

## English Language Teaching in Zambia: Balancing Colonial Legacies and Cultural Relevance

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**Abstract:** *The teaching of English in Zambia plays a crucial role in the education system, serving as the dominant medium of instruction at all academic levels. However, the multilingual nature of the country presents significant challenges, as many students learn English as a second or third language. This study investigates the effectiveness and cultural relevance of English Language Teaching (ELT) methods employed in Zambian secondary schools. Using a qualitative research design, the study explores how teachers adapt their instructional strategies to Zambia's diverse linguistic and cultural context. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with English teachers from various schools and analyzed using thematic analysis within a postcolonial theoretical framework. Findings indicate that teachers employ a combination of traditional and modern ELT methods, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Grammar-Translation, Task-Based Learning (TBL), and teacher exposition. While communicative approaches have gained traction, the persistence of grammar-translation and lecture-based instruction reflects the lasting influence of Zambia's colonial educational heritage. Teachers have made efforts to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy by incorporating local proverbs, storytelling, and translanguaging strategies to enhance student engagement. However, challenges such as large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and examination-driven curricula hinder the full implementation of culturally responsive teaching methods. The study highlights the ongoing tension between the need for English proficiency in a globalized world and the importance of preserving local linguistic and cultural identities. It recommends policy reforms that support more inclusive and culturally adaptable ELT strategies to bridge the gap between colonial legacies and contemporary multilingual realities in Zambia's education system.*

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching (ELT), culturally relevant pedagogy, multilingual education, postcolonial theory, indigenous methods, teaching methods, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, cultural adaptation, postcolonial education

## **INTRODUCTION**

The teaching of English in Zambia where it serves as the dominant medium of instruction across all academic levels is fundamental to Zambia's education system. The importance of English extends beyond its use in education to include various sectors such as government, the judiciary, and business. It acts as a lingua franca within the country where multilingualism exists, facilitating communication among people who come from over 70 local language backgrounds. Consequently, proficiency in English is essential for both academic success and social mobility, making it a gateway to economic and political participation at national and global levels (Kaunda 2022; Sampa, 2005; Simwinga, 2021). Given its significance, the development and implementation of effective English language teaching (ELT) methods are crucial for equipping students with the necessary linguistic competence to thrive in these areas. The multilingual environment in Zambia, however, poses significant challenges to English language teaching and learning. For many students, English is a second or even third language, learned after their native tongue. In a study conducted to determine the language of play in Lusaka primary schools, Mwanza (2012) found that 100% of students who were observed spoke English as a second or third language. This situation creates a complex linguistic dynamic in the classroom, where students must navigate multiple languages while learning English. Teachers face the dual challenge of conveying English's linguistic structures which are far distant to any local language while also addressing the socio-cultural contexts in which students learn the language (Sumbwa, 2018; Kaunda, 2022). In such an environment, effective English teaching methods must, therefore, not only focus on linguistic proficiency but also consider the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population.

To mitigate such challenges, using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) has been found to be effective (Gay, 2000). CRP is a conceptual framework that emphasises the importance of connecting academic content to students' cultural and linguistic experiences, thereby making learning more meaningful and effective. In a multilingual and multicultural country like Zambia, CRP offers insights into how teaching methods can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This study, therefore, sought to explore the extent to which English teaching strategies in Zambia are both effective and culturally relevant, thereby addressing the critical issue of how best to teach English in a diverse educational context.

### **Framing the context of the study**

The education system in Zambia has been largely shaped by its three historical contexts including precolonial, colonial and post-colonial backgrounds (Kaunda & Ailwood, 2021). Before colonialism, Zambian tribal groups conducted education informally using traditional methods such as oral history, storytelling, apprenticeship, observation and participation using

the local language. Men's and women's circles acted as important classrooms where younger boys and girls acquired knowledge and skills respectively. Wise men and women were chosen as teachers to pass knowledge to younger ones with the family acting as the first point of education. During the colonial period, the formal education system was introduced concurrently with English (Kaunda, 2022).

As a former British colony, Zambia inherited an educational framework that prioritized English as the primary language of instruction and administration (Mwansa & Adeyemi, 2007). Even after independence in 1964, English retained its dominance in both public and private sectors, reflecting the deep-seated colonial legacy that continues to influence educational policies today (Kaunda & Ailwood, 2021; Kelly, 1999). In the 2023 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework, English is introduced as a subject and the sole 'official language of instruction from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Tertiary' (Ministry of Education, 2023, p.7.) across all subjects, making student proficiency in English pivotal for their academic progression. Alongside English, teachers are allowed by the same curriculum to use local languages for purposes of explaining concepts. Nevertheless, the use of English as the official language of instruction presents challenges for students, particularly those from rural areas or households where English is not commonly spoken (Mwanza, 2012). For many students, their exposure to English is limited to the classroom, creating a significant barrier to language acquisition (Moyo, 2001). Furthermore, traditional teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation approach, often fail to engage students or develop their communicative competence (Kamwendo, 2010).

In recent years, there has been a shift towards more communicative teaching methods, which emphasise real-life language use and the development of speaking and listening skills (Ellis, 2012). However, the effectiveness of these methods in Zambia's multilingual context remains under-researched. Additionally, the extent to which these teaching strategies are culturally relevant is unclear. Teaching methods that fail to consider students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds may not fully engage them or meet their learning needs (Lamb, 2013). Conversely, culturally responsive teaching methods have the potential to enhance student motivation and understanding by linking the language to their everyday experiences (Gay, 2000).

### **Introduction to ELT**

The teaching of English in postcolonial Africa is historically grounded in colonial legacies left behind by British colonial rule. Since then, English has been a critical part of national educational systems. English, in many African countries, serves as an official language and is often the primary medium of instruction in schools. Zambia, as a former British colony, is no exception. English has held a prominent position in Zambia's educational and governmental structures since the country gained independence in 1964 (Kaunda & Ailwood, 2021). While

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this legacy has led to the widespread use of English, it has also posed significant challenges due to the country's linguistic diversity.

A number of studies have examined the role of English language teaching (ELT) in postcolonial African countries, emphasising its importance for economic, social, and political participation in a globalised world (Mkandawire, Mukonde-Mulenga, Simwinga, Mwansa, Mwendende, Muyangana, & Musonda, 2022; Mwanza 2020). In countries like Zambia, where English is not the first language for most students, English language education presents unique challenges that are often shaped by the socio-cultural context. It is within this complex landscape that teachers must navigate the task of imparting English language skills to students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Existing research on ELT in Zambia is relatively limited, although some studies have explored the methods used in classrooms and their effectiveness. Miti (2005) and Simwinga (2013) provide valuable insights into the historical evolution of English teaching in Zambia and its current challenges. Additionally, comparative studies with other African countries, such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda, have highlighted similar issues related to the postcolonial language policies that prioritise English while marginalising Indigenous languages (Tom-lawyer, Thomas, and Kalane, 2021). These studies underscore the ongoing tensions between maintaining a global lingua franca and acknowledging the linguistic and cultural realities of African students (Kaunda, 2022).

### **Teaching Methods in ELT**

Over the years, the methods used in English language teaching in postcolonial Africa in general and in Zambia in particular have evolved, largely influenced by both global trends and local social and cultural contexts. Mwanza (2017) states that in the early years of Zambia's education system, the grammar-translation method was predominantly used. This method focuses on teaching grammar rules and translating sentences between English and the learners' native languages. Mwanza (2017) further states that the method was widely adopted across many African countries during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Although this method prioritises accuracy in grammar and vocabulary over communication, and while it remains in use today, it has been critiqued for its limited ability to develop students' communicative competence.

Globally, ELT has developed, and more communicative and task-based teaching have gained prominence approaches. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches emphasise the use of language in real-life situations, aiming to improve learners' ability to use English functionally and fluently (Rashov, 2024). Task-Based Learning (TBL) also focuses on meaningful communication, using tasks as the primary unit of instruction (Hima, Saputro & Farah, 2021). These approaches are designed to enhance students' language skills by involving them in activities that mirror real-life language use.

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In Zambia, the shift toward communicative methods has been gradual. While the Zambian Ministry of Education has encouraged more communicative approaches in recent years, the implementation of these methods is often inconsistent across schools, particularly in rural areas. Studies, such as those by Banda (2008) and Mulenga (2015), indicate that many Zambian teachers continue to rely on traditional methods like grammar-translation due to a lack of training in more modern, communicative and task-based approaches. In contrast, urban schools, where resources and teacher training are more accessible, are more likely to incorporate CLT and other learner-centred methods.

Moreover, the literature suggests that even when communicative methods are introduced, teachers often struggle to adapt these methods to the local context. For instance, in a study by Phiri (2017), teachers in Lusaka reported difficulty in balancing communicative tasks with the demands of the national curriculum, which still emphasises grammatical accuracy. This tension between traditional and modern methods reflects broader challenges in adapting global ELT strategies to the Zambian cultural and educational context. In addition to these challenges in the incorporation of culturally relevant methods in ELT.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

The concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) has gained increasing attention in educational research as a means of making teaching practices more inclusive and responsive to students' cultural backgrounds. Introduced by Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP advocates for teaching methods that acknowledge and leverage students' cultural identities in the learning process. In the context of ELT, CRP implies that teachers should integrate students' linguistic and cultural experiences into language instruction to make learning more meaningful and effective (Tanase, 2022).

In multicultural and multilingual societies like Zambia, where students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and speak various Indigenous languages, CRP offers a promising approach to addressing the disconnect between students' home lives and their school experiences. Several studies have explored the potential of CRP in African contexts. For example, Chishimba (2011) examines how Zambian teachers can draw on students' local knowledge to make English lessons more relatable. Similarly, a study by Lungu (2014) highlights the importance of using culturally relevant materials, such as local stories or proverbs, in English lessons to enhance students' engagement and comprehension. Kaunda (2022) focussing on preschool teachers found that preschool teachers utilised learning corners, learning through participation, stories, songs, and learning through play in order to include Indigenous ways of learning in the classroom. Using Indigenous and Western teaching strategies and methods in the classroom created a third space of learning, described by Gupta (2015) as the third space of pedagogical hybridity. In the third space, children not only acquire academic content based



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on Western worldviews but they also saw themselves as centred and located people worthy of  
study (Kaunda, 2022).

However, the application of CRP in Zambia remains under-researched. While there is a growing recognition of the importance of culturally relevant teaching including Indigenous teaching methods in diverse classrooms, there is limited empirical data on how Zambian teachers integrate cultural relevance into their English lessons in secondary school. Studies from other African contexts, such as Kenya and South Africa, provide some insights into how CRP can be applied in multilingual classrooms. For instance, Telli (2017) demonstrates that incorporating local languages alongside English in Tanzanian classrooms can boost students' confidence and participation in English language learning. Such findings suggest that CRP has the potential to improve ELT in Zambia, particularly in rural areas where students may feel alienated by the dominance of English in the classroom.

### **Impact of Postcolonialism on English Teaching in Zambia**

As a former British colony, Zambia's adoption of English as the official language and medium of instruction reflects the lasting influence of colonialism on its educational policies. According to postcolonial scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), the imposition of colonial languages like English serves as a tool of cultural domination, marginalising Indigenous languages and knowledge systems.

In the Zambian context, the use of English in schools has been both a symbol of national unity and a source of exclusion for those who are not proficient in the language. While English is often viewed as a language of opportunity, providing access to higher education and employment, it can also alienate students from their cultural heritage. Studies such as those by Mwanakatwe (2010) and Phiri (2016) highlight the tension between promoting English for its practical benefits and preserving Zambia's linguistic diversity. The postcolonial critique of English teaching in Zambia centres on the ways in which the education system perpetuates colonial hierarchies by privileging English over local languages. Scholars argue that this dynamic contributes to the linguistic and cultural disenfranchisement of Zambian students, particularly those from rural areas where Indigenous languages are more commonly spoken. This critique is echoed in broader discussions about decolonising education in Africa, with calls for more inclusive language policies that recognise the value of Indigenous languages in the classroom (Kaunda, 2022).

Despite these critiques, English remains deeply embedded in Zambia's educational and political systems. The challenge for educators, therefore, is to find ways to teach English that do not perpetuate colonial hierarchies but rather empower students by making the language relevant to their cultural and linguistic identities. Postcolonial theory offers valuable insights

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into how this can be achieved, emphasising the importance of decolonising pedagogies that promote linguistic and cultural diversity in education.

The literature on English language teaching in Zambia reveals a complex landscape shaped by the country's postcolonial history, linguistic diversity, and cultural dynamics. While communicative methods such as CLT have gained traction in recent years, traditional methods like grammar-translation remain prevalent, particularly in rural areas. The concept of culturally relevant pedagogy offers a promising approach to addressing the challenges of teaching English in a multilingual context, although its application in Zambia is still underexplored.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Although English remains central in the education system in Zambia, studies have shown that many students struggle to master the language (Mwanza, 2016). The resultant effects are that poor comprehension and communication skills are particularly prevalent among students or non-English-speaking households (Sumbwa, 2018). These challenges are exacerbated by the limited research on the effectiveness and cultural relevance of the teaching methods employed in Zambian classrooms. Much of the existing literature on English language teaching in Zambia focuses on student outcomes without adequately exploring the instructional strategies that influence these outcomes (Simwinga, 2021).

This research addressed a critical gap by investigating the teaching methods used in Zambian secondary schools and their adaptation to the local cultural context. By examining the strategies employed by English teachers and assessing their relevance to Zambia's multilingual and multicultural environment, the study aimed to provide insights into how English language teaching can be improved. Understanding whether current teaching methods are effective and culturally relevant is vital for addressing the challenges faced by students in learning English and improving educational outcomes (Mwansa & Adeyemi, 2007).

### **Research Questions**

This research is guided by the following key questions:

1. What are the most commonly English language teaching methods used by secondary school teachers in Lusaka?
2. How do English teachers in Zambia adapt their teaching strategies to the local cultural context?
3. What challenges do English teachers face in implementing effective teaching strategies in Zambia?
4. How relevant are the teaching methods to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Zambian students?

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research adopted a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews to provide an in-depth understanding of the teaching methods employed by English teachers in Zambian secondary schools. Qualitative research is particularly suited to exploring complex social phenomena, as it allows for the examination of participants' experiences, beliefs, and practices in their natural settings (Creswell, 2013). By focusing on practicing teachers, this research sought to capture the unique experiences of English teachers in different contexts, ranging from urban to rural schools, and to understand how they adapt their teaching strategies to align with Zambia's cultural context.

### **Sampling and Data Collection**

Purposive sampling was employed to select secondary schools from urban, peri-urban, and rural areas in Zambia. The selection of schools across different geographical regions provided a comprehensive view of the teaching methods used in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. Teachers with varying years of experience in teaching English were included to ensure a broad range of perspectives. This purposive sampling method allowed for the selection of participants who are knowledgeable about the subject matter and could provide rich, relevant data (Patton, 2002).

To gather comprehensive data, English teachers were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to explore their teaching methods and how they adapt to the cultural and linguistic realities of their students. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow for in-depth probing of participants' experiences, making them suitable for exploring complex educational practices (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the data were coded and organised into themes such as “teaching methods,” “challenges” and “adaptation .” The coding process involved reading through the data, identifying key phrases and ideas, and categorising them into relevant themes. Thematic analysis is appropriate for this research because it allows for the systematic examination of the data while remaining flexible enough to capture the complexities of teachers' experiences.



## **POSTCOLONIAL THEORY**

Theo study employed Postcolonial theory to understand and interpret findings. Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens through which the legacy of colonialism is interrogated, especially in relation to language, culture, and identity. Central to postcolonial theory is the notion that colonial practices did not end with the cessation of colonial rule but persist through cultural, political, and linguistic institutions (Lunga, 2008). English, as a colonial language, continues to dominate as the medium of instruction in many former colonies, including Zambia. This dominance often marginalises Indigenous languages and cultural practices, posing significant challenges for education systems that strive for inclusivity and cultural relevance (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). In this study, postcolonial theory was employed to examine how English language teaching methods in Zambia reflect or challenge these colonial legacies.

Postcolonial theorists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Ashcroft et al. (1995) argue that the continued use of colonial languages, such as English, reinforces cultural imperialism by sidelining Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. In education, this manifests as a disconnection between the language of instruction and the lived experiences of students, who often speak multiple local languages at home. In Zambia, English has remained the official language of instruction, despite the country's rich linguistic diversity (Ministry of Education, 2023). The choice of English as the primary medium of education creates barriers for students whose first language is not English, leading to issues of comprehension, academic performance, and cultural alienation (Banda, 2008; Mwanza, 2012).

Postcolonial theory critiques this dominance by questioning whose knowledge and whose language are privileged in the classroom. It argues for a decolonisation of the curriculum, where local languages and cultures are integrated into teaching practices. However, the challenge remains: how can English be taught in a way that is both effective and respectful of Zambia's cultural and linguistic diversity? This study sought to address this question by exploring the extent to which teaching strategies employed in Zambian classrooms are culturally relevant.

Postcolonial theory is highly relevant to this research as it provides the framework for analysing English language teaching methods in a context still influenced by colonial histories. Zambia's education system, established during British colonial rule, has largely retained its colonial structure, with English occupying a central role in both instruction and examination (Simwinda, 2013). This research utilised postcolonial theory to explore how teaching methods either resist or reinforce colonial norms. The study also investigated whether these methods are adapted to suit Zambia's cultural context, particularly in a multilingual and multicultural society.

By employing a postcolonial lens, this study explored the tensions between the necessity of teaching English for global participation and the need to preserve and promote local cultures and languages. It further assessed whether English teachers in Zambia are equipped to navigate

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these competing demands, particularly in a classroom where the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students are diverse.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study are presented and discussed under thematic areas based on research questions.

### **Most Used ELT Methods**

The findings from this study clearly illustrate a diverse range of English language teaching (ELT) methods currently employed in Zambian secondary school classrooms, reflecting both contemporary educational trends and historical influences rooted in colonialism. The most reported teaching strategies included Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Grammar-Translation, Task-Based Learning (TBL), teacher exposition (lecture method), and interactive methods like role-playing and group discussions. This eclectic approach aligns with the observations of scholars like Simwinga (2021) and Mwanza (2016), who notes the gradual shift from traditional, grammar-focused methods towards more communicative practices aimed at enhancing functional language use.

Teachers in this study consistently identified Communicative Language Teaching as a highly valuable method, primarily due to its emphasis on real-life communication. As participant Mengwa Mutambo explained, 'I use communicative language teaching because it improves learners' interaction with others and builds confidence not only through speaking but also writing in order to communicate effectively.'

This preference reflects a global trend, as outlined by Ellis (2012), who underscores CLT's strength in preparing students for practical language use outside the classroom. Teachers further justified the use of CLT because it promotes student engagement, critical thinking, and leadership skills—attributes strongly advocated by contemporary educational theory (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, despite its advantages, participants also acknowledged practical constraints. For instance, Bornface Mbewe highlighted overcrowded classrooms as a major barrier:

Though some methods like group work may not be very effective these days due to overcrowded classrooms, the communicative methods still remain important to teaching communication and comprehension skills."

This aligns with Kamwendo's (2010) observation that resource constraints significantly limit the implementation of communicative methods in postcolonial African contexts, where infrastructure often lags behind pedagogical aspirations.

Interestingly, the Grammar-Translation method continues to hold a significant place in Zambian ELT, largely due to historical influences dating back to colonial education. Stanley Kangwa noted explicitly:

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Grammar translation helps learners understand the meaning behind particular structures. Using a local language enhances the full meaning of particular words as opposed to using the target language only, which is English.”

This comment echoes Banda’s (2008) critical perspective, noting that reliance on Grammar-Translation persists as a colonial legacy, originally intended to maintain linguistic precision and control rather than facilitate communicative competence. Postcolonial theorists, including Kayira (2015), Mutuota (2019) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), have long argued that the continued dominance of colonial languages and methodologies in education marginalises Indigenous languages and cultures. The prevalence of Grammar-Translation in Zambia can thus be viewed as symptomatic of broader colonial continuities within educational practices.

Task-Based Learning (TBL), another frequently cited method, was recognised by teachers for its applicability to real-world situations. Participant Obby Munsaka explained:

I formulate tasks during learners' free time on selected cross-cutting issues like climate change and HIV/AIDS. They present findings in writing and orally. Task-based learning makes language learning relevant and practical.

The pedagogical rationale behind TBL, supported by Ellis (2012), aligns with culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which emphasises linking classroom activities to students' lived experiences (Gay, 2000). Indeed, the adaptation of TBL to culturally meaningful contexts demonstrates the potential for ELT methodologies to resist colonial legacies by embedding language instruction within locally relevant frameworks, thereby promoting greater cultural responsiveness (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

However, despite these positive indications, the ongoing influence of teacher-centred approaches such as exposition or lecture method, prominently reported by participants like Bwalya Mwila, underscores persistent colonial vestiges:

I usually use teacher exposition (lecture method) incorporated with pupil-centred approaches. This helps me make the lesson more pupil-centred than teacher-centred, although the large class sizes often force more lecture-based teaching.

This practice, historically dominant in colonial educational systems, continues largely due to practical necessity rather than pedagogical preference. The persistence of teacher exposition is critically viewed within the postcolonial framework, as Ashcroft et al. (1995) contend that such methods perpetuate power hierarchies reminiscent of colonial authority structures, thus limiting students’ active participation and critical engagement.

The findings reveal that teachers in Zambia consciously balance contemporary communicative approaches with traditional, grammar-based methods, often driven by pragmatic concerns like large class sizes, limited resources, and curriculum constraints. While CLT and TBL offer pathways towards more interactive, culturally inclusive instruction, historical reliance on Grammar-Translation and lecture-based methods remains significant, reflecting deeper structural legacies of colonial education.

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The synthesis of these methods within classrooms indicates teachers' attempts to navigate the complex interplay between pedagogical innovation and structural realities imposed by the education system's colonial heritage. As Ngũgĩ (1986) argues, the persistent dominance of colonial languages and methodologies poses ongoing challenges, not just educationally, but culturally and linguistically, by continually positioning English proficiency as both a gatekeeper and a barrier.

In interpreting these findings through the lens of postcolonial theory, it becomes evident that Zambia's ELT methodologies are deeply embedded within the country's colonial past. The tension between adopting culturally responsive, communicative approaches and relying on historically entrenched grammar-focused methods illustrates broader postcolonial dynamics at play. Teachers, as frontline practitioners, embody this tension by striving for methodological innovation while grappling with systemic limitations rooted in colonial legacies.

### **Adapting ELT strategies to the local cultural context**

Concerning adapting strategies to local context, the findings demonstrate a notable effort by Zambian English teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to the local cultural context, reflecting a nuanced integration of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) within English language instruction. Teachers frequently incorporated local proverbs, idiomatic expressions, folklore, and traditional practices into their lessons, aligning with Chilisa (2012), Gay (2000) and Kaunda (2022) who advocate for culturally responsive teaching that recognises and leverages students' cultural identities to enhance learning. Teachers commonly utilised local proverbs to facilitate a deeper understanding and relevance of English instruction. Participant Obby Munsaka shared a clear example of integrating local idiomatic expressions into language teaching:

“I have used selected idioms and sayings from learners and had them translated into English. For example, the Tonga proverb ‘Mweenzu ta langwi ankhumo, ulangwa mwiida’ (‘Do not look at a visitor's face but look at their stomach’) emphasizes hospitality.”

This approach not only enriched learners' vocabulary but also reinforced cultural pride and identity, resonating with Kayira's (2015) assertion that incorporating cultural narratives strengthens student engagement and learning outcomes. Similarly, Isabel Nguni described her method of integrating local culture through composition exercises:

“If I am teaching composition writing, I pose a question on a local traditional ceremony the learner has experienced, helping them vividly describe and explain. The interest in their explanation helps them write better.”

This method significantly aligns with Chishimba's (2011) argument that Zambian teachers can effectively utilise students' local cultural knowledge to enhance engagement and language learning. Teachers' use of cultural ceremonies and traditional practices in lessons underscores the practical application of CRP, supporting the notion that integrating learners' experiences enhances their linguistic and cognitive development (Gay, 2000).

Storytelling emerged as another culturally relevant teaching method, effectively bridging the gap between students' cultural backgrounds and language learning. Prudence Malama emphasised that, "Usually, we allow them to tell stories in their mother tongue and then pick it up from there, linking the stories to their everyday culture." This practice corroborates Lungu's (2014) findings that culturally relevant stories can significantly boost student comprehension and engagement in multilingual classrooms. Teachers' use of storytelling also reveals an underlying resistance to colonial methodologies by promoting Indigenous knowledge systems that were historically marginalized by colonial education policies (Lunga, 2008; Mutuota, 2019 & Kayira, 2015).

Moreover, songs and role-play featured prominently as methods to incorporate local cultural practices. Stanley Kangwa described a detailed and structured approach in integrating local proverbs with persuasive writing:

"Students construct arguments weaving relevant proverbs from their cultures as evidence as they participate in role play. For example, a student used the proverb 'Ukasombola ico ubyala' ('As you sow, so shall you reap') to argue for disciplined behavior in school."

Such approaches exemplify effective CRP practices by directly engaging students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, affirming their identities, and promoting critical thinking skills (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It also demonstrates the potential for postcolonial resistance within language education, as highlighted by Ashcroft et al. (1995), who emphasise the importance of leveraging Indigenous knowledge to challenge colonial educational legacies.

Nevertheless, despite these positive strategies, the findings indicate that implementing culturally responsive teaching methods often encountered substantial barriers. Overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching materials significantly limited teachers' ability to implement these culturally adaptive methods effectively. Participant Bornface Mbewe noted practical constraints and said that, "Though I incorporate local stories they know very well, overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources limit how effectively we can use these methods." This aligns with Mwanza and Miti's (2016) observations regarding resource constraints impeding effective cultural integration in Zambian classrooms, reflecting deeper structural issues rooted in postcolonial realities.

Moreover, linguistic diversity posed challenges to the smooth adaptation of culturally responsive methods. Mengwa Mutambo highlighted the complexity:

I have not incorporated culture extensively due to fear of taking up much lesson time, explaining cultural backgrounds unfamiliar to some students. Different backgrounds make it difficult to use a one-size-fits-all approach."

Mutambo's point underscores a tension identified by Simwinga (2013) and Mwanza (2012) where linguistic and cultural diversity, while enriching, simultaneously complicates uniform language instruction methods. The multilingual classroom environment thus demands more tailored, differentiated instruction, which the rigid colonial-influenced curriculum structure in Zambia frequently undermines (Banda, 2008).



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Teachers' efforts to integrate local cultural content into their English instruction represent active resistance against colonial legacies embedded in Zambia's educational system. Historically, colonial education marginalised Indigenous cultures and languages, positioning English and Western knowledge as superior (Mwansa & Adeyemi, 2007; Ngũgĩ, 1986). In contrast, contemporary teachers' intentional use of local cultural references, idioms, and storytelling signifies a conscious reclaiming of cultural heritage within language education, disrupting colonial hierarchies by elevating Indigenous knowledge and practices.

### **Challenges Faced in implementing effective teaching strategies**

The findings highlight several significant challenges encountered by Zambian English teachers when implementing effective teaching strategies in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. These challenges reflect broader systemic issues within Zambia's educational system, deeply rooted in its colonial past and ongoing postcolonial dynamics. Teachers frequently reported constraints such as varying levels of student proficiency, limited educational resources, large class sizes, and linguistic diversity, all of which significantly influenced instructional effectiveness.

A predominant issue identified was the varying proficiency levels among students. Isabel Nguni emphasised this particular challenge:

Learners in a particular grade include those who are very good, moderate, and least performing. You can't move forward without teaching the least performing. This makes learning boring for the good ones as they are dragged behind. Sometimes we receive learners who cannot even read at secondary level."

This reflects the observations of Simwinga (2013), who argues that disparities in English proficiency levels complicate teaching practices, necessitating differentiated instructional methods that are often difficult to implement in classrooms constrained by rigid curricula and limited resources.

The findings further underscore the pervasive issue of limited resources as a significant challenge. Bornface Mbewe succinctly described this difficulty as follows: "The biggest challenge is limited teaching and learning resources followed by varying levels of English proficiency among students." This reality aligns closely with Mwanza and Miti's (2016) study, highlighting how resource scarcity profoundly restricts the practical application of effective, innovative teaching methods. This resource limitation directly connects to Zambia's postcolonial legacy, where education systems established during colonial rule remain inadequately resourced to address contemporary educational demands (Mwansa & Adeyemi, 2007).

Large class sizes, exacerbated by Zambia's recent implementation of free education policies, significantly compounded teaching challenges. Rosemary Shawa provided a stark example:

The primary challenge in the classroom is the high teacher-pupil ratio, with as many as 120 students in a single class, making effective teaching and learning extremely difficult. The large class size limits individual attention, hinders meaningful engagement, and makes assessing students' progress challenging. Additionally, the



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shortage of teaching materials exacerbates the situation, with one textbook often shared among five students, restricting their ability to study independently and participate fully in lessons. This scarcity of resources, combined with overcrowding, makes it difficult to implement interactive teaching methods, ultimately affecting the quality of education and highlighting the urgent need for better resource allocation and reduced class sizes.

This challenge resonates strongly with Kamwendo's (2010) observation that overcrowded classrooms severely limit interactive and communicative teaching methods, ultimately pushing teachers toward less effective, lecture-based strategies. This scenario further reflects the persistence of colonial educational frameworks, where limited resource allocation maintains power hierarchies and constrains educational innovation (Ashcroft et al., 1995).

The issue of linguistic diversity emerged as another significant instructional challenge. Teachers consistently noted that students' varied linguistic backgrounds made English instruction more complex, particularly due to mother tongue interference. Mengwa Mutambo illustrated this clearly:

Language barrier due to mother tongue language is significant. Most pupils interpret or translate English words directly into their mother tongue. As a teacher, I am not multilingual, making it difficult to explain certain concepts clearly to everyone."

This linguistic challenge aligns scholars whose findings show that students who concurrently develop literacy in their mother tongue often struggle with English language acquisition. Additionally, this linguistic complexity underscores the colonial legacy of privileging English over Indigenous languages, as postulated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), who argues that colonial languages continue to dominate at the expense of local languages and cultures, leading to significant barriers in multilingual classrooms.

However, this finding departs from other studies which have shown that learners who knew how to read in their mother tongue were likely to transfer reading skills to English. In his study, Tambulukani (2015) confirmed that "transfer of skills from the first language to the second language was evident for the learners who had acquired initial reading ability in the first language."

Addressing these multifaceted challenges often required teachers to adopt adaptive, creative strategies, such as group work and peer-led learning. Prudence Malama highlighted one approach, saying, "Mixing brighter learners with slower learners in group work helps to bridge gaps in proficiency." The practice aligns with Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, emphasising the benefits of inclusive teaching strategies that leverage diverse student abilities to support peer learning. However, the frequent reliance on peer strategies also underscores systemic shortcomings in educational resources and support (Mutuota, 2019).

These challenges represent a significant intersection of postcolonial legacies and contemporary educational realities. Colonial educational frameworks prioritised resource allocation and educational opportunities based on hierarchical structures, often marginalising rural and linguistically diverse populations (Banda, 2008; Kelly, 1999). Today, the residual impacts of

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these frameworks manifest in the continued marginalisation of rural and multilingual classrooms, reinforcing educational inequalities and limiting pedagogical innovation.

### **Relevance of teaching methods to the diverse linguistic and cultural Context**

The findings regarding the relevance of teaching methods to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Zambian students revealed a complex interplay of educational practice, cultural responsiveness, and the enduring impacts of colonial legacies. Teachers consistently acknowledged that while many current methods show promising signs of relevance, their full potential often remains unrealised due to systemic and contextual challenges deeply embedded in Zambia's colonial educational heritage.

Participants notably highlighted the significant value and effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching practices. Stanley Kangwa exemplified this by elaborating on his approach to using culturally relevant methods:

Adapting teaching methods to students' cultural backgrounds mostly involves recognising and incorporating their unique experiences, values, and traditions into the learning process. I incorporate traditional stories or folklore into teaching, especially in subjects like literature, or history... teaching moral values using local fables can make lessons more engaging and culturally grounded."

This aligns closely with the theoretical perspectives of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), where Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1995) advocate incorporating cultural references into classroom instruction to enhance student engagement, understanding, and academic performance. Teachers' efforts to integrate local cultural content through proverbs, storytelling, and other traditional practices reflect an acknowledgment of students' diverse cultural identities, promoting more meaningful educational experiences.

Stanley Kangwa provided an illustrative instance of integrating local cultural wisdom through the teaching of persuasive writing:

I teach students persuasive writing by drawing on their cultural knowledge of local proverbs. A student from a rural community used the proverb 'Ukasombola ico ubyala' meaning, 'As you sow, so shall you reap,' to argue for disciplined behavior in school."

This practice is highly indicative of effective CRP, affirming Ladson-Billings' (1995) contention that culturally relevant methods significantly enhance student participation by validating their existing cultural knowledge within the curriculum. Furthermore, such pedagogical strategies can be seen as resistance to the colonial educational practices that historically sidelined local knowledge systems and cultures (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

However, despite their recognised potential, participants often expressed mixed sentiments regarding the overall cultural relevance of their teaching methods. Isabel Nguni, for instance, reflected on the limitations posed by Zambia's educational system:

To a greater extent, these methods are not very effective because teaching English language can be challenging to learners in rural settings who rarely use English.

Nguni’s observation resonates with critiques by Simwinga (2021) and Mwansa and Kaunda (2022), who emphasise that Zambia’s curriculum remains deeply entrenched in colonial structures prioritising examinations over practical communicative competence. This points to a lingering postcolonial tension where educational methods, though superficially adaptive to local contexts, continue to privilege colonial-era assessment norms, thus limiting genuine cultural relevance and practical application.

Additionally, several participants pointed out that their adaptation of teaching methods to cultural contexts often involved practical use of translanguaging or code-switching, a strategy recognised by Banda (2008) as both pragmatic and culturally inclusive. Besa Benson Mukupo explicitly described this method as follows: “Sometimes I am forced to translate a comprehension passage into Icibemba to help learners understand.” Despite the pragmatic effectiveness of code-switching, its usage remains somewhat controversial, reflecting the postcolonial tension around language prestige and identity highlighted by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986). Teachers’ reliance on local languages to enhance understanding, while practical, simultaneously reflects the colonial tension where English remains the dominant medium of education, often marginalising Indigenous languages (Sampa, 2005).

Moreover, Obby Munsaka described the deliberate incorporation of cultural examples into instruction. This participant said that:

Being eclectic has always made English language lessons interesting, coupled with good participation from learners. For instance, after descriptive writing, learners describe how a traditional dish is prepared, or how a traditional ceremony of their tribe is celebrated.”

This exemplifies CRP effectively by situating learners’ cultural experiences at the center of academic activities, as advocated by Kayira (2015). Yet, this also exposes an implicit struggle where such culturally responsive practices are implemented within an overarching educational structure still strongly defined by colonial legacies (Kayira, 2015; Mutuota, 2019 and Kaunda, 2022).

The findings reveal that cultural relevance in teaching methods, although intentionally pursued by educators, remains constrained by educational policy and structural limitations. Teachers highlighted the inadequate curricular and institutional support as a major impediment to deeper cultural integration. Rosemary Shawa’s statement is illustrative:

Limited teaching and learning materials, because of large class sizes, become a challenge. Resources are inadequate, and the curriculum is rigidly examination-based, limiting the scope for culturally responsive teaching.”

This observation aligns with literature pointing to systemic educational issues inherited from colonial rule, which emphasised rote learning and examination success rather than holistic communicative and cultural competence (Kaunda & Ailwood, 2021). From a theoretical standpoint, these adaptations and struggles epitomise the postcolonial tensions described by

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Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Ashcroft et al. (1995). Teachers in Zambia must continually negotiate the dual pressures of employing culturally inclusive methodologies while simultaneously adhering to a curriculum and language policy shaped by colonial ideologies. This duality illustrates the persistent conflict between the need to cultivate English for global competitiveness and the imperative to preserve Indigenous languages and cultural identity (Ngũgĩ, 1986).

It is evident from the findings that Zambian English teachers actively pursue culturally relevant pedagogies within the constraints of a postcolonial educational framework that often hinders full realisation. These adaptive strategies, though commendable, must constantly navigate structural and ideological barriers reflecting colonial education legacies. Thus, while teachers' methods hold promise for fostering deeper cultural and linguistic inclusivity, their effectiveness is continually constrained by systemic shortcomings in curriculum design, classroom overcrowding, resource scarcity, and entrenched colonial linguistic hierarchies.

Conclusion

## **CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this study reveal a blend of traditional approaches like grammar-translation, alongside more communicative and learner-centred methodologies such as task-based learning and group discussions. Despite the evident shift toward communicative approaches, findings indicated a persistent dominance of exam-oriented instruction, reflecting enduring colonial legacies that prioritise rote learning over practical communicative competence (Mwanza, 2017). Even though teachers actively employed culturally relevant pedagogies by integrating traditional stories, proverbs, and cultural practices into their lessons. However, while these methods significantly improved student engagement and understanding, systemic constraints such as large class sizes, limited resources, and a rigid examination-focused curriculum limited their full effectiveness.

Further, teachers reported difficulties in managing multilingual classrooms effectively, as varying English proficiency levels among students and inadequate teaching materials complicated lesson delivery. These challenges reflect broader systemic issues inherited from Zambia's colonial past, which has consistently underfunded and undervalued Indigenous languages and local educational resources.

Teachers affirmed deliberate efforts to implement culturally responsive methods within their classrooms. Teachers recognised the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy but indicated that their effectiveness remains constrained by systemic and institutional limitations, directly linked to the enduring impacts of colonial educational structures.

The study recommends that policymakers and curriculum developers urgently enhance educational resources, including textbooks, audiovisual materials, and smaller class sizes; reform the curriculum to emphasise communicative competence and culturally relevant content over exam-focused instruction; reconsider language policies to prioritise oral English proficiency, particularly for rural and multilingual learners; and implement specialised

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professional training programs in culturally responsive teaching methods and effective  
multilingual classroom management.

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