

Analysing the strategies used in the implementation of the new English curriculum at Grade 8 level and their effects in the learning and teaching in Epembe circuit

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyse which teaching strategies were used in the implementation of the new English curriculum at Grade 8 level and the effects that these strategies have in the learning and teaching in Epembe circuit. The study sought to answer the question: what are the strategies used in the implementation of the new English curriculum at Grade 8 level and their effects in the learning and teaching in Epembe circuit? The study was triggered by the fact that over the past two years in which the new curriculum for English second language has been implemented, the researchers observed with regrets that the English performance for Grade 8 learners in Epembe circuit has not been promising. The qualitative research approach was used to explore the phenomena under study. Cluster sampling was used to select five participants from five schools. Interview guide, observation guide and document analysis were used to gather relevant data from the participants. The findings of the study indicated that, English teachers of Epembe circuit used a total number of six teaching strategies to implement the new curriculum. These learning strategies were: whole class listening strategy, question and answer strategy, comprehension monitoring strategy, the Survey Question Read, Recite and Review Strategy (SQ3R), vocabulary building strategy and cooperative learning strategy. However, the scheme of work had recommended a number of teaching strategies such as role-play, dramatizing, prose summary, class discussion and dictation. Teachers ignored such beneficial teaching strategies, which could lead to learners' favourable performance.

The study also found that the "question and answer" strategy did not work in favour of Epembe circuit learners because it requires active participation from learners and time consuming. However, only few teachers found to use this strategy because it requires adequate teaching resources and Epembe circuit schools were in shortage of teaching resources. The study further found that learners did not perform well when the vocabulary building strategy was used because the learners of Epembe circuit were not self-driven to expand their vocabulary. The study also found that teachers of Epembe circuit did not use this very significant strategy often (the vocabulary building strategy). The findings of this study also found that when teachers use the "summary presentation" strategy, learners did not achieve favourable performance because teachers were using this strategy without facilitating learning. The study further revealed that some teachers did not use the "whole class listening strategy" at all. This was the only teaching strategy, which was recommended for teaching listening.

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education should employ only qualified personnel so that failure among learners is reduced at all cost. The ministry should also give necessary training to unqualified teachers who were currently employed. Moreover, the school management should strengthen their supervision measures to ensure that teachers were using all recommended teaching strategies. The study further recommends that subject advisors should offer necessary support to teachers to enable them use various teaching strategies efficiently.

Keywords: *teaching strategies, curriculum, English language, implementation, teachers*

Introduction

The Ministry of Education, Arts and culture (2015) reformed the entire Namibian Basic Education curriculum in 2015. The whole broad curriculum for basic education has been

reformed with major changes introduced in the curriculum. The syllabus for English Second Language was improved and teachers had to adjust to changes in the new curriculum.

Silimwe (2009) notes that whenever a new curriculum is introduced teachers are usually required and requested to adjust their teaching strategies, in order to comply with new changes in the curriculum and meet the needs and demands of the learners and all educational stakeholders. Grade 8 English second language teachers had to adjust their teaching strategies in response to changes in curriculum reform which took place in 2015. The new English second language curriculum was first implemented in 2017.

Over the past two years in which the new curriculum for English second language has been implemented, the researchers observed with regret that the English performance of grade 8 learners in Epembe circuit has not been good. It was noted that almost 70 percent of the Grade 8 classes failed because of English. As a result, this causes a constant grade repetition, higher learner to teacher ratios, school dropouts and low morale by both teachers and learners. Since the new English curriculum was implemented, grade 8 learners' performance in Epembe circuit of Ohangwena region in Northern Namibia had not been impressive. It is for this reason that the researchers investigated the teaching strategies used in the implementation of the new English curriculum at grade 8 level in Epembe circuit.

This study sought to answer the following research question:

1. What are the strategies used in the implementation of the new English curriculum at grade 8 level and their effects in the learning and teaching in Epembe circuit?

Theoretical framework and literature review

This study was based on the Cognitive Flexibility theory as a theoretical framework. The theory of cognitive flexibility places its focus on the nature of learning in complex and ill-structured domains (Fernandez, 2014). Cognitive flexibility refers to the ability of restoring one's knowledge in various ways, doing it in such a manner that responds to situational demands. The knowledge is presented and the processes that operate on

those method representations are brought into the picture. The cognitive flexibility theory deals with the transfer of knowledge and skills beyond learners' initial learning (Guffey, 2013). According to Fullan (2017), the teaching strategies employed by teachers during the new curriculum implementation in Namibian schools to make learning exciting were: summarizing, question and answer strategy, comprehension monitoring strategy, the survey question read, recite and review strategy (SQ3R), vocabulary building strategy and cooperative learning strategy.

Routman (2013) defined summarizing as a process of deducing the most important facts or ideas concerning something or someone from any given text, presenting it in a short and clear format. This strategy is associated with reading comprehension. It is a necessity for learners to be taught how to integrate ideas from given information in the text. With question and answer strategy, teachers are expected not to rush into answering their own questions whenever they pose a question. Every question asked should first be discussed by all learners in the classroom, and when they fail to give correct answers, the teacher comes to their rescue (Domician, 2015). According to Makeleni (2014), good readers make use of metacognitive strategies to have control over their reading and to think about it. In this strategy, learners are provided with a long text to read and answer some questions after reading the text. The teacher teaches learners the skills of identifying where in the text the difficulty is, restarting a difficult sentence or passage on their own and try to understand it better. Fernandez (2014) revealed that the SQ3R is a strategy used when teaching English. The method is given its abbreviated name for its 5 steps. The first step under this strategy is represented by the letter 'S' which stand for "Survey" which includes scanning the text; paying attention to the layout, chapters, sections, graphs and highlighted words in the text.

Step two of the SQ3R method is "Question" where the teacher coaches learners to ask themselves questions about the text. They should also ask themselves what they already know about the text and remind themselves of the goal of reading the text (Fernandez, 2014). According to Hande (2014)

the third step of the SQ3R strategy is “Read.” Where the teacher makes learners read the text actively while keeping the previous steps in mind. The fourth step of this strategy is “Recite” at this point, the teacher trains learners to repeat aloud in their own words what they have read. The last step of the SQ3R strategy is “review”. Learners read all relevant parts again and pay attention to parts they found difficult (Hande. 2014). Hill (2014) explains that vocabulary building strategy is an essential component of every English class. The focus of this strategy is to build learners’ vocabulary repertoire. In this strategy, teachers ask learners to identify unfamiliar words and go over their meaning in class. Domician (2015) advises that English teachers should be decisive in incorporating this strategy in their English literature classrooms. The strategy requires students to discuss a piece of literature in their individual groups. The first step to perform under this strategy is; making learners review the literal elements to ensure that all members of the group have common understanding of the literal components. In step two of this strategy, learners read the text together in a group and identify all figures of speech, which are found in the text. Thereafter, learners answer all literature questions provided as a class activity.

Guffey (2013) outlines the shortcomings of the summarizing strategy; the strategy is mostly less effective because most students have a negative attitude towards this strategy. Students struggle to give correct answers when writing a summary because there is no formula of getting it right. Fullan (2017) says that the question and answer strategy could be less effective if any teacher chooses to use it in his/her English lesson. The strategy requires learners to be free to ask questions in class as well as to participate in giving responses to questions asked by their classmates. Regardless of all the demerits of the question and answer strategy, it is beneficial because it enables learners to be fully involved in the lesson by actively participating. The effectiveness of the SQ3R strategy and the comprehension monitoring strategy is affected by their status of being time-consuming (Hill, 2014). Teachers have limited time of 40 minutes per lesson therefore they struggle to manage time when employing these two

strategies. Consequently, the effectiveness of the strategies is affected.

The nature of the vocabulary building strategy demands for learners’ zeal to learn. Most learners are still young and not self-driven so vocabulary building strategy may not work with them. However, the strategy works best when used in a class with ambitious learners; they can be excited about enhancing their vocabulary knowledge (Hill, 2014). According to Hande (2014), cooperative learning strategy is associated with literature. Some teachers do not really like literature, therefore some teachers also struggle to deliver literature related concepts effectively leading to the ineffective of the cooperative learning strategy.

Methodology

This study adopted the interpretivist research paradigm. The interpretivist research paradigm determines appropriate data collection instruments such as interview and observation guides as well as document analysis (Babbie, 2018). The paradigm was chosen because of its merits in enabling researchers to obtain necessary subjective and detailed information from participants. The detailed and descriptive information acquired enabled the analysis of teaching strategies used during implementation of the new curriculum. This study adopted the qualitative research approach because the phenomenon under study was completely narrative. The study adopted a case study design. The researchers found a case study as a suitable design for this study because the study involved various explanations and descriptions of the teaching strategies used by teachers in their teaching. The population of this study comprised all grade eight English teachers (they are 40 in total) in Epembe circuit. Probability cluster sampling was used for selecting schools in this study. The researchers chose cluster sampling because Epembe circuit is divided into five clusters. In each cluster only one school was chosen which was easily accessible to the researchers. Purposive sampling was used in selecting five teachers who specifically teach English in grade eight in Epembe circuit to participate in this study. Three research instruments were used to collect data for this study. These were an

interview guide, classroom observation guide and document analysis.

An in-depth face-to-face interview was carried out with five, grade 8 English teachers from five sampled schools. The researchers carried out classroom observations once at each of the five schools, which had been sampled. Document analysis was reviewed on lesson plans and schemes of work from those five grade 8 English teachers in order to figure out the teaching strategies used during implementation of the new English curriculum. From document analysis, the researchers deduced various teaching strategies prescribed for grade eight English teachers and analysed them. A bar graph was used to indicate which teaching strategy has been used during the implementation of the new English curriculum for grade eight in Epembe circuit. Additionally, more data were presented in a narrative manner, giving clear description theme by theme. Data was presented into themes, and those themes were used to analyse the data from the transcripts of the class observations and from face-to-face interviews. Similar themes and patterns among data were

identified and presented. The researchers also wrote reflective memos in order to record what the researchers were learning from the data collected during the observations. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), memos were helpful for recording ideas generated during data analysis. Data obtained through document analysis as well as observation were analysed at a latent level, whereby underlying ideas and ideologies were examined.

Findings and discussion

The teaching strategies used in the implementation of the new English curriculum in Epembe circuit

All the five teachers (100%) who were interviewed said they used six strategies, in the implementation of the new English curriculum in grade eight in Epembe circuit.

Figure 1 presents results from the observation findings. This figure indicates the number of teachers that made use of each strategy in their teaching as they were implementing the new English curriculum. Five lessons were observed from the 5 teachers.

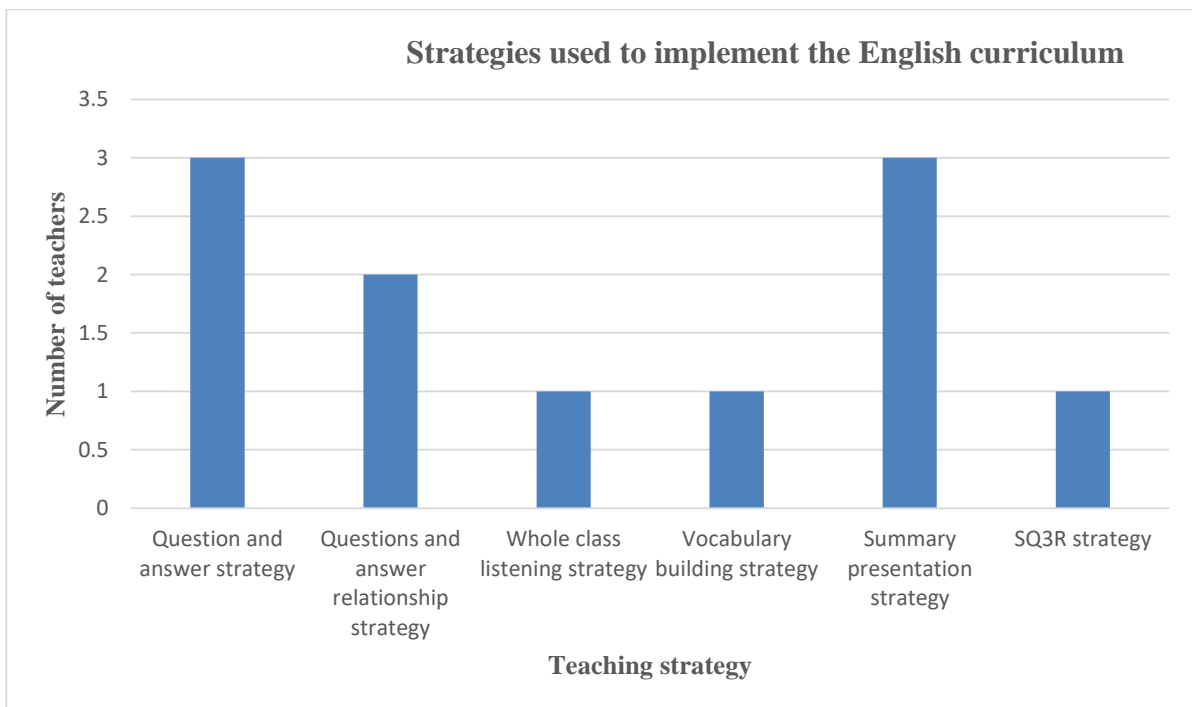


Figure 1: Strategies used to implement the English curriculum

Five lessons were observed and the researchers noted that there were some teachers who used more than one strategy in their teaching. Three

out of five teachers used the question and answer strategy. Three out of five teachers used the summary presentation strategy. One

out of five teachers used the SQ3R strategy. The researchers analysed the scheme of work and found out that the scheme of work recommended quite a number of teaching strategies. These were role-play, dramatizing, prose summary, class discussion and dictation. None of the teachers indicated that they used all the strategies in their teachings. Participant A said that:

“I barely use role-play, dramatizing, prose summary, class discussion and dictation because I am not familiar with them”.

There is no doubt that the scheme of work recommends some best teaching strategies. However, teachers failed to use them. According to Silimwe (2013), dramatizing and role-play are the fun teaching strategies. They bring humour into the classroom and made learning exciting. Therefore, the researchers concluded that these teachers limit themselves from exploring best strategies such as role-play, dramatization, dictation, and prose summary and classroom discussion because very few teachers are using those methods. They are often limiting themselves to the same old teaching strategies, which barely enable them to perform beyond expectations. In Silimwe’s (2013) view, teachers who explore various teaching strategies enable learners to enjoy learning. It is an opportunity, which spares both the teachers and learners from boredom, while maximizing effective learning. Every teaching strategy has its own unique downfalls. A dynamic use of various teaching strategies makes it possible for any teaching strategy to cover the weaknesses of other teaching strategies.

Four out of five teachers indicated that they used the question and answer strategy and they found it effective because it made the lesson more interesting and more exciting. Teacher A mentioned that:

“Most learners were shy and lacked intrinsic motivation so this strategy disadvantages them”.

Teachers added that the question and answer strategy was very time consuming. Consequently, teachers tried as much as they could to cover many basic competencies in one

lesson whenever the question and answer strategy was involved. They did so in an attempt to save time because the strategy itself was really time consuming. One out of five teachers indicated that she felt like the question and answer strategy was out-dated, hence she did not use it. The ineffectiveness of the question and answer strategy has been confirmed by Donena (2017), who expressed that the question and answer strategy was very time consuming because every question asked should first be discussed by the whole class. Whenever they failed to give a correct answer, the teacher then came to their rescue.

During classroom observation, the researchers noted that three out of five teachers used the question-and-answer strategy. They tried to deliver too much content in a single lesson. At the end of the lesson, most learners seemed confused and performed poorly in the class activities given. Learners also appeared to be shy and not free to ask questions. Five lesson plans from the participating teachers were analysed. Two out of five lesson plans analysed indicated that teachers had used the question and answer strategy in their lessons. No clear reflection of the lessons was done. The reflection of the lesson could determine the effectiveness of the teaching strategy used. The ineffectiveness of the question and answer strategy has been confirmed by Matemba (2017), who expressed the view that the question and answer strategy was very time consuming because every question asked should first be discussed by the whole class. Through interviews, two out of five teachers indicated that from time to time they used the SQ3R as one of their favourite strategies of teaching. Participant B said:

“I prefer this strategy because it seems suitable for facilitating most competencies of the English syllabus for grade eight”.

Three out of five teachers responded that they did not use the SQ3R strategy because it was time consuming and the syllabus has too much content, which needed to be covered within the limited time. The participants indicated that although this strategy was the most recommended one for teaching reading comprehension, it did not always bear good results. For example, Participant C said that:

“The SQ3R did not always bear good results because it was very demanding”.

Participant teachers said that SQ3R strategy was very demanding; it required learners to intensively concentrate for a long time while reading texts in order to comprehend them and answer questions thereafter. All five participants confirmed that most of their learners had very short concentration span so whenever the SQ3R strategy was used; such learners were most likely not to perform at all. At the time of observing teachers' lessons, the researchers noted that one teacher used the SQ3R strategy. The strategy was not effectively used because the text which the teacher used was too difficult and at a higher cognitive level. The text contained difficult words, which were too advanced for grade eight learners. The learners appeared to be frustrated during the lesson and the whole class performed poorly in the class activity, which was given thereafter because only 10% of the class managed to pass that particular class activity.

The researchers analysed the scheme of work and noted that the SQ3R had been recommended for some topics, but this strategy was not compatible with those topics. For example, SQ3R strategy seemed to be recommended for topics such as grammar or punctuations. Those two topics were completely not feasible with the recommended strategy (SQ3R). Using this strategy on such topics therefore contributes to poor curriculum implementation as well as high failure rate. Overall, the strategy being very time consuming does not work in learners' favour. Makeleni (2013) advises that SQ3R is suitable to be used during lessons taught in the morning. The strategy is quite demanding and requires high concentration. During morning time is suitable because it is a fresh new day and learners' brains are well rested and can handle the pressure. Using this strategy during any time of the day may not be effective and it may lead to undesirable performance from learners. During interviews, two out of five teachers indicated that they used the vocabulary teaching strategy. They stated that it is one of the best strategies; it is the best tool for expanding learners' vocabulary. These teachers reported that learners did not seem to

have a burning desire of enriching their own vocabulary so whenever teachers used this strategy in their lessons, the learners did not embrace it. They performed poorly whenever the class activity was given. To this, Participant C indicated that:

“I should be honest to state I still need to work on my skills so that I will be able to effectively implement these strategies”.

Three out of five teachers said that the vocabulary building strategy was a tricky strategy. They also stated that the strategy was demanding, such that it challenged them to have rich vocabulary. Participant B mentioned that:

“The vocabulary building strategy was a tricky strategy as well as demanding, that it challenged most of us teachers to have a rich vocabulary”

They indicated that they did not use this strategy due to low confidence in themselves. The teacher being honest enough to indicate that she had not mastered this strategy was an indication that she did not implement this strategy effectively. This obviously poses a threat to learners' performance. Upon analysing the scheme of work for English grade eight, the researchers found the vocabulary building strategy had been recommended for various topics. This is a dynamic strategy, which could be incorporated in almost any lesson. Not using this strategy occasionally makes learners miss out. Hill (2014) explains that the vocabulary building strategy ought to be an essential component of every English lesson. The focus of this strategy is to build learners' vocabulary repertoire. Two out of five teachers revealed to the researchers that they used the summary presentation strategy. They indicated that this strategy was beneficial because it provided learners with notes, which they might use to study at their own convenience. Participant E said that:

“This strategy is not sufficiently beneficial because if learners write notes, which they do not understand, they will not be able to use the notes when studying. I use this strategy as my last resort after various attempts of explaining

a particular aspect to learners and they still struggle to apprehend it”.

Three out of five teachers revealed that they did not use summary presentation strategy because the subject advisors from the regional offices did not provide them with appropriate notes which they could share with learners while using it. During classroom observations, the researchers noted that three out of five teachers gave summary notes to the learners but they did not take time to go through the notes with learners. Based on the researchers’ observations, learners seemed to have not enjoyed the lesson when summarising strategy was used during teaching. The class activity was given and learners performed poorly. So it was evident that the strategy was not effective. Five lesson plans were analysed and none of the lesson plans indicated that the teacher gave summary notes to learners and explained them. The observation findings correspond with Guffey (2013) who revealed the shortcomings of the summarising strategy. According to Guffey (2013), summarising strategy is mostly less effective because most of the learners have a negative attitude towards this strategy. And learners were struggling to give correct answers when writing summaries because there was no formula of getting it right.

Two out of five teachers interviewed indicated that they used the whole class listening strategy to facilitate learning in their classrooms. Given that their learners were English second language speakers and they were still struggle to fully understand the language. Both teachers indicated that the summarising strategy was never effective, but they had to use it because listening skills form part of the examinations. This is what Participant A said:

“This strategy is not effective in my class. I never bare good results because my learners still struggle to fully understanding English therefore they were always performing poorly”.

Three out of five teachers revealed that the whole class listening strategy was a frustrating strategy to learners. They realised that learners never performed well whenever the whole class listening strategy was involved.

Therefore, they refrained from using this strategy. During classroom observations, none of the teachers observed used the whole class listening strategy. The scheme of work was analysed and it was quite surprising that this strategy was not prescribed for teaching and learning in the scheme of work. Mbudhi (2012) advises English second language teachers to invest more time unto training learners on how to become effective speakers. Mbudhi (2012) acknowledges that using this strategy can be very frustrating especially when learners do not have good background knowledge of listening. Two out of five teachers interviewed revealed that they used question and answer-relation strategy during teaching. They indicated that the strategy could only be effectively implemented if teaching materials were in adequate supply because it’s a complex and demanding strategy. However, they indicated that they struggled to implement this strategy effectively because the schools lacked resources. Three out of five teachers responded that they were not aware of this strategy. Consequently, they did not use it in their everyday teaching.

None of the teachers observed used the whole class listening strategy; most teachers were bound to one (question and answer) strategy, which they deemed more important. Butts (2018) notes that the question and answer strategy has been proven to be one of the most effective strategies for teaching English. It helps non-native English speakers to work on their language proficiency skills. The researchers analysed the scheme of work and discovered that the question and answer-relation strategy had been recommended on several occasions on the scheme of work. It seems that most of the teachers were not using the answer–relation strategy as recommended in the scheme of work.

Conclusion

The study only found a total of six teaching strategies in use, in Epembe circuit. These were the question and answer strategy, question and answer-relationship strategy, whole class listening strategy, vocabulary building strategy, summary presentation strategy and the SQ3R strategy. However, the scheme of work recommended a number of teaching strategies such as role-play,

dramatizing, prose summary, class discussion and dictation. The teachers ignored these beneficial teaching strategies, which could lead to learners' favourable performance. The study found that the "question and answer" strategy did not work in favour of Epembe circuit learners. The strategy requires active participation from learners. Epembe circuit learners were struggling to actively participate during the lesson because the question and answer" strategy did not work in their favour. Therefore, the use of the "question and answer" strategy disadvantaged them. The strategy is time consuming, causing teachers to waste too much time dwelling on one topic. Frequent use of this strategy might result in teachers not finishing the syllabus.

The study found that learners did not perform well when the vocabulary building strategy was used. Learners of Epembe circuit were not self-driven to expand their vocabulary hence they did not perform well when this strategy was used. The study also found that teachers in the Epembe circuit did not use this very significant strategy often. The teachers confessed that they lacked confidence to contest themselves by using this strategy because the strategy is very demanding. Such attitude deprived learners from enriching their vocabulary. Learners with poor vocabulary are at risk of not performing well during examinations. The study found that as teachers used the "summary presentation" strategy, learners did not achieve good performance. Teachers used this strategy without facilitating learning. The learners were normally only provided with summaries but the teachers failed to explain those summaries to the learners. Learners might not understand the summaries provided to them, yet they were expected to study on their own. No learning support was offered; therefore, learners might perform poorly during class activities and examinations.

The study revealed that some teachers did not use the "whole class listening strategy" at all. This was the only teaching strategy, which is recommended for teaching listening. It was clear that teachers who did not use whole class listening strategy were using wrong strategies to teach listening. Listening has always been part of the final examination. Whenever learners are not well trained in this

area, they might not perform well during examinations. The "question and answer-relation" strategy ought to be used by all teachers because it is very beneficial. Few teachers used the "question and answer-relation" strategy because it requires teaching resources to be in adequate supply and Epembe circuit schools were in shortage of teaching resources.

Recommendations

School principals should strengthen their supervision measures so that they help teachers to adhere to all curriculum policies and documents. For example, all teaching strategies recommended by the scheme of work should be used because they are all relevant. The subject advisors should visit schools on a frequent basis so that they offer experts opinion. For example, they could alert teachers on the dangers of using time-consuming teaching strategies frequently. All teaching strategies literally have their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers should try to use at least two teaching strategies in one lesson so that the strengths of one teaching strategy can compensate the weaknesses of the other. Subject advisors should help teachers to realise the importance of using vocabulary-building strategy in order to enrich learners' vocabulary. Learners with rich vocabulary have a good chance of performing well during examinations. Subject advisory teachers should also coach teachers to be flexible with the use of teaching strategies. All teaching strategies are relevant so none of them should be ignored.

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