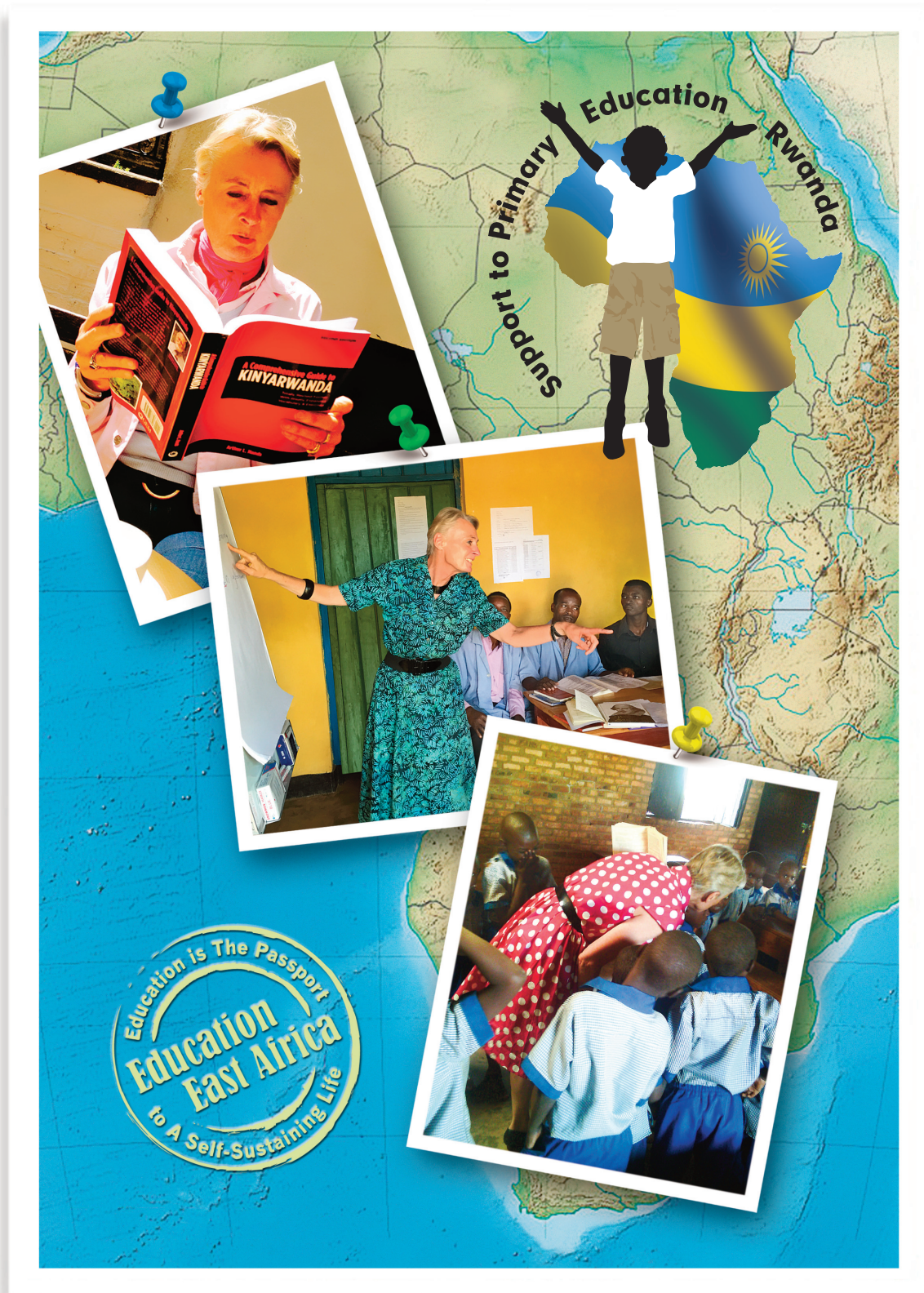


Teaching and Learning English in Primary Schools in Rwanda

Katy Allen-Mtui Presents
An Overview with Options for Consideration



www.EducationRwanda.org
www.EducationEastAfrica.org
Katy@EducationEastAfrica.org

Contents:

Foreword	Page 1
Introduction	Page 2
1. Primary years	Page 2
2. Background in Rwanda	Page 2
3. Reality	Page 4
4. Consequences	Page 5
Some options for consideration	Page 5
1. On-the-job training for the teachers	Page 7
2. The optimum age for pupils to start learning English in this context	Page 9
3. Pre-service training	Page 11
Conclusion	Page 12
Appendix 1 – Appraisal of the competence based curriculum for English P1-P4	Page 13
Appendix 2 – Use of ‘the’ and lesson guidance explained in Kinyarwanda	Page 29
Appendix 3 – The NOEC course for English	Page 31

FOREWORD

My aim is the achievement of quality education for primary school pupils in learning English. This is based on my 22 years of experience working with government primary school teachers in Tanzania, combined with my recent experience working with primary school teachers in rural schools in Gasabo district.

I am a trained teacher of English as a foreign language. My passion and desire is to see pupils in government schools equipped with the necessary foundation of the English language so that they can fully engage in their future learning, studies and employment.

From my relatively short time in Rwanda, and working in the primary schools in Gasabo, I have seen much that is good, but I have also seen many practices, and some causes for concern which are identical to those I experienced in Tanzania. The similarities are extraordinary given the different backgrounds of the two countries. The similarities extend to details such as the way many pupils write the letter ‘e’, to the ambitions in the curriculum, to the competency in English inter alia.

My purpose in setting out options for consideration is to assist with the teaching of English. This is so that the country’s ambitions can be fulfilled with a flourishing tourist industry, a financial services industry second to none in Africa. This skilled workforce will maintain and expand the impressive development of the last 22 years.

I foresee understandable challenges, and hope that my intent to prevent an ‘accident’ from happening is not taken in any way as criticism. It is merely an effort to help based on my assessment of the situation and on my own experience.

INTRODUCTION

1. Primary Years

Primary School is the most important stage of education. It is in the primary years that the foundation is laid. Primary school teachers are one of the greatest resources of a nation. **Teachers have more influence over productivity than any government.**

The main and crucial part of the years in primary education is the development of skills; that is learning how to think. Skill development at primary school is what eventually creates top scientists, entrepreneurs, politicians, historians, artists etc. The primary years are so important because it is within those years that a child's brain develops fundamentally.

Every child needs to be guided to use the skills the brain can offer. If developed in primary years, those skills are lifetime skills that will develop further with education and experience.

If proper development is missed in the primary years then a child is at a severe disadvantage for the rest of her/his education.

For success in the primary years the teacher is the key. The teacher must train the pupils and be their guide.

In primary education the most important training is in literacy (mother tongue), mathematics, and art and creative studies. In Rwanda, and indeed East Africa, another important consideration is the learning of a second language. That chosen second language is English.

English is now the undisputed world language. From the instructions on the medicine bottle or the crop spray, to the language of the internet, tourism and world trade, English is the language. It makes sense for school children to learn English, but the context must be right.

2. Background in Rwanda

An astounding amount has been achieved in Rwanda since 1994. The aim is to have a knowledge-based, technology-led economy. I think it is extremely difficult for outsiders to comprehend the magnitude of achievements in education over the last 22 years.

The enrolment rates and access are major successes. Good governance and accountability are at the core of the success of the education sector. The infrastructure is impressive; the school buildings are proper and adequate and the structure from Mayor, Vice Mayor, District Education Officer, Sector Education Officers and Head Teachers is supportive. Of overriding importance, and a cause of pride for the country, is the rapport between the teachers and their young pupils in Lower Primary. The teachers are motivated and show that they care about their pupils and want them to learn. This conducive atmosphere in the classroom is excellent, and is the essential foundation for success. The teachers are willing to learn and this is another key element for educational success.

Primary education in Rwanda is from the age of 7 for six years, followed by four years in secondary school. Some children have pre-primary education.

In 2009 French ceased to be the second language in Rwanda. English was then adopted as the second language. This was a major decision. There have been other decisions made within the 7 years since 2009, and so the current system is only seven years old.

English is now taught from P1 to P3 (Lower Primary) as a foreign language, and then from P4 all subjects are taught through the medium of English.

Of some concern is the age differences in the classes; for instance, some P1 pupils are over-age (15% on average) and some are under-age (15% on average). This affects their learning as the brain is undergoing fundamental development in this age-range. There is also the problem of the number of pupils repeating years, and the drop-out rate. P5 experiences the biggest drop-out, and this could well be influenced by the language of instruction.

Unfortunately, learning outcomes are low. The LARS II report shows that the majority of children in P2 have not acquired age-appropriate literacy or numeracy skills in their mother-tongue.

There is now a new Competence Based Curriculum which took effect from January 2016 for P1 and P4. For the subject of English the government-approved textbooks are not in the schools at the time of writing. The Lower Primary teachers are using a mixture of old books and some more recently prepared by donor partners.

After the major change to adopt English as a second language it is not surprising that many of the teachers are not yet sufficiently competent in the English language and are struggling to teach it. In most P1 to P3 lessons Kinyarwanda is used to explain and translate the English which is being taught; **this is not how children learn a second language**. Many teachers do not use any teachers' books or guides as their English is not good enough to be able to understand them.

The teacher, as the guide, helper and trainer must be equipped to know, at least, some elementary English. This means that the teacher of English should know the backbone of the English language.

Lower Primary school teachers of mathematics are not required to have a degree in mathematics, nor to be the most proficient mathematicians in the country. They are required to have sufficient knowledge of the subject so that they can teach the basic number work to their pupils.

There is, though, an expectation that the Lower Primary school teacher of English be near-fluent in the language. This is unrealistic. The primary school English teacher needs to know sufficient English to be able to teach the pupils the basics of the language. An advanced proficiency to be able to read explanations and instructions in the syllabus, teachers' guides and books in English is unrealistic and not necessary.

In Australia, England and most of Europe, when a foreign language is taught at primary school the teachers' books and the syllabus are in the native language of the teacher.

- After only 7 years the teaching of English in the majority of government primary schools in Rwanda is, understandably, not of a high standard.
- Most teachers themselves do not have sufficient knowledge of the language to be able to teach it well.
- The pupils are not getting the language instruction and the language skills that they could and should be getting. The pupils need to know the sentence patterns and structures that are the backbone of the English language. Once that backbone or framework is learned then that is something on which to build their future English language learning. Without this framework the language will not be mastered.
- This is of utmost significance as the pupils' future studies are all through the medium of English. If the teaching and learning of English in these primary years is not adequate, the implications for studies at tertiary level, business needs and the requirements of the East African Community, as well as interaction with global communities are huge and worrying.

3. Reality

The new competence based curriculum is not being fully implemented yet.

In April this year, I was asked to write an appraisal of the new competence based curriculum for English for P1 to P4 by a senior member of Rwanda Education Board (REB). Attached as Appendix 1 is that appraisal, based on my years of teaching in East African government schools and working with the teachers.

My worries about some of the shortcomings of the competence based curriculum are being borne out, as the teachers make mistakes which the syllabus and available materials lead them into. For instance, when the material mixes singular and plural items together without guiding the teachers to the implications of the language involved, the teachers teach such structures as, 'This is socks'.

As the teachers are struggling to teach, there is little or no real assessment of competence. From my observations there is little competence being gained by the pupils. **This is because there is very little teaching of the sentence patterns and sentence structures which are the essential backbone of the English language.**

In my view the curriculum has some shortcomings, and I know the textbooks have been much contested and, therefore, delayed. The first year of implementation has been greatly compromised. I wonder if this is not an ideal time for consideration of some options for improvement.

4. Consequences

My concern is that if options are not considered then the consequences for the development of Rwanda could be huge and cannot be over-emphasised.

At the moment many in top positions who have helped and are still helping the country in its impressive development, as a business and commercial centre for East Africa and beyond, have had the benefit of education abroad. The majority are near-fluent speakers of English who had their thinking skills developed and moulded at primary school.

The children now in the primary schools will be the ones responsible for the maintenance and development of the country's achievements. Some of those children have already dropped out, and others have finished school with poor literacy and numeracy. Businesses are voicing concerns about the ability of the country's graduates.

Whilst there is no time to lose, it is not a race to be rushed. A steady, educationally sound approach is needed. **It all starts with primary education.**

If the teaching and learning of English is not tackled properly then all future education will be severely compromised. The teachers will continue to be forced to teach in Kinyarwanda in order for any learning to be imparted. Secondary education will not achieve its full potential. By university some students may have caught up to some extent, but the potential of most students will be untapped and unknown, and they will not be able to enter the skilled workforce in order to benefit their country. These may be in such numbers that the skilled workforce is not sufficient to maintain the impressive development that has occurred in recent years.

SOME OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

A short to medium-term approach is needed to get the teaching and learning of English 'on its feet'. That approach should take full account of the context; that is the physical infrastructure, the available resources, and particularly the teaching force that is in place in the primary schools.

In order of importance I look at on-the-job training of the primary school teachers of English, the ability of the pupils and the optimum age to start learning English in this context, and pre-service training.

1a On-the-job training for teachers of English

Teachers' explanations and instructions to be in Kinyarwanda

The primary school teachers' language skills need to be developed and supported, as a most crucial step. The teachers who are already in the primary schools need immediate support. As well as that, the curriculum, syllabus and teaching materials need to be such that the teachers are able to learn or improve on-the-job and yet still provide the pupils with some quality language learning. The teachers need to be assisted as much as possible in order to ensure that real improvement takes hold.

The aim is to get the teaching and learning of English 'up on its feet'.

The present teaching force is shouldering the brunt of the continuing problem of the teaching and learning of English. They are the teachers in post and are the resources with which to work. These teachers who are currently in post should be given every bit of support and help possible.

Teachers who have some insight into how the forms of English language behave in certain circumstances – who understand its grammatical structure – are able to teach it all the better as this knowledge has considerable influence on the methods they use in the classroom. A knowledge of the structure is essential for the teacher and pupil of English. In the classroom the teaching and learning of structure is a foundation for the teaching of certain other aspects of English.

The majority of primary school teachers have an insufficient command of English to be able to teach it effectively. Without subject knowledge then subject application cannot take place, and it is unfair to place expectations on primary school teachers of child-centred learning or participatory practices. Lack of subject knowledge is one of the main causes of the present problems in teaching English in primary schools.

One option is for the teachers' books to use Kinyarwanda so that the teachers can understand the explanations and instructions.

This is not a suggestion that Kinyarwanda is used in the classroom. It is merely stating that if the teachers are to understand the teachers' books then the explanations and instructions should be in Kinyarwanda. If teachers are to increase their knowledge of English then explanations in Kinyarwanda will help them.

There is little point in preparing teachers' materials in English when it is known that many of the teachers do not have competency in English to understand them, and that they will be put-off reading them because of the language barrier.

If a child embarks on a new journey alone her parent will give her instructions, advice and explanations so that she will not get lost or be led astray. Her parent will use language that she is certain to understand. In Rwanda that is Kinyarwanda. Those explanations and instructions are too important, and so the parent will not use a language in which the child is not fully conversant. So it is with a child's education. Their teachers must be advised and guided so that the journey of learning a foreign language goes without mishap along the way. The teachers need to have explanations and instructions in a language they can fully understand.

Recently a senior member of REB's Curriculum department, when discussing a questionnaire which inspectors will be using with teachers to obtain information, said that for Lower Primary the questionnaire had better be in Kinyarwanda "otherwise we might get the wrong information". Therefore, it is already accepted that the teachers' English is of a low level.

The teachers' textbook-guides could use Kinyarwanda so that all the explanations of structure, meaning and how to conduct classroom activities are in Kinyarwanda. **It is over-ambitious to continue to give all these materials in English when Kinyarwanda is the commonly understood language.**

Most other countries give all these materials to their teachers in the teachers' L1, the mother tongue (so in England, teachers who teach French in primary school nevertheless have all their teachers' materials written in English, and in Australia the teachers who teach Indonesian have the teachers' materials in English etc.)

The teachers are not adequately assisted by the existing materials. The materials are not prepared with the level of available teacher expertise in mind. In order to improve communication, the only language that all teachers fully understand is Kinyarwanda.

To have the teachers' books and handbooks containing explanations and instructions in Kinyarwanda could be the first step to be undertaken. This could only help and not hinder the acquisition of the foreign language by the teachers.

Examples are provided in Appendix 2; one which sets out an explanation of the use of 'the' (which has no equivalent in the Kinyarwanda language) from reference material in a Handbook, and one which sets out guidance to help in a lesson.

1b On-the-job training for teachers of English

The case for one course of textbooks

Another option to consider is the adoption of a single, suitable English language course. At the moment there seem to be separate textbooks, but they do not combine to form a coherent course.

One observation is that the curriculum and the system lead to separate textbooks being produced for each year of study, and there is no 'course'. A course is a coordinated series of successive books which build one on the other so that there is steady build-up of knowledge and skills with constant revision. Indeed, even within some of the current textbooks there is no successive build-up of language and no revision. Learning English (or any language) is the learning of new habits and skills. Practice must be regular and systematic.

The writing of a textbook is a long process based on years and years of experience. A senior member of the Curriculum department of REB said, about the new textbooks for the second phase, "These should not be delayed as the publishers have 6 months to write them". It is contended that no quality text book can be written in 6 months. A good textbook takes about 5 years to produce.

A case could be made at this stage for the study of English in primary schools to have a single English course comprising a text book for each year. A single text book would assist all teachers to improve their language skills 'on the job', and ensure a solid base of sentence and structure-patterns as well as vocabulary. Any pupil or teacher who moves from one school to another would not be confronted with new materials. In the medium term this would also greatly assist the pre-service training of teachers (see below).

One example to consider is an English course whose use is tried and tested. It was used some years ago with great success across East Africa. It has been updated and adapted to suit the current context. It has recently been used in

Tanzania to great effect¹, and is now being used for in-service teacher training in project schools in Gasabo District with very good results. It is referred to below, and details are set out in Appendix 3.

The advantages of the books are that:

- i. The teachers learn on-the-job by being taken through the structural patterns step by step with their pupils**
- ii. The teachers are helped by the thorough guidance in the teachers' books and the dictionary and pronunciation guide in them**
- iii. The pupils are provided with sufficient practice of each step for the meaning and structure to be thoroughly understood**
- iv. The pupils are motivated by the stories and their pictures and by the classroom practice exercises**

The books lay the firm foundations in the language which is required of a primary course.

It is worth considering that, when they were first used in East Africa (Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania), Book One and Two aimed to get those pupils to a sufficiently proficient level in English in two years that they could then cope with all subjects taught in English. That was achieved.

The course books provide certainty that the teaching will be systematic, progressing from one point to another in regular fashion; that English will be broken down to a limited number of regular patterns and that these will be practised regularly and systematically; that new habits and skills be learned by practising the patterns of behaviour of the language; that the pupils enjoy the content and are motivated to learn.

In accordance with successful practices followed in most other countries in the world where a foreign language is taught in primary school, the teacher's books use the native language of the teachers (here, Kinyarwanda) for the explanations and instructions to be fully understood, and so that maximum help can be given to the teachers.

In the short to medium term consideration could be given to use this tried, tested and successful course of text books for the initial learning of English: The NOEC (The New Original English Course) – see Appendix 3.

¹ I spent 22 years in Tanzania working in government primary schools, and introduced the above English course and Language Awareness course, mentioned below, successfully in pilot projects. I am a fluent Swahili speaker, and am the longest-serving native English speaking expert in primary school education and particularly English as a foreign language in Tanzania. In 2010 the Minister for Education wanted to adopt the books nationwide. The general election that year resulted in his being moved to Agriculture, and the matter lapsed. In 2013 the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education wanted to adopt the books nationwide. Correspondence and meetings took place. In the end the matter was not pursued because of 'blocking' by parties interested in incentive payments. Disappointed by the difficult barriers to work in government education in Tanzania, I came to Rwanda in early 2015.

2a The optimum age for pupils to start learning English in this context

In Rwanda foreign language acquisition begins in Primary 1 (the first year of primary school when the average pupil is 7 years old). There are many arguments, and much evidence from other countries, to show that the delay of the introduction of a foreign language until at least the third year of primary school is very beneficial. This is an important consideration.

Primary I, and arguably Primary 2 as well, should be preserved for building a good foundation in reading and writing Kinyarwanda. Indeed, the LARS II results show that a literacy test (in Kinyarwanda) set for P2 had average scores of 45.3% and the numeracy test set for P2 had average scores of 32.9%. The young pupils need a good command of basic literacy and numeracy before consideration is given to the introduction of a foreign language, and especially one so different, and not grounded in Bantu languages.

In teaching English to young learners it is essential to consider how children learn. There are recognised stages of cognitive development that every child passes through, and teaching material should take account of this. There is also a very great need for the motivation to learn English for both the pupils and the teachers.

When most Rwandan children learn the foreign language of English they have no native speakers of English at hand whom they may imitate – nor do they receive as much social encouragement as learning L1. Patterns of speech of L1 are in conflict with those of English especially in the early stages. Most striking is the relative lack of powerful motivation. In learning L2 (English) the teaching must be systematic, progressing from one point to another in regular fashion. Structural patterns must be taught in an orderly way, and therefore insight into grammar or structure is absolutely essential, and is central to L2 learning.

L2 is acquired after the basis of L1 is established. For child learners it is important to compare cognitive capacity and cognitive demand. The older the child the greater capacity for cognitive capacity. The older the child the greater the demands made on him. Young children might not be better or quicker language learners but if they know a little it impresses others because of their overall cognitive ability.

So, the belief that young primary schoolchildren were *ipso facto* better language learners than older children has not been upheld. Indeed, the LARS II findings are that older children in P2 perform better than average-age children which indicates that their greater cognitive capacity enables them to cope with the demands of the P1 and P2 curricula.

There are three factors at least which affect a child's progress in language acquisition: motivation; exposure; age.

- 1. Motivation: the child must want to learn L2.**
- 2. Exposure: the quantity and quality of exposure to L2 in a learning environment**
- 3. Age: Young children are at a disadvantage because their learning capacity is not very great. Therefore, young children may take longer to move along the developmental pathway.**

Motivation is perhaps the greatest factor. Alongside motivation, the incentive value of success is another most important factor.

Studies have indicated that early success is more likely to be followed by favourable attitudes at later stages, and with success at later stages. Nothing succeeds like success. **This would suggest that curricula that are too ambitious for the age and cognitive development of the children could damage attitudes and overall success.**

Primary I and Primary 2 pupils are only just beginning to gain literacy and numeracy skills in Kinyarwanda. Some enter Primary 1 under-age (about 15%). That means that pupils in Primary 1 are in the stages of pre-operational thought moving to concrete operations (Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development). In the context of Rwanda, with the majority of teachers not confident or skilled in the English language, and the low level of mother-tongue literacy and numeracy achievements in P1 and P2, it is suggested that the introduction of English, as formal language learning, to be postponed until P3 is considered as a very serious option.

Indeed, in Tanzania, in 1998 the government changed the introduction of English as a foreign language from Standard III to Standard I, expecting that two extra years of language learning would improve the proficiency. In the middle of 2015 they stopped the teaching of English in Standard I and Standard II, and reverted to the introduction of the foreign language in Standard III. No benefit had been gained, and in some cases regression was the case, by introducing the formal language learning too early in the children's cognitive development, and in the context of teachers who are not fully competent in the language. Habits badly or incorrectly taught are not easily 'untaught' from a young child's brain.

2b The case for a Language Awareness Course in P1 and P2

In order for P1 and P2 to concentrate on literacy and numeracy, and for those crucial studies not to be compromised by the introduction of the formal learning of English, it is suggested that consideration be given to a Language Awareness Course for P1 and P2.

Such a course would aim to support mother-tongue literacy, and develop important thinking skills and to provide motivation to learn English in, for instance, P3 and beyond. The fact that future studies will be conducted through the medium of English is not enough to motivate young children to want to learn the language.

Motivation to learn English is provided by learning about the speakers of English, and how learning English will be of interest and benefit.

Such a course would take full account of the children's cognitive development, and comprise literacy, numeracy and elements of art and music, and so be a support to the other time-tabled subjects.

A young Kinyarwanda speaker learning about English might be surprised to know that he/she already knows some words which derive from English before he/she has any English language lesson. All that is needed is a little help with a change of pronunciation. It is suggested that the introduction of these words (e.g. shirt, jacket, glass, hospital, bank etc.) in some of the early lessons would give enormous motivation to the language learning. Work on the pronunciation at an early stage would also be most beneficial.

To engender motivation of pupil and teacher the course could introduce inter-cultural education to promote interest in the Rwandan culture and that of speakers of English – e.g. in learning about children’s songs, rhymes and games, food, gestures, playtime activities, domestic and wild animals, flags, money etc. Language is culture in motion, and language is a main element of culture. The study of speakers of English can help develop pupils’ understanding and appreciation of their own culture and of other cultures and ways of life. Thus teachers of these early years who lack great subject knowledge of English language could be assisted to explore, with the pupils, cultural information of both their own culture and that of speakers of English. This would help to motivate the language learning and general interest in the language and speakers of it, for both the teacher and the pupils.

All of this would take account of the age of the pupils and their stage of cognitive development and also of the current level of expertise of the available teachers, and the need to motivate both pupil and teacher.

Such a course, as outlined above, was successfully used on a pilot project in Tanzania, and the two course books (accompanied by 20 colour posters) are available for consideration if required.

3. Pre-service training

It seems fair to state that the majority of primary school teachers have an insufficient command of English to be able to teach it effectively. Good command of grammar and vocabulary is lacking, and alongside this the most striking failing is in the pronunciation. Interference from Kinyarwanda and particularly its ultimate vowel sounds is the main problem.

Teachers with insufficient subject knowledge have very little if any confidence.

Teacher training is concerned with two elements:

- 1. *Subject Knowledge* – ensuring that the future teachers know and understand enough about what they are to teach to be able to teach it effectively. The teachers should have adequate performance skills in English, and have knowledge about the language in general.**
- 2. *Subject Application* – ensuring that the future teachers know and understand enough about how to teach what they are to teach to be able to do so effectively. The teachers need an understanding of the teaching-learning process, and general pedagogical understanding.**

Subject application cannot take place without subject knowledge. Without subject knowledge it is unfair to place expectations on primary school teachers of child-centred learning or participatory practices.

From observations in schools it is apparent that lack of subject knowledge is the main cause of the present problems in teaching English in primary schools.

Ultimately, for any item of ‘target language’ (a new structure or item) the aim is for the pupils to produce it naturally on their own. If the teacher cannot produce the target language freely then she or he cannot easily plan for pupil-centred lessons with the target language. The fear of not knowing how to correct or even whether things are right or wrong is overwhelming.

Planning a lesson is the most important stage if real pupil-centred learning is to take place. Little planning of this kind is taking place while the majority of teachers do not fully understand their materials.

However, even when subject knowledge is mastered much help is needed with its application if the primary pupils are to learn and understand.

The teachers need to be guided in both subject knowledge and application. The materials need to guide the teachers in methodology and assessment. In fact, until the teaching of English is well established, the teachers and the student teachers should be hand-held by their materials so that good, learner-centred lessons are guaranteed at the same time as the teacher is improving his or her ability on-the-job. This would save a lot of time and money on one-off trainings which use a 'cascade' approach which itself is not always successful.

If the single course of textbooks, suggested above, is adopted then pre-service training should comprise the study of the course and all the practical exercises within it. The course would guide the teacher in the sentence patterns and structures and in methods of how to teach them to the pupils.

If pre-service teachers were trained in the content and methodology in all the text books of the course then they would be competent speakers and teachers of English; they would have confidence in the structure of the English language, and they would have a good understanding of how to teach the language to their pupils. As the course books provide for practice and repetition then assessment of competence would be easily made.

A study of the stories in the course books, over the length of the student-teachers' training, would certainly build their command of the English language. It would also help the literacy of the teachers, and perhaps instil in them a joy of reading which is much needed in the primary education sector.

CONCLUSION

This paper has set out, what might appear to be, bold and new options for consideration.

If it is considered that the teaching of English in primary schools is not working well, then something different needs to be adopted.

What is suggested here is tried and tested in the context of East Africa, and has every chance of working in Rwanda.

Fear of change is often prevalent. An overriding fear might be compromising the educational potential of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan pupils who will be the backbone of the country in 20 to 30 years' time.

Please see our website for more details and information:

www.EducationRwanda.org
www.EducationEastAfrica.org

October 2016

Appendix 1

Appraisal of the English Syllabus for Primary Level P1 – P4 Rwanda Education Board 2015 New Competency Based Curriculum

Below I consider each unit for each year from P1 to P4. Each unit comprises 28 lessons of 40 minutes each. That is 7 periods/lessons a week for 4 weeks. That amounts to nearly 19 hours of instruction.

My comments are based on the printed syllabus. I obtained this syllabus on the REB website in September 2015. As yet no textbooks are available, and so the transference of the syllabus to textbook material cannot be assessed.

At the end of my appraisal of the units I set out some overall comments.

I write with 22 years of experience of helping in the teaching and learning of English in Tanzanian government primary schools and of the many difficulties encountered by the teachers there. My comments are set down in the hope of helping to improve the teaching and learning, and not in any way as a criticism of the aims behind the new curriculum.

P1- Unit 1

Unfortunately, in the first column 'Knowledge and understanding' there is an error in the grammatical terminology. 'Personal and possessive pronouns' should be 'personal and possessive adjectives' as it is '*my, your, his, her*' which are to be taught. This same mistake is found on page 18 of the syllabus document.

Possessive adjectives are very difficult to teach, and especially to children of a young age. The teacher needs help in activities that indisputably denote possession. This is best done with 'concrete' or actual objects. To introduce this difficult grammatical item with something 'abstract' as '*name*' makes the teacher's job more difficult. It would be better to use '*shirt*'. Every pupil will be wearing a shirt, and it is indisputably something belonging to that pupil. Other items such as '*bag, 'book' 'pencil*' also bring difficulty as they may not be the actual property of the pupil, but might be borrowed items or even items belonging to the school. For teaching methodology the teacher can stand behind the pupil, assist him/her with actions, and say on his/her behalf (or with him/her) '*this is my shirt*'. It is possible to do that with '*my name is Felix*' but there is nothing to 'hold' or to 'see'. Whereas a '*shirt*' is visible to all other pupils.

There is then the introduction of '*this*'. I assume the textbooks will expand on this. '*This*' is to be used when touching an item. The question '*Who is this?*' requires an answer. The obvious answer, assuming all pupils in the class cannot touch Felix at the same time, is '*That is Felix*' –and yet '*that*' is not introduced in the unit.

Classroom instructions are introduced. The inclusion of '*speak*' is potentially problematic. '*Speak*' as a classroom instruction is not used. The teacher might say, '*speak up*' or '*speak loudly*' or '*speak to Ivan*' but these constructions are beyond the scope of this first unit.

The problem with actions for the classroom instructions is that the use of the

present continuous tense is being invited. If the teacher says *'clap'*, then the pupils can do the action and so obey the instruction. However, if the pupils are to speak whilst they are doing the action (which I strongly suspect is what will happen in the classroom) then the pupils need to say, *'I am clapping'*.

P1- Unit 2

Here *'this'* and *'that'* are used, and I hope the teacher will be supported and guided to know when each word is used. *'This'* is used if you touch an object and *'that'* is used if you point to an object (or you cannot touch an object).

Colours and plurals are introduced together. This is potentially confusing to young learners, and I hope the textbooks will introduce them separately.

Plurals of nouns in the English language fall into three distinct categories, and these are because of the different pronunciation of plural words.

There are those with the *'ss'* sound, those with the *'z'* sound and those with the *'iz'* sound. These three categories should be introduced separately. This will help the teacher as much as the pupil.

The *'ss'* sound comes after unvoiced sounds. For example, *'books'* *'cats'* *'cups'*

The *'z'* sound comes after voiced sounds. For example, *'dogs'* *'pencils'* *'pens'* *'chairs'*

The *'iz'* sound comes after words ending in *'s'* *'z'* *'x'* and *'ch'* sounds. For example, *'houses'* *'dresses'* *'faces'* *'boxes'* *'churches'*.

Along with plural nouns there is the plural verb form *'are'*. The form *'these are'* is in the syllabus, and I assume textbooks will include *'those are'*

Adjectives of colour are then introduced. It is assumed that these are familiar to the pupils in their mother tongue.

The use of the verb *'have got'* is in my opinion far too difficult at this stage. It is quite an advanced language item. It is multi-word or two-word verb, and it is one of those verbs where its components are split. So, for instance *'to stand up'* is similarly a multi-word verb, but the *'stand'* and *'up'* are never split; as in *'Are you standing up?'*, *'Did you stand up?'* The use of *'have got'* is fraught with difficulty. Firstly, it is split in the question *'Have you got..?'* by the object coming between the verb-words. Not only that but it does not fit the pattern of the present simple verbs which are about to be introduced. That pattern is that the question form uses the auxiliary verb *'do'*, as in *'Do you like bananas?'*. It seems unnecessary to introduce young pupils to the unique structure of *'have got'* when the use of *'to have'* would suffice at this stage. In fact, nowhere else in the syllabus for P1 to P4 is the *'have got'* structure used again.

Even if *'to have'* is adopted, then to introduce the interrogative form at this stage is ambitious.

The indefinite article is introduced. It is introduced as *'a'*. The introduction of *'an'* is not until P2 Unit 8. I hope that textbooks will guide the teachers to know the difference, and to use *'an'* before a noun beginning with a vowel sound, as in *'an umbrella'* *'an ant'*. I also hope the textbooks will guide the teachers in the use of *'a'* and *'the'* so that in this unit the teacher does not continue to use *'a'* when in fact she/he should be using *'the'*. This is a very difficult grammar item as the indefinite and definite articles are absent from Kinyarwanda.

P1- Unit 3

In this unit the use of *'to have'* is introduced. This is much more grammatically sound at this stage of learning than *'have got'* – see my comments in Unit 2.

Age is introduced, the short form *'I am 10'* is introduced rather than the full form of *'I am ten years old'*. The full form should always be introduced.

Unfortunately, the definite article *'the'* is introduced without acknowledging its introduction in *'the head teacher'*. This will cause confusion, and the teacher as well as the pupil in all probability will not know why it is used.

Numbers 1 to 20 are introduced. Knowing that telling the time is to be introduced in P2 it would be helpful if within this number work the pupils could start to count in fives, as in *'5, 10, 15, 20'*. Presumably this is something they have done in their mother tongue.

P1- Unit 4

In this unit again the definite article is introduced without its use being specifically stated in the Language Structure.

Parts of the body are introduced and this leads to good revision of possessive adjectives where full meaning of possession can be gleaned.

The question *'what colour are.....?'* is a confusing structure. It is singular noun followed by a plural verb *'colour...are'*. This would need to be carefully introduced and it is possibly unnecessary at this stage to use this structure. It would be advisable to start with the singular as in *'What colour is this sock?'* Or to ask *'Are the socks blue?'*

Clothing is introduced. *'Trousers'* are in the list of clothing. Again care needs to be taken, as this is a plural word. It is singular when used as *'a pair of trousers'*, but the common short form of *'trousers'* is a plural noun. This gives rise to structures *'My trousers are blue.'* *'Where are my trousers?'* The textbook would need to guide the teacher specifically in this.

The present continuous tense is introduced. In order for pupils to understand a tense, the use or meaning of that tense must be clearly demonstrated. The present continuous is used for an action or arrangement in progress at the time of speaking but which will have an end at some time. The usual introduction of the present continuous tense is for actions which the teacher and pupil can do – and then they can see the meaning of the structure. For instance, *'I am drawing'* if the words are spoken at the same time as the individual is drawing on the blackboard. My concern here is that *'he is wearing...'* is not a clear enough use of the verb tense for the pupil to be able to understand the difference between that structure and the present simple structure to which, so far, she/he has been introduced. See my comments at the end in my overall summary.

P1- Unit 5

This unit introduces many difficult items.

Firstly it introduces countable and uncountable nouns, with no mention of this grammatical item in the Language Structure. However, the structure, *'this is rice'* is introduced alongside *'these are beans'*. The teacher should be guided, and should, at this stage, use only the countable items.

This is the first introduction of the present simple tense in its regular structure. So far the pupils have been introduced to the present simple of the verb '*to be*' which is irregular, and the unique structure of '*have got*'. As such the teacher will need to be guided to alert the pupils to the third person singular addition of 's' to the main verb stem, as in '*she likes beans*'.

Then the interrogative and negative are introduced. These are difficult as the auxiliary verb '*do*' is used. It is then the auxiliary verb that takes the addition of 's' in the third person singular and the main verb (e.g. *like*) reverts to its infinitive form, as in '*Does she like beans?*' The teacher who is struggling with English would need to be carefully guided in this.

The negative is difficult and the syllabus even adopts the contracted form '*doesn't*' as opposed to the full form of '*does not*', as in '*he doesn't like rice*'. It is hoped that the textbooks will use the full form and then explain the contracted form and its pronunciation. The contracted form should only be used in oral English, and not in written English of any formal nature.

I wonder if other verbs are going to be introduced in this unit so that the pupils can see the structure of the present simple tense with other main verbs?

The meaning or use of the present simple tense which is usually introduced for beginner learners is that for actions which happen habitually or every day. This gives pupils a clear understanding of the present simple tense. They can then distinguish it from the present continuous tense of actions in progress at the time of speaking of 'now'. The introduction of '*to like*' to demonstrate the use of the present simple is not so clear. Overall the present simple tense is used to denote fact, that is what the speaker believes is fact at the time she or he utters the present simple structure. That gives rise to the use of the present simple for future events '*Kigali team plays Nyagatare team next Saturday*'. There is then the use of the present simple tense for telling jokes or stories, '*This man enters the bar, he gets a drink, then he falls over..*' These uses, or meanings, of the present simple tense are introduced later in this P1 syllabus. However, they are too advanced for young learners to grasp.

One activity suggested is for the pupils to represent data in a bar graph. It is assumed that the pupils will be fully confident in this from their maths lessons. A graph is an 'abstract' item, and children of this age (P1) who are still in the 'concrete' stage of learning might find this difficult.

P1- Unit 6

Prepositions of place are introduced. '*Behind*' and presumably '*in front of*' are included. These are difficult language items and it is hoped that the textbooks will give full support to the teacher.

The position where the teacher stands is crucial, as she must see things the same way as the pupils so that '*the ball is behind the box*' has proper meaning if the box is the first object in the line of sight of the both teacher and pupils.

There is then difficulty with objects that have a '*back*' and a '*front*' such as *a car, a person, a chair*. The teacher would need to be guided in this so that confusion in the classroom did not arise.

The structure '*there are*' is introduced. This needs to be contrasted with '*they are*',

and the pronunciation of the two structures practised so that the difference is grasped. This will occur as in '*Where are the pencils? **They are** on the table. How many pencils are there? **There are** two pencils.*' These two structures should be specifically noted.

Again the syllabus uses contracted forms, '*Where's the blue pen? **It's** Mutesi's*' The contracted form of '*it is*' to be '*it's*' placed so near to the apostrophe to denote possession '*Mutesi's*' is unfortunate, and will lead to confusion. The golden rule is to teach one thing at one time. This, therefore, should concentrate on possession, and so the full form of '*it is*' should be used.

The awareness of lower case and capital letters is presumably something the pupils have encountered in their mother-tongue learning, and so should not give rise to many problems.

P1- Unit 7

This unit continues with the present simple tense of main verbs other than 'to be'. As my comments for Unit 5 state, it is unfortunate that the use/meaning of the present simple tense in this unit of the syllabus is that of 'fact' in the speaker's mind when he/she utters the words. This is not easy for the pupils to understand when and how they should use the present simple tense.

For example, if a pupil is staying with a relative while studying at school but goes home for the holidays, then the pupils has two structures he/she can use. For example, he/she is studying in Kigali and staying with an aunt, but goes home in the holidays to Rubavu. That pupil can say, '*I am living in Kigali*' (as it is an action in progress which will come to an end) and '*I live in Rubavu*' as that is pure fact of where his/her real home is. This, of course, is far too complicated for beginner learners in P1. However, it illustrates the point that the structures introduced at this stage need to be crystal clear so that the pupils really understand the meaning and use.

Again the syllabus uses contracted forms, '*There's a table*' This should only be heard by the pupils and they should not write it. With the apostrophe of possession having been introduced, for the pupils to see another use of the apostrophe would be confusing.

P1- Unit 8

This unit concentrates on the present simple tense. Again the use or meaning adopted is that of fact in the speaker's mind at the time of speaking, using '*to eat*'. It would be much easier for the pupils at this beginner-level to see this tense used for 'Every day' occurrences. So if the target language was '*Every day our dog eats meat*' that would be more helpful to the pupils' learning of when and how to use this tense.

There is another 'uncomfortable' structure in '*My favourite animal is goats*'. This is a singular verb followed by a plural noun. It should be '*my favourite animals are goats*'. It could be '*my favourite animal is a goat*' but the plural structure is more fluent.

Also in the Learning activities column it is suggested that '*toads*' is an anagram of '*goats*'. It is not. There is no 'g' in '*toads*' and conversely no 'd' in '*goats*'.

P1- Unit 9

This unit adopts the 'Every day' use of the present simple tense. This is the use/meaning which will make the most sense to the pupils, and should have been the first use of the present simple tense when it was introduced in unit 5.

However, if any actions are to be adopted to accompany the 'every day' action then there should be no speaking by the actor at the time he/she is performing the action. This then separates the present continuous tense from the present simple tense. This is of huge importance, so that the pupils realise the meaning of each tense. It would be easier for the teacher if the pupils knew the present continuous tense, so that she could ask for activity 'now' using the present continuous tense, in contrast to the present simple tense for 'every day'. Without the use of 'time markers' the teaching of these tenses at beginner level is very difficult. The pupils should know the 'time markers' of 'every day' as opposed to 'now'.

Telling the time is introduced. This is not only difficult in terms of new vocabulary but very difficult because the telling of the time in English differs so much from Kinyarwanda time.

It is assumed that by this stage in P1 the pupils are very confident telling the time in their mother tongue.

Before pupils begin to learn telling the time it is very helpful if they are used to seeing a circle with the numbers 5 to 60 written round the edge. They can count in 5s, and count in 10s. They should know fractions from their studies in Kinyarwanda and see the circle split into two halves vertically, and then split into quarters. They should then see a circle with the numbers 1 to 12 written around the edge. They should play a game both in English and in Kinyarwanda saying numbers which are opposite each other. For instance, if one pupil says '1' then another pupil should say '7'. A further exercise of walking 'to' and 'past' is practised.

Once the pupils are confident in these exercises then they are ready to be introduced to telling the time. (See *Jiandae 1* and *2* written for primary pupils in Tanzania).

P1- Unit 10

Without stating so in the Language structures, this unit introduces the past simple tense. Perhaps there is a typing error in that '*present simple tense*' in the Language structures should be '*past simple tense*'.

The introduction of the past simple tense needs careful direction. Again, a 'time marker' of 'Yesterday' is useful for beginners so that they understand the 'past-ness' of the tense.

Verbs following the regular form of the past simple tense should be used initially so that the pupils can see the pattern of how to form the tense. Irregular verbs can then be introduced once the regular pattern is grasped.

The stative verb 'was' is not so easy with the state of people, as in 'he **was** still hungry'. It is more easily learned with revision and extension of the prepositions of place. That is, put a ball on the table, 'the ball is on the table', then remove the ball and put it on the floor. 'Where is the ball?' 'The ball is on the floor'. 'Where **was** the ball?' 'The ball **was** on the table'. This gives a visual and clear understanding of the past-ness of this irregular verb.

P2- Unit 1

At the beginning of the new school year the syllabus starts with revision. However, new greetings are introduced.

The English greeting 'Hi' is slang and should not be in a syllabus and should not be taught. Whilst it is much used in the English speaking world its use is controversial, and many times it is not used appropriately by native English speakers and, as such, can cause offence. It is strongly suggested that this item of slang language be removed from the syllabus.

The modal auxiliary 'can' as a request is introduced. Then 'may' is introduced similarly as a request. It is suggested that 'may' is falling out of use, and that the pupils need only learn 'can'. However, if the pupils understand that these words are interchangeable in this use, then there should be no problem.

P2- Unit 2

One new structure introduced here is the use of the gerund after the verb 'like'. The pupils should not find this difficult. However, it is a shame if by this stage they have not been exposed to the present continuous tense such as 'I am running' 'I am swimming' so that they would have prior knowledge of the words and the spelling.

The other new structure is the modal auxiliary 'can' but this time expressing ability. The negative is also introduced, and the full form of 'cannot' should be introduced before the contracted form 'can't'. The pronunciation of 'can't' would need to be made clear.

P2- Unit 3

The daily routines, or 'every day' activities using the present simple tense are revised. It is a shame that this was not introduced more in P1.

Ordinal numbers are introduced, and it is assumed that the pupils are familiar with these in Kinyarwanda.

The years are introduced. For 2013 it is given as 'two thousand and thirteen', and I would suggest the alternative of 'twenty thirteen' is also given as this is consistent with the other centuries where the year is always referred to in that way, such as 'nineteen thirty'.

P2- Unit 4

The unit misses an opportunity to differentiate between countable and uncountable foods. This grammar structure of countable and uncountable is not formally stated as introduced until P3 Unit 5, although 'how many' is in P3 Unit 1, and has been in P1 unit 6.

Before the pupils are fully introduced to countable and uncountable nouns and the different grammar structures in P3 it would be good if, nevertheless, the teacher was helped to show the different nouns in units such as this one.

The classification of 'fruit' and 'cereals' and 'vegetables' would need careful guidance for the teacher. 'Fruit' does have a plural but in the context used here it is in the singular.

There is a difficult structure, '*my favourite food is bananas*' where a singular verb is followed by a plural noun. This may cause confusion.

P2- Unit 5

Story-telling in the present simple tense is not common. Most stories are told in the past tense. My concern is that although there has been an emphasis on the present simple tense its uses and meanings may not be understood by the pupils. The pupils have seen the present simple for facts, for daily routines, for facts again, for daily routines again, and for story-telling. Unless each of those uses/meanings is made very clear then I suspect the pupils will not know when and how to use the present simple tense as opposed to some other tense. For instance the song '*this is the way we....*' will presumably be performed with actions. Those actions, with the singing at the same time, should be used with the present continuous tense – as it is an action in progress at the time of speaking.

There is a problem of context too, in saying that the postman delivers the letter. Is there a postal delivery service in Rwanda with postmen?

Punctuation with direct speech is introduced, and this is important, and is assumed it will be known by pupils in their Kinyarwanda studies.

P2- Unit 6

This is a unit concerned mainly with vocabulary, and revision of structures. However, the structure '*how long does it take to get to....?*' is a new structure, and uses the infinitive of purpose. That same purpose can be expressed by using '*in order to get to*' or '*so that you get to*' or just '*to get to*'. These structures need attention.

P2- Unit 7

This unit uses the present continuous tense. However, again, as in P1 Unit 4, the use of the tense is not as clear as it could be to aid the understanding of the pupils.

This use of the present continuous '*it is raining*' '*the sun is shining*' is background description. It would be better if the pupils had a thorough grounding in and grasp of the present continuous for actions in progress ('*now*') at the time of speaking, before this harder- to-understand use and meaning is used. In fact, they have been exposed to so much use of the present simple tense for fact, that they might be forgiven for thinking the present simple should be used here, '*the sun shines*' '*it rains*'. Once pupils are muddled like this in the early stages of their learning then it is very difficult to rectify things.

The activity of interpreting a line graph assumes that the pupils have studied and understood line graphs in their mathematics studies.

P2- Unit 8

In this unit the syllabus uses '*an*' for the first time '*an elephant*'. It is hoped that this might have been introduced already in the textbooks.

The unit also uses the basic use of the present continuous tense for actions in progress, and it is a shame this was not introduced early on in P1. For example, '*the lion is sleeping*' '*the elephants are eating grass*'.

The unit also anticipates a knowledge of geography (*Asia, Antartica, Africa*) that presumably has been covered by the pupils in another subject.

P2- Unit 9

This unit states in the 'Knowledge and understanding' column that there is to be identification and use of question tags. I see no question tags in the 'Content' column. As question tags are very much an oral item of speech, I would doubt the suitability of introducing them at this stage.

This unit is using mathematical knowledge gained in Kinyarwanda mathematics lessons to be used as a basis for English vocabulary. It is proven that pupils can perform mathematical equations quite easily in another language. However, one big problem might arise with multiplication – it certainly does when transferring from Kiswahili into English and vice versa.

In English *5 times 3*, is concentrating on the number 3, and is asking for 5 lots of it:

III III III III III

In Swahili, and I expect the same might be true of Kinyarwanda, '*5 mara 3*', concentrates on the 5 and is asking for 3 lots of it.

IIII IIII IIII

If this is the case then extreme care would need to be taken.

It is assumed that the numbers 1 – 100, and 1,000 are fully understood in Kinyarwanda. The pronunciation of '*thousand*' is difficult and will need attention.

P2- Unit 10

This unit at the end of the school year has a lot in it. It is a shame that practice of the past simple tense did not appear in earlier units in the year. The past simple was last mentioned in the syllabus in P1 Unit 10.

This unit introduces the negative and interrogative. As for the present simple tense the auxiliary verb 'to do' is used. This needs attention and much practice (not least I expect by the teachers) as the past of the main verb reverts to its infinitive form and the auxiliary verb takes the past form: *I **liked** the man. Did you **like** the man? He did not **like** the man.'*

Then the '*going to + infinitive*' tense is introduced for future meaning.

It is a shame that the pupils have not had much use of the present continuous tense, as then they would be familiar with the formation of '*...am going*'

It would be prudent to point out to the teachers as a guide, the difference between '*I am going to the market*' in the present continuous tense, and '*I am going to buy bananas at the market*' as the structure of this new tense. This should not be brought to the attention of the pupils but the teachers do need to know the difference before they start to teach this new structure.

P3- Unit 1

By this stage I am concerned by the emphasis on the present simple tense. This unit uses again 'can' of ability, and introduces imperatives for giving directions.

At this stage of learning English I would think that 28 lessons for this content is too many.

P3- Unit 2

This unit revises the apostrophe of possession, and the vocabulary for jobs and occupations.

The new structure is 'want to + infinitive'

Again to use 28 lessons for this content seems too many. I expect the writing activities of this unit are the main content, but my comments at the end of this appraisal about writing might be helpful.

P3- Unit 3

This unit is revision of time-telling, dates and daily routines.

New items are 'minutes, hours, days', and the adverbs of frequency, 'usually, always, sometimes, never'. Those adverbs of frequency might have been better introduced in previous units as they would help to give meaning and understanding to the use of the present simple tense.

P3- Unit 4

This unit revises the past simple tense, and the future with 'going to + infinitive'. Letter-writing is introduced and I presume the pupils are fully conversant with letter-writing in Kinyarwanda.

P3- Unit 5

This is the first unit in which *Countable and uncountable nouns* are mentioned. The unit uses countable nouns and introduces 'few' and 'a lot of' and revises 'many'. This could have been introduced in earlier units to good effect.

As the written task is about the use of animals then I assume the teacher is guided to use the structure already met of 'to get...'. The structure 'we use xx for..' might come in, and I hope the textbooks will guide the teacher on this.

P3- Unit 6

This unit looks further at infinitives of purpose, such as 'I use soap to wash my hands' which is also 'I use soap in order to wash my hands' and 'I use soap so that I wash my hands'. At this stage all those structure should be taught as they will help in future studies in P4.

P3- Unit 7

This unit is a revision of clothes, with the introduction of some new adjectives. 28 lessons for this content seems a lot.

P3- Unit 8

This unit does not introduce any new structures but is for vocabulary. It is assumed that the words are already well understood by the pupils in their geography studies.

P3- Unit 9

This unit revises the past simple tense, the present simple tense and 'few' and 'many'.

New items are 'most' and 'some'

Vocabulary of mathematical equations is revised.

New vocabulary of 'vertical axis' and 'horizontal axis' is introduced.

A new item is 'what comes after/before 765?' This appears straightforward, but the teacher would need careful guidance.

The answer to 'what comes after 765?' is 'After 765 comes 766'. The alternative answer of '766 comes after 765' is confusing for pupils as the larger number is seen or heard before the smaller number.

So the answer to 'what comes before 765?' is '764 comes before 765'.

P3- Unit 10

As for the last lesson for the year in P1 and P2, here an important grammatical structure is introduced right at the end of the year. It would seem more efficient to have the new important structure before the end of the year, so that the end of the year is for practice and revision, and consolidation.

This unit tackles some of the complexities of countable and uncountable nouns. The use of 'many' 'much' 'any' are introduced in the specific context of uncountable and countable.

At this stage the pupils have learned the English from the syllabuses of P1 to P3, and will enter P4 with all subjects taught through the medium of English.

P4- Unit 1

This unit revises the present simple tense.

The new structure is '*would like to + infinitive*'

The activity of gathering data and constructing a bar graph is used again. It has now been used in 4 units including this one (P1 unit 5, P2 unit 4, P3 unit 9).

P4- Unit 2

This unit revises the present simple tense, and '*like + gerund*' as in '*I like running*'.

The past simple tense is also revised as is the future with '*going to*'

New vocabulary of adjectives is introduced, '*tall, short, tall, thin, attractive, confident*'. Some of these are basic and should have been taught a long time previously. However, '*confident*' and '*attractive*' will be difficult to teach and I wonder what guidance will be given to the teacher as to how to teach their meaning?

Comparatives are introduced, and again this structure could have been introduced in a previous year.

P4- Unit 3

This unit revises the present simple tense, and giving directions, as well as comparatives.

There is little new material.

P4- Unit 4

This unit is very similar to P2 Unit 7, except that the past simple is now included.

The modal auxiliary '*can*' used for probability is introduced but is not noted in the Language structure.

It would be advisable for the teacher to be aware of this use/meaning of the modal auxiliary so that other examples can be given in order to make the meaning clear.

P4- Unit 5

This unit is very similar to P3 Unit 2.

The future simple with '*will*' is introduced.

In the syllabus there is no mention of '*shall*' for the first person singular and plural. Whilst its use for ordinary statements is rare, it is a structure that needs to be known for '*Shall we...?*' etc.

P4- Unit 6

This unit revises the present simple tense, and the comparative.

It introduces the superlative.

It expands on the countable noun structure by introducing '*there aren't any*'. The unit does not use '*there isn't any*'. That is a shame as that is often a mis-used structure in East Africa with many speakers saying '*there is no any...*'.

The unit introduces the present perfect tense. However, in the example in the syllabus the introduction is made with an irregular past participle. It would be more helpful for the pupils to learn the formation and the meaning of this new tense with verbs having regular past participles. Instead of '*I have seen*' (the irregular past participle of '*to see*', which has a past form of '*saw*'), it would be more helpful to use '*I have looked at*' or '*I have pointed to*' or '*I have played with*' so that the past forms are the same as the past participle, and, therefore, formation of the tense is not a big problem.

Again there are uses/meanings of the present perfect tense, and this use/meaning is for general past experience where the time is not mentioned and is not necessary. The teacher should be guided in this. As such there are no 'time markers' apart from 'ever' as in '*have you ever played with a monkey?*' to denote general past. Very often the next question is '*When did you play with a monkey?*' which uses the past simple tense in order to get a specific time reference. It might help both teacher and pupil to have these two tenses used together in this way.

P4- Unit 7

This unit introduces the modal auxiliaries of '*must*' and '*must not*' as well as the first conditional.

The context of rights and responsibilities might be better and more successfully used in the pupils' mother tongue, as these are abstract concepts.

P4- Unit 8

This unit revises the past simple.

It also expands on countable and uncountable noun structures with the introduction of '*fewer*' and '*less*'. It might have been better for those items to have been introduced in P3 Unit 10, and revised here.

P4- Unit 9

This unit is set in the context of world geography and general knowledge. It is assumed that the items will be familiar to the pupils in their previous studies in other subjects.

The unit revises the comparative, superlative, and the present perfect tense.

The use of '*have been*' might need a note for the teachers. It is sometimes thought of as the past participle of the verb '*to go*', and that verb has another past participle '*have gone*'. The difference between the two should be pointed out to the teacher. The meaning of '*have been*' is that the person has come back, whereas the meaning of '*have gone*' is that the person is still there.

P4- Unit 10

This unit introduces '*let's*' and '*don't*'.

It also introduces '*too*' as in '*too much/many*' which is something which could have been introduced earlier on.

One of the activities for the pupils is to write about cause and effect of climate change. I wonder if the pupils could do this in Kinyarwanda. It is a difficult assignment.

The Appendix

On page 152 and page 154 there are some typing errors in the phonemic symbols.

On page 152 the sound for 'tourist' is given as /ʊə/. This is not so. The sound for 'tourist' is the same as 'door' which is the /ɔ:/ sound.

An example of the /ʊə/ sound is 'pure'

On page 154 the phonemic symbols for 'catch' are written as those for 'cat'. The phonemic symbols should be /kætʃ/

Layout of the Syllabus

My only comment here is that in the 'Knowledge and understanding' column when specific target words or phrases are used they should be in inverted commas. Without some way of differentiating those words it makes the sentence very difficult to read for non-fluent readers.

For example, in P1 Unit 3 on page 15, the first paragraph in the 'Knowledge and understanding' column is, "Recognize the use of how old and this is my".

It would be much clearer if it was written, "Recognize the use of 'how old' and 'this is my'".

This occurs in P3 Unit 9 although word 'equals' is written in italic font. In P4 Unit 7 the words 'must/mustn't' could be in inverted commas and/or italic font.

Introduction to the Syllabus

The specific references to Bloom's Taxonomy are, in my opinion, not wholly helpful. Particularly the reference in 3.2 to the setting of examination questions with regard to each level of Bloom's taxonomy. I would think that even if teachers were given lists of Bloom's Taxonomy verbs to assist them with question-setting they would be none the wiser in how to set their paper. Bloom's Taxonomy itself is controversial with much criticism, and the very basis of the hierarchical structure is open to debate.

In the setting of English as a foreign language at basic level (which this primary course is) I would think the language items and structures, and the content of the textbooks would themselves cater for the necessary thinking skills.

Overall comments, observations and suggestions.

Overall approach

The syllabus adopts a 'topic' or 'subject' approach as a means of determining the language and structures to be introduced or used. This can restrict textbook writers. The topics are repeated and the content might well not inspire the pupils, particularly those in P1 and P2.

Language structures

There is an over-emphasis on the present simple tense, and even with that emphasis I worry that a full understanding of it uses and meanings will not be grasped by the pupils. Also the present simple tense gives limited scope for any actions to be done with the production of the language. The limitation is that if actions are performed then it is very likely that the present continuous tense should

be being used. It would take a very good teacher to use actions in silence and then to say the target language.

The introduction of the present continuous tense could be much earlier on in the syllabus. Its introduction should be solely on the use/meaning of actions in progress at the time of speaking. This use of the tense gives rise to actions which makes the learning for young children fun, and gives their learning full meaning. Also the present continuous tense uses the auxiliary verb 'to be' in the present simple tense, and this reflects the first sentences the pupils have learned, 'I am Felix', 'He is Ivan' etc. Not only that, but the use of the present continuous tense would enable the pupils to be ready to understand the gerunds used with, for example, 'I like running'. Also the formation of the negative and interrogative is not so very difficult as the auxiliary verb is already used in the positive form of the tense. This compares with the present simple tense in which the auxiliary verb 'to do' is only used in the interrogative and negative forms, and does not appear in the positive form of the verb (unless, of course, it is used for emphasis, which is an advanced use, as in 'I do like eggs').

The way the present continuous tense is introduced and used in the syllabus does not give rise to an immediate understanding of its use and meaning. It is introduced as 'He is wearing a shirt', which for the pupils is perhaps indistinguishable from 'he wears a shirt'. The next introduction is for background description, such as 'it is raining', 'the sun is shining' and, again, for young pupils it is not clear why this tense is being used as opposed to the present simple tense. With young learners, and indeed with many teachers who are struggling with the English language, the meaning and use needs to be made as clear as possible on its first introduction.

Speaking

The syllabus puts an emphasis on the pronunciation including the stress and rhythm of the words and sentences. This is not easy, and I sincerely hope the textbooks will guide the teachers very specifically in this. Without guidance there is no guarantee that this component of the syllabus can be taught correctly.

Writing

The writing of English by the pupils is of some concern. The first two years of learning English (P1 and P2) should be mostly oral/aural. The fact that the testing and examination is conducted in writing is regrettable. At this level there should be an emphasis on oral work and demonstration of understanding. The testing and examination should not wag the tail of the learner. The tests and examinations should, therefore, not be too ambitious. The writing in the first year should be restricted to copying from the blackboard, or the book. This not only serves as a visual, written record but in itself is a kinaesthetic exercise which will appeal to some pupils' learning style. There should be some filling of blanks, and limited copying of substitution tables. Labelling of pictures is also a good written exercise at this level. Also there should be spelling exercises, and lots of visual work of looking at words and reading and saying them.

In P1 Unit 8 there is an expectation of pupils to 'describe animals in writing using simple supported sentences', and in Unit 9 to 'describe daily routines in writing using simple supported sentences'. This may be too ambitious. Firstly, it depends on the pupils' ability to copy from the blackboard and the speed at which they can write English words, as I imagine this activity would be largely for the pupils to fill

in some blanks. This is a meaningless exercise unless the pupils have had enough practice and guidance in letter and word recognition. This is a skill which needs to be developed. Without this then pupils will be slowly copying individual letters from the blackboard. It cannot be over-estimated how much time and practice young learners need in the language before they write it, and especially with the difficulties of English being non-phonetic.

In P2 Unit 2 there is an expectation of pupils to *'write a short text about sport'* and in P2 Unit 4 to *'write a short text about food and diet'* and in P2 Unit 5 to *'write a short text showing time sequence by using connectors'* and in P2 Unit 10 to *'write a short text about past and future activities.'* I wonder how well they would do this in Kinyarwanda unguided. Even if guided by the teacher or the textbook I think continuous prose at this stage in English is too ambitious.

From P3 I think expectations can rightly be a bit higher, as the pupils will have developed writing skills in Kinyarwanda, and in English their vocabulary is expanding and they will be used to a limited number of structures. As my comments above state, the structures to which they are introduced may be too limited.

Appendix 2

This is an extract from the Handbook containing items of reference for the teachers.

INGINGO YA 6 : UKO BAKOresha 'THE'

Ese uzi neza uko bakoresha *the* na *a (an)* mu cyongereza? Ese washobora kubikoresha neza ndetse no kubivuga neza? Niba utabizi neza, banza wige neza iyi ngingo mbere yo kwigisha isomo rya gatatu.

Mu cyongereza, dukoresha *a (an)* iyo dushaka kuvuga umuntu cyangwa ikintu kimwe kiri muri byinshi. Nta kintu kidasanzwe kuri yo. Urugero, '*This is a boy*' bisobanura umuhungu usanzwe, uwo ari we wese, na '*This is a book*' bivuga igitabo kiri muri byinshi, ntabwo ari igitabo kidasanzwe.

Ijambo *the* rikoresha mu buryo bwinshi butandukanye:

- The* iyo dushaka kugaragaza umuntu cyangwa ikintu mu gihe nta kindi kintu bimeze kimwe, nubwo haba hari ibindi bintu bidasa. Urugero, mu ishuri tuvuga, '*This is the door, this is the roof, this is the table*', kuko haba hari ikintu kimwe muri ibyo mu ishuri. ndetse tuvuga '*the wall*', nubwo haba hari ibikuta bine , dutekereza ko ari urukuta rumwe ruzengurutse icyumba. Ariko iyo tuvuze ku ntebe z'abanyeshuri; tuvuga tuti: '*This is a desk*' kuko haba hari intebe nyinshi. Ugomba kubisobanurira abanyeshuri bawe igihe wigisha isomo rya gatatu, ariko ubu nubwo buryo bwonyine *the* ikoreshamo ugomba kubigisha
- The* ikoresha iyo tugaragaza itsinda ry'ibintu bimeze kimwe, iyo icyatoranyijwe gitandukanye n'ibindi mu buryo runaka. Urugero, ufite ibitabo by'amabara atandukanye uvuga, '*This is a book*', ariko ukavuga '*This is the red book*' kuko ari cyo gitabo cyonyine gitukura kirimo. Iyo ufite ibitabo byinshi kandi ibitabo bibiri cyangwa birenze bibiri ari

4

umutuku, hanyuma ugashaka kuvuga kuri kimwe muribyo, uravuga ngo '*This is a red book*', ntvugaga ngo, '*This is the red book*' kubera ko ntabwo ari cyo gitabo cy'umutuku cyonyine gihari.

- The* ikoresha iyo dushaka kuvuga ku kintu kimwe mu bintu bitandukanye ahantu hamwe. Urugero, iyo ufite ikaramu y'igiti ku meza, ikaramu z'imiti, irati, icyuma, igoma, idebe, ugashaka ko umunyeshuri akuzanira irati ayikuye mubindi bintu, uvuga uti, '*Bring me the ruler*'. Iyo uvuze, '*Bring me a ruler*' yakuzanira indi rati ku meza ye utavuze. (Ntabwo uhita ubyigisha abana).
- The*, ikoresha wibanda k'umuntu cyangwa ku kintu cyavuzweho. Urugero, ubwira umunyeshuri uti : '*Take a pencil*'. yahitamo ikaramu yifuza. Hanyuma ukongera kumubwira uti, '*Put the pencil on the cupboard*'. Afite gufata iyo karamu yahisemo mbere akayishyira ku kabati. Uzabyigisha abana mu isomo rya gatanu 5.

Muri make, *the* ikoresha mu kwerekana ko umuntu cyangwa ikintu kizwi mu buryo budasubirwaho;ko aricyo gihora gitekerezwaho. *A (an)*, cyakora ikoresha mu kwerekana ko umuntu cyangwa ikintu kidafutse neza, ko hari ibindi bintu bimeze nkacyo kandi bitoroshye kugitandukanya.

Wibuke ko nta magambo ameze kimwe nka *the* na *a (an)* mu rurimi rwacu rw'Ikinyarwanda, kandi nubwo aya magambo agaragara nk'aho ari mato kandi adafite umumaro, ajya agaragara nk'atamenyerewe k'umunyeshuri wiga icyongereza ku nshuro ya mbere. Mwarimu agomba gusobanukirwa neza akamaro kayo mbere y'uko ayigisha abanyeshuri.

IMIVUGIRE. Ese ujya uvuga *the* neza mbere y'ingombajwi?, urugero; *the book, the door? The* akenshi ikunze kuvugwa ibangutse imbere y'ingombajwi niyo mpamvu tudakoresha, *the* kuko itinda. Ariko imbere y'inyajwi *the* ntijya ivugwa itebutse, ariko ihora ivugwa nka *the*. Gerageza ukore imyitozo ubwawe kugeza igihe uzumva utagikora amakosa.

'*the axe, the elephant, the ink, the orange, the umbrella*'.

5

This is a typical example of how teachers are guided to give the lessons. Here there are important instructions in order that the full meaning of 'Tom is giving.....to...' is preserved. That is that Mary must not touch the item until her turn in 'taking thefrom Tom'.

ISAHA YA 1

Imfashanyigisho zisabwa. Ibintu gusa

Kumva - Listening

- Abanyeshuri barumva. Umwarimu n'abanyeshuri babiri bagaragaza ibikorwa bishya:
give to, take from.
Interuro ntangarugero zisanzwe zizwi, ibikorwa bishya byigishwa ni ibikorwa byo **gutanga** no **gutora**.

Abanyeshuri bumva interuro esheshatu zigishwa kuva kuri((i) kugera kuri (vi)) kandi bakitegereza ibi ibikorwa bitanze:

(1) Uhamagara umunyeshuri umwe uti: *Tom! Come here!*
Tomasi arumvira ubundi akavugaga uti: *I'm coming.*
Tegeka Tomasi uti: *Give a book to me.*

Tomasi akuzanire igitabo. Utege ikiganza ariko ntukore ku gitabo. Uvuge uti: *What is Tom doing?*
Tom is giving a book to me.
Noneho ushyire ikiganza cyawe ku gitabo ubundi ugikure mu kiganza cya Tomasi gahoro cyane uvuga ngo:
What am I doing? I'm taking the book from Tom.

Subiramo ibyo wakoze haruguru kuri (1) inshuro ebyiri gahoro.

82

ISOMO RYA MUNANI – Isaha ya 1

Kuvuga - Speaking

- Hamagara undi munyeshuri uti: *Mary! Come here!*
Mariya aremera ubundi akavugaga: *I'm coming.*
Tegeka Tomasi uti: *Give a bottle to Mary.* (i)

Tomasi afate icupa arishyire Mariya. Mariya arambure ikiganza ariko ntakore ku icupa.
Baza Tomasi uti: *What are you doing?* (ii)
Tomasi asubize ati: *I'm giving a bottle to Mary.* (iii)

(3) Erekanza Tomasi(umutunga urutoki)ubundi ubwire ishuri uti:
Tom is giving a bottle to Mary.
He's giving a bottle to Mary. (iv)
Baza abanyeshuri batandukanye uti:
What is Tom doing? (v)
Buri munyeshuri asubize ati:
He's giving a bottle to Mary. (vi)

(4) Noneho utegeke Mariya uti:
Take the bottle from Tom. (i)
Mariya yitonze afate icupa. Mubaze uti:
What are you doing? (ii)
Mariya asubize ati:
I'm taking the bottle from Tom. (iii)

(5) Erekanza Mariya(umutunga urutoki)ubundi ubwire ishuri uti:
Mary is taking the bottle from Tom.
She's taking the bottle from Tom. (iv)
Baza abanyeshuri bategeranye uti:
What is Mary doing? (v)
Buri wese asubize ati:
She's taking the bottle from Tom. (vi)

(6) Mu gihe ibyo byose birangiye, nyuma nibwo Mariya akura icupa mu kiganza cya Tomasi. Noneho ukavugaga ngo:
Tom! Go back to your place.
Mary! Go back to your place.

83

Appendix 3

The NOEC books

Learning English is an important task: learning new habits and skills. It is more like riding a bike or learning to swim than learning history or geography. Learning new habits is a matter of practising new patterns of behaviour, not of learning facts. So, the learner must be shown patterns that recur regularly and practise them systematically. The whole of English should be broken down to a limited number of regular patterns. If pupils practise all these regularly and systematically they can quite quickly acquire a mastery of speech habits in English.

These course books provide certainty that the teaching would be systematic, progressing from one point to another in regular fashion; that English would be broken down to a limited number of regular patterns and that these would be practised regularly and systematically; that new habits and skills be learned by practising the patterns of behaviour of the language; that the pupils enjoy the content and are motivated to learn.

Teachers' books

The first thing to note is that all the books are accompanied by Teacher's Notes and, for Book One and Book Two by an additional Handbook. These are presented in Kinyarwanda, in black ink, so that the teachers can understand the explanations and instructions, and easily see the target English language which is printed in red ink. For help with the target English language, each Teacher's book has a dictionary, and a pronunciation guide which guides the teachers to how they can make the English sounds using sounds from Kinyarwanda words.

The Teacher's Notes give comprehensive guidelines on how to teach each lesson. The 'stages' of each lesson are clearly set out. The Teachers' Notes to Books One and Two give detailed lesson notes for each period with suggested timings, how to use teaching aids, and the stress to be given to words.

For Books One and Two there is a Handbook. The Handbooks help the teacher to organise the lessons and to understand parts of English speech. It also sets out extensively the various techniques to be used in teaching the language, and when, rarely, to explain things in Kinyarwanda to the pupils, and how to use teaching aids.

The teacher's books give guidance throughout: group work, pair work and class-organisation is suggested; participation in large classes is catered for by use of, among other things, a 'whispering technique'; structural patterns are scripted; pronunciation guides are provided; answers to classroom exercises are given; activities are prescribed and oral work, written work and reading are all given proper emphasis.

Pupils' books

The most important key to the success of the books is the pupils' books themselves. The content is of meaning and interest to the pupils, drawing on their environment and people and things to whom and to which they can relate. The stories are mostly funny, and mostly follow the same characters through several episodes. The grading and sequencing and the intrinsic interest of the stories is admirable. The stories have numbered sections for ease of comprehension work. The illustrations in the books depicting the basic concepts are clear and good.

The content is built up by repetition and revision; each lesson uses language items from previous lessons so that the language learning is continuous and not segmented. The exercises are many understanding.

The author of the books was concerned to build word-recognition and then phrase-recognition. The overall aim is to prepare pupils for reading comprehension as this will form the basis of their work in their future education. This is achieved through much oral preparation, some specific preparation for each reading/story, and then many and varied questions on the reading. Eventually this builds up to structured composition work.

The pupil's books contain no Kinyarwanda.

Please see our website for more details and information:
www.EducationEastAfrica.org

**Support to Primary Education Rwanda
in partnership with Education East Africa**

www.EducationEastAfrica.org
Katy@EducationEastAfrica.org

Rwanda
Katy Allen 250 782 369 540
Emmy Nyirigira 250 732 442 040
PO Box 2962, Kigali, Rwanda

Great Britain
0300 323 9944
PO Box 434, Apartment 2, Deal, CT14 4BU
Great Britain

Rwanda No 134/RGB/NGO/LP/09/2017
UK Registered Charity No. 1041672

© Support to Primary Education
Rwanda 2017
© Education East Africa 2017

