus on the skills of listening and speaking (*National Curriculum Statement*, p. 11). Although the actual substance of each skill area is not specified, presumably it is the First Additional Language learners who are having the greatest demands made of them.

A reason for the lack of differentiation between Home Language and First Additional could be ascribed to the lack of content specification in the curriculum documentation. Another reason could be the need to ensure that learners doing First Additional Language master sufficient English to enable them to study their other subjects. The curriculum acknowledges the need to develop "abstract cognitive academic language skills" (*National Curriculum Statement*, p. 11) in First Additional Language learners, and acknowledges elsewhere that language is often "a major barrier" (*Learning Programme Guidelines*, p. 32) to inclusivity.

The English curriculum at First Additional Language level needs to serve two functions: it needs to develop learners' competence in English, and it needs to develop learners' ability to learn their content subjects through the medium of English. No other language taught at First Additional Language level needs to shoulder the latter responsibility, even though the *Subject Statement* is identical for all languages. Although any official language can be offered at First Additional Language level, only English functions as a gateway subject to the extent that performance in this subject can affect performance across the curriculum, determine access to higher education, and can influence other social and economic life opportunities. Providing access to English is therefore of vital importance if the social transformation aims of the curriculum are to be met. Against this background, it becomes easier to understand what has prompted the curriculum developers to produce a First Additional Language curriculum that demonstrates almost complete parity with the Home Language curriculum, at least as far as the intended curriculum is concerned. While the desire to facilitate access to English is both understandable and commendable, it remains to be seen whether or not such a move will indeed produce greater English proficiency in additional language learners.

The South African curricula have the same aims, are working with the

same outcomes and similar assessment standards but, because they are targeting different constituencies of learners, they need to be working at different levels and to different depths with different texts and contexts. As one critical reader pointed out, it does not make sense to have separate courses but then to have inadequate differentiation between them. This is an important point and perhaps South Africa does need to consider having one course for all learners, with optional specialist literature courses. The evaluators believe that the courses appear so similar because the intended curriculum gives little concrete indication of depth and progression, provides no clarity on how to select texts for different levels and does not differentiate between pedagogies needed for language acquisition versus those needed for language enrichment. Evaluators feel that there is an unstated common understanding among teachers that regardless of the virtual sameness of the two syllabuses, the examinations will continue to be as different as they have always been.

In addition to this lack of differentiation, there is no clear acknowledgement that the language demographics of the classroom seldom, if ever, correspond neatly with the different levels at which languages are offered in the curriculum. In other words, a class of learners taking English at 'Home Language' level will inevitably include learners who do not speak English at home. Despite the laudable curriculum aims of valuing linguistic diversity and developing multilingualism, the curriculum offers no guidance on how to manage linguistically diverse classes or how to draw on learners' multilingual resources within the frame of a 'language as subject' curriculum—in this case, English.

As a final point, it is also worth noting that while the *Language in Education Policy* sets up the language policy framework within which the schooling system operates, it is the governing body of the individual school that determines the school's own language policy. It is likely that this will be where various factors which lie beyond the reach of the language curriculum play themselves out. Parents who may themselves be speakers of indigenous languages often choose to have their children educated through the medium of English. Schools seldom have the resources (material, human, and time) required to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to develop and use their mother tongues. Internal

population migration often results in learners having to adapt to new languages offered by different schools. The gap between language policy and practice is therefore particularly evident with regard to additive multilingualism. Ultimately, learners who do not have English as a home language are not necessarily acquiring literacy in their mother tongue, or even having their home language valued and developed by the curriculum as an additional language. It is also important to note that learners who do have English as a home language are seldom exposed to learning opportunities which facilitate the acquisition of an additional South African language.

The examined curriculum

All references to South Africa are to the old syllabus; the new curriculum had not been examined at the time of this research.

Structure of the examinations and relationship to intended curriculum documentation

Kenya and South Africa structure their examined curricula in the same way, both electing to examine language and literature in separate examinations. Zambia's compulsory language curriculum culminates in an examination that has a similar structure to the other countries' language examinations; and its specialist literature elective culminates in an examination similar in structure to the other literature examinations. The Zambian specialist literature syllabus comprises only one examination which requires extended writing. Ghana, however, does not structure its examined curriculum according to the traditional language-literature divide but instead organizes its examinations into different question-and-answer formats. Two of its three examinations are entirely in multiple-choice format. The third paper requires writing. Most of it is devoted to tasks requiring extended writing but it also includes a number of short answers. This organization is echoed in the examinations pertaining to its specialist literature syllabus: one paper comprises only multiple choice questions; the other requires extended writing.

It is interesting to note that while most of the compulsory language syllabuses mention the same broad kinds of texts as suggested teaching resources for teaching reading, in the examinations differences in selection of non-literary texts emerge. The Kenyan, Zambian, and Ghanaian examinations focus predominantly on non-fiction passages drawn from

text books—i.e. factual disciplinary texts. The South African examinations tend to draw their non-literary texts from contemporary public culture, using passages and visual/verbal texts from a range of newspapers, magazines and other everyday texts. This difference in text selection echoes the different aims of these syllabuses. The former syllabuses are prioritizing their aim of supporting learning in other content subjects through the medium of English; while the latter seek to develop students' engagement with the world beyond the classroom through language.

A significant difference in the examined curricula of the different countries is evident in the way in which the grammar/ language structure components are assessed. The South African English First Language papers only assess language in the context of authentic texts so as to get at 'language in action'; Ghana, however, uses multiple choice questions to assess the application of grammar rules in decontextualized ways which focus on correctness of form. Neither of these assessment methods is 'right' or 'wrong' in and of itself—they simply represent different approaches. Each approach must therefore be measured against its own syllabus aims.

It is worth noting that the South African English Second Language syllabus, like the Ghanaian, Zambian and Kenyan syllabuses, also focuses on communicative competence, and yet its Language papers seem to occupy a position midway between the two approaches to language outlined above. Like the English First Language examinations, it underplays knowledge of grammatical rules and uses everyday texts drawn largely from popular print media to assess comprehension and some language in context. Yet it also has includes cloze procedure and manipulation of isolated sentences to assess language, although these questions are weighted far less than those which engage with texts and ask for meaning to be made and explained. It seems possible that this syllabus has largely modeled itself on the English First Language syllabus, making only the adaptations deemed necessary to fairly assess language in learners who are not native speakers of English.

The Kenyan, Zambian, and Ghanaian syllabuses all state that they aim to develop communicative competence in their learners, and Kenya and Zambia in particular demonstrate an awareness of the need to avoid teaching grammar structures in isolation, yet all of them assess grammar

in the examinations in ways that, at most, employ the 'context' of a full sentence. This approach may well be a useful one, but it does seem out of place in relation to the aim of assessing communicative competence. While it is entirely possible that students who write these examinations are communicatively competent, in certain sections of these papers a good performance would not necessarily be an indicator of their communicative competence. Furthermore, in emphasizing decontextualized grammatical knowledge in this way, these papers run the risk of having their 'backwash effect' undermine the stated syllabus aims since teachers may well use class time to prepare learners to answer these questions than to have learners engage in classroom activities that are designed to improve fluency and language proficiency.

On the other hand, a key element of communicative competence is written fluency, and this can be adequately assessed in a written examination providing there are sufficient questions that require answers in stretches of connected sentences. The composition questions which are a feature of the Kenyan, Zambian, and Ghanaian papers provide are ideally suited to assess written fluency. There is a discernible effort in the choice of topics to engage learners with their world, and to assess written fluency in scenarios that show some attempt at authenticity. Although intended curricula provide little indication of how much extended writing students are required to do, presumably they are being prepared for the demands of this examination by practising extended writing in various genres. In South Africa, however, where over the past ten years the writing examination has been replaced by a section in a Portfolio (a component of continuous assessment), students could hypothetically get away with doing only the two pieces of 'composition'-type of writing that are required by the Portfolio—one of the reasons that a writing examination has been reintroduced.

The other aspect of the examined curriculum that provides the opportunity for extended writing is the assessment of literary texts. All examinations that include literature require students to produce at least one extended essay-type answer. Yet only the IEB syllabus makes explicit reference to the teaching of the literary essay. This could mean that these essay questions in the examinations all go beyond the syllabus requirements;

or it could mean that students are not being taught to write literary essays because they are only expected to produce extended pieces of writing which accumulate detail rather than one which has its own structural conventions. Certainly in most cases the marking guidelines provide lists of points or issues which simply have a few illustrative points attached to them by way of substantiation. Since the literary essay proper is one form of academic writing that could comfortably fit into the school curriculum, teaching its structure and conventions would certainly go some way towards addressing the aim of preparing students for tertiary education.

Levels of cognitive demand

It seems that the question-answer format used by the different questions and/or different examination papers can be a determining factor with respect to the level of cognitive demand in an examination. For example, in an essay-type literature question, there is always a level of synthesis required in selecting relevant information from an extended text, even when the question itself is not conceptually challenging. On the other hand, even these essay-type questions can vary greatly in terms of cognitive challenge. Similarly, while multiple choice questions can often be subtle in their assessment of linguistic structures, as shown by some of the questions in the Zambian compulsory language examination, generally these types of questions are limited to middle to lower order questions, particularly as they are used in the Ghanaian papers.

It is also interesting to note that across the Kenyan, Ghanaian, and selected South African first language papers (Western Cape Higher Grade, Gauteng Standard Grade), and all the South African English Second Language papers, there is a considerable discrepancy between the level of cognitive demand of the language papers and that of the literature papers. There seems to be a general perception that cognitively demanding work can only be done through the study of literary texts. Certainly most of the syllabuses seem to mention critical analysis largely with reference to literature only. Non-literary texts seem to be reserved for the sole purpose of teaching basic reading and comprehension skills which presumably are held to be ‘neutral skills’ applied to ‘neutral texts’. However, the IEB

First Language (Higher Grade) papers, and to a lesser extent the Gauteng (Higher Grade) paper, demonstrate that language and comprehension questions on non-literary texts are equally capable of being spread across all levels of cognitive demand.

Furthermore, while the Zambian, Ghanaian, and Kenyan examinations demonstrate a fairly narrow definition of 'literacy', South African examination papers validate alternative literacies in that a range of visual and multimodal texts drawn from the media is used in assessment (e.g. magazine advertisements, cartoon strips, newspaper columns, etc.). Yet it is a cause of some concern that, by and large, this innovative selection of texts is not being used to generate cognitively demanding questions that require critical engagement with the media and the world. The IEB Language paper (Higher Grade) seems to be the only one that generally succeeds in sustaining the level of cognitive engagement required when moving from predominantly verbal expository texts to texts drawn from popular culture.

For highest level of cognitive challenge in a literature paper, the Ghanaian 'Appreciation and essay' paper scores highly for the level of demand and number of essays; and the IEB literature paper scores highly for blending creative, innovative questions with a high level of cognitive demand. In the IEB papers, particularly the language paper, there are questions where the mark allocation does not seem high enough to accurately reflect the level of cognitive demand.

Ghana's Literature in English paper requires the most extensive writing; with the exception of the Ghanaian multiple choice papers, Zambia's compulsory Language papers require the least writing. The IEB papers require the most reading, and the Language paper works with the broadest range of media and visual; the Zambian compulsory Language paper requires the least reading.

Across all syllabuses there is inadequate attention to critical thinking skills, although there are random questions in certain papers that seek to interrogate texts.

A note on marking

There exists a subtle but significant relationship between the conditions of possibility of the marking sessions and the level of cognitive demand of the question papers. Members of the research team repeatedly commented on the high level of cognitive demand of the questions in the IEB papers, citing the memoranda's stipulation that the question be open to interpretation and assessed on argument as evidence of genuinely open-ended questions. While such questions may add to the quality of a paper, it is notoriously difficult to standardize the marking across the range of varied answers provided. It is possible for the IEB to manage such questions because they are in the privileged position of being able to run a single, small, tightly organized marking session simply by virtue of the fact that they cater for such a small section of the student population writing English First Language (approximately 8% in 2004). In the public sector in South Africa, the luxury of such open-endedness is not afforded to the provincial departments who are catering for much larger groups of candidates and run extensive marking sessions, often in more than one location, with copious numbers of markers. In these situations, it is often felt that the only way of ensuring a reliable marking standard across the group is to supply non-negotiable memoranda which are fixed in advance. While information gathered in this research suggests that the marking processes and systems in place in Kenya, Ghana, and Zambia are carefully organized, it is possible that sheer numbers of candidates also militate against extensive use of questions that encourage open-ended negotiation of meaning.