



**Written by Annemijn van Gent
Supervisor Dr. A. de Muynck
 University Hogeschool *Driestar Educatief***

# English as language of instruction

**At Primary Schools in Sierra – Leone**

# Acknowledgement

To Sierra Leonean people I explained my thesis to be ‘my last big assignment before I will be graduated’. And a big assignment it was. Beforehand I did not know what to expect, so while working on this thesis, a lot of new aspects were added. This is a very interesting process, as it broadens your mind. Gradually I got some more insight in the complexity of the problems Sierra Leonean people have to deal with, but I also learned a lot from their hopeful and positive attitude. This would not be attained without the help and willingness of many people. Therefore I want to thank all people who played a role in this process. First of all I would like to thank my supervisor, Mr. A. de Muynck, for his useful comments and guidance through this process of doing research. I also want to thank Woord en Daad, especially Marike de Kloe, for giving me this opportunity to go to Sierra Leone, and for arranging all the contacts with EFSL. To the staff members of EFSL I want to ‘tell una boku boku tenki’ for everything they did to make it possible for us to carry out our research. Like our drivers Mohammed and Pafaya, who brought us to almost unreachable places if necessary. A special staff member to be mentioned at this place is coach and landlady Cecilia Becker, who was willing to share her house with us, to take very good care of us, and to offer me more background information on this country and its people. I want to thank all this people from Sierra Leone, but a special word of thank to all the teachers, principals, pupils and parents I met at the Goflames Mission primary school, the Baptist secondary school in Grafon, and the Free Pentecostal primary school in Freetown, for their willingness to take time to answer all my questions during the interview. I am very grateful that I could get to know these wonderful people, it was very enriching. May God bless you all. Beside all these people, I also want to thank my temporarily sisters Lydia and Jorine, for everything we could share together and for supporting and counseling each other in all the new things we perceived during our stay in Sierra Leone.
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*Annemijn van Gent
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# Abbreviations

CLILL Content and Language Integrated Learning

CTF Cotton Tree Foundation

EFSL Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone

JSS Junior Secondary School

L1 First language; mother tongue

L2 Second language

L&DS Literature and Debating Society

SSS Senior Secondary School

MTE Mother Tongue Education

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

VSO Voluntary Service Oversees

# Introduction

*Knowing the English language, gives our children access to the world!
(Parent in Grafton, 13 December, 2011)*

## Subject matter

Since the British colonized the country of Sierra Leone, English became the official language. However, the languages that already existed, remained. When slavery was abolished, the freed slaves from all over west Africa were brought to Freetown, to build up a new life. This is where the Krio language developed; a mixture of English and many other languages.
Because of all these different languages, it was and is important to maintain the English language as official language of the country. Still, most children are not brought up with that language. The first language they learn at home is Krio, or a tribe language, or even both.
When the children have to go to school, they are supposed to learn the English language. One of the reasons, apart from English being the official language, is that the textbooks of the later subjects are all written in English. That means that if the children do not learn English properly, they will not learn at all. The problem will become even bigger as they grow up, because the requirements will extend during the years. If you lack the basics of the English language, learning will only become harder.
Now becomes clear that English is of high importance for education, and because education develops a country, the knowledge of the English language is also important for the development of Sierra Leone.

## Research problem

At the schools in Sierra – Leone English is the language of instruction. This language is not the first, but the second, third or even fourth language of the pupils. I can imagine there will be a lot of problems concerning the English language, as long as it is not your mother tongue.

I would like to examine what the problems in Sierra Leone are, concerning the English language, caused by the difference of languages, and probably also other reasons. What are the problems exactly? Where do they come from and what will these problems entail? And can solutions to these problems be found?

The language of instruction in English can be a problem because the pupils will not understand everything that is explained by the teacher. Thus they will miss a lot of information, and get arrears which are hard to make up during the next years at school. I wonder in what extend these expectations will be true.

To get more insight in the processes of the school, I will interview some pupils of the primary- and secondary school about how they experience(d) learning English. Further I will also interview parents about their children’s school careers and their own attitude towards the English language. Also, I will interview the teachers about the problems they experience and what problems they see the children face. To get all the information I need I came up with the following research questions.

## Research questions

### Main question:

What problems do the pupils face at primary schools in Sierra Leone where English is the language of instruction, but not the pupils’ native language? And how can these problems be solved?

### Secondary questions:

1. What problems are experienced by the pupils at **primary school** regarding English as language of instruction?
	* From the pupils’ perspective
	* From the teachers’ perspective
	* From the parents’ perspective
	* What solutions do pupils, teachers and parents mention regarding the problems with the English language at the primary school?
2. What problems did pupils face in primary education from the perspective of secondary education regarding English as language of instruction?
	* What problems in learning (in) English do secondary school pupils remind from their own school career?
	* What problems in learning (in) English do secondary school teachers perceive in their students’ school career?
	* What problems in learning (in) English do parents perceive when they look back at their child’s school – career?
	* What solutions do students, teachers and parents mention regarding the problems with the English language at primary schools?

## Goal and relevance

The goal of this research is to find out what the problems really are according to the teaching and learning of the English language; and what the solutions to these problems are.
This research is important and relevant because the language skills are elementary skills to benefit from education. When these elementary skills are lacking, important goals of education can be missed or the pupils can get high deprivations; for pupils can only learn well at school if they understand the teacher’s instructions and the information out of the textbooks. So if the instruction and the receiving of the instruction will improve, the quality of education will improve.

This research can offer insight in the problems and the solutions concerning English as language of instruction, for the organizations that work with the schools; like Woord & Daad and their partner organization CTF. By having knowledge about problems and solutions measures can be taken to make education as profitable as possible. This research can also be useful for Woord & Daad when they create a new course about teaching. From the results of this research, they can see what the current situation is in the schools. In the courses they can discuss how to deal with situations like these, to make the best of the education that is possible. This again will help the pupils of the schools in Sierra Leone. And that is what the country needs. In Sierra Leone there is much poverty, and the aim of Woord & Daad is to reduce poverty by education, because young people are the future of the country. Education gives people the opportunity to a better life; for being educated means being able to get a good job and earn money. This means a future and hope to live.

# Theoretical framework

To be well – prepared on the situations that I might face at the schools where I will collect the data for my research, I described some information among the topic of ‘English as language of instruction’. To be aware of the context of teaching in the country where I will carry out my research, I wrote about the history, current situation, language and education in Sierra Leone. It is good to take into account what this country has gone through, to be able to explain situations.
My research is about language, so it is also important to know what the current situation is concerning the spoken languages; what is the position of the inhabitants towards the English language? The topic of research is English as language of instruction, so I collected information about the teachers, for their influence is huge, and about the second language acquisition. In this chapter you can find the information about these topics.
In this information you will read about the ‘L1’ and ‘L2’. The L1 means first language, or mother tongue. The L2 is the second language, the language that has to be studied before you are able to speak in this language.

The partner organisations of Woord & Daad; EFSL (Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone) and CTF (Cotton Tree Foundation), are organisations at whose schools we are allowed to carry out our research. Here I will describe what they are doing and, more specifically, what they do in the educational sector.

## Organizations

**EFSL**The Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone (EFSL) is a church-based network organization with 49 members. In February 2010, a rapid assessment survey was carried out among seven out of the fourteen EFSL member bodies involved in the educational sector in different districts.
It was realized that the seven denominations have a total of 266 schools spread throughout all the four Provinces of the country. Thus they are providing services to 110, 293 direct beneficiaries. The seven member churches/denominations employ a total of 1,236 teachers. ([www.efsl.evang.org](http://www.efsl.evang.org))

The member body schools of the organization EFSL face the following challenges for education in Sierra Leone, according to the ‘Terms of Reference for internship’, (Woord & Daad, 2011):

1. The schools have a high percentage of **untrained and unqualified teachers**. EFSL field research report shows that most teachers in the schools are untrained and unqualified.
2. There is **overcrowding** in EFSL member body schools and in some of the schools pupils learn under structures roofed with palm thatches.
3. There is no existing Christian network to influence policy makers both at central and local government levels for the provision of quality education. These problems are contributing to poor quality of education provided by EFSL member institutions.

 **CTF**The Cotton Tree Foundation is organized exclusively for the following charitable and educational purposes:

* To **facilitate the provision of educational supplies and the development of education** for children in the West African nation of Sierra Leone. The scholarships will be awarded based on need and/or academic eligibility and achievements. The Cotton Tree Foundation will be providing and administering scholarships that will focus primarily on:
* The Elementary Level – 1st through 8th grade The Primary Level – 9th through 12th grade The Tertiary and College Level – vocational training and university levels. (<http://www.cottontree.org/aboutus.html>)

The Goflames Mission primary school and the Baptist secondary school where I will carry out my research are both assisted by Woord & Daad, through CTF.

## Sierra Leone

**History**Before Sierra Leone was discovered in 1462 by Pedro da Cintra, as far back as 2500BC, it was a land with small communities working with stone and wooden tools, smelting iron, growing rice, sludging salt from the swamps, refining palm oil, panning for gold, making soap from wood ashes, potting, weaving, etc. The Portuguese started to trade. First gold and ivory, but from 1550s the most tempting and financially rewarding goods were human. Englishman John Hawkins made several trips to the bays of Freetown to buy slaves in the 1560s. Queen Elizabeth I even provided money for a second expedition after his first was so profitable. The ‘Province of Freedom’ (which later became Freetown) was founded by Britain’s most fervent of slave trade abolitionists. Later, the British colonized the country, although they planned (in 1865) the West Africa colonies should one day be given up, but they didn’t succeed very soon.
 British influence was extended to the hinterland beyond Freetown, and justified as best for the interests of the people in the territories adjacent to the colony of Sierra Leone. The hypocrisy of attempting to take over the land for the people’s own interests was well illustrated by the fact that domestic slavery continued not being debated. (Manson, K. and Knight, J., 2009)
 An important influence of the colonizer was the English language. Besides the suppression of the local culture and knowledge through the use of the language of the suppressor, it also works as an ‘excluder’ when the language used for administration and better jobs, is taught to a small minority. People who do not speak the language are ‘disempowered’, while people who speak the colonial language are ‘increasingly divorced’ from their own culture and language (Johnson 2007: 248).
 **Civil war**Images of Sierra Leone’s 1991 – 2002 civil war remain engrained; amputated limbs, men wielding machetes, child soldiers wildly firing Kalashnikovs, their minds lost to drugs. It goes beyond extremes, beyond the power of words like horror or atrocity that try and fail to describe it. The country is still recovering, perhaps in never will, perhaps it needs to begin again. It’s hardly clear what the war was about, what started it, who it was between and why it went on for so long. Despite the complexities, the war had two constants: the similarity of the fighters and the fact that civilians, rather than other combatants, were overwhelmingly their targets. In the absence of one decisive campaign to stop them, fighters from all sides relied on terror tactics. More than 4000 people had limbs amputated, an estimated one in three women and girls were raped, an estimated 10.000 child soldiers were abducted and forced to fight. The same number again was taken for sexual slavery and forced labour.
 Much more could be told about the terror tactics. The only thing that matches the horror of the war is the tales of hope, determination and daily bravery that have come out of it. These are what make the country not only a great, but a humbling place to visit; and why, amid the devastation that still persists and the accounts of unfathomable violence, it’s easy to hear, and even easier to believe, that Sierra Leoneans are a peaceful people. (Manson, K. and Knight, J., 2009)

**Current situation**Sierra Leone is a country with many faces. Beside the beautiful beaches in the coast areas, the abundant nature of the rural parts and the richness in natural resources, the Human Development Index (HDI) is still one of the lowest (0.317, rank 158) of Africa. 66.4% percent of the nearly 6 million inhabitants live below the poverty line (www.data.worldbank.org 4-1-2012). Like Penfold, the former British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone cited: ‘The tragedy of Sierra Leone is that her people are among the poorest in the world while the country is among the richest’ (in Davies 2000: 349). Poverty is especially concentrated in the rural areas with a poverty rate of 80 percent, while it is lower (15 percent) in the capital city Freetown.
 Recent history has so overwhelmed this small country that the great strides made since the end of the war are sometimes forgotten. For a long time people felt politicians too easily blamed the lack of economic and social progress on the war, without ever getting to grips with the underlying mess that predated it, or attempting to inject much urgency to the effort to rebuild and get on.
The government’s budget mostly comes from import taxes at the port (41%) and from donors (c33%). The main challenges to economic growth include poor infrastructure, including less that 10% of the population with access to energy, a poorly skilled and trained labour force, and a regulatory environment for business and the private sector that ranks among the worst in the world. (Manson, K. and Knight, J., 2009) Despite the strong economic recovery after the civil war, the unemployment rate, especially youth unemployment, is still high (World Bank 2007). Beside economic poverty, the health situation is also miserable with a life expectancy of 48 years and one of the highest mortality rates under five (194 per1000). These circumstances influence the conditions of education and the situation of both children and teachers.

### Language

The country has 23 living languages. Of the African languages, two dominate the rural areas: Mende in the south and Temne in the north. Many more are still in use. Today the official language is English, although regular use is limited to a literate minority, mostly based in the capital Freetown. Krio is the *lingua franca* that connects the majority of the population. (Manson, K. and Knight, J., 2009)

**Krio**Sierra Leone Krio is the [lingua franca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_franca) spoken throughout [Sierra Leone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone). Krio is spoken by 97% of Sierra Leone's population and unites the different ethnic groups in the country, especially in their trade and social interaction with each other (wikipedia.org). The [vocabulary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexicon) of Krio is derived primarily from English, while its sound system, grammar and sentence structure are heavily influenced by at least 12 [African languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_languages), including aspects of the [Igbo language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo_language) and [Yoruba language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba_language) of [Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria), but also by European languages. It gets called pidgin English, even broken English, but anyone who thinks of Krio as a simple business is in for a shock. Many of the words are easily recognisable from their English counterparts, but equally the likes of *pikin* (from the Portuguese for child), *yabas* (from the Arabic for onion), etc. are a long way from Shakespeare. The tongue started as a trading language for tens of thousands of freed slaves from all over West Africa, Europeans and other merchants. It evolved from contact with English – speaking sailors and traders in the 1700s, and the Creole community of freed slaves who later took it as their own. Krio is the primary language of communication among Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad. English is Sierra Leone's [official language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_language), while Krio, despite its common use throughout the country, has no official status. Officially written and taught in phonetic symbols, complete with diphthongs, tense markers, its own grammatical structure and vocabulary, there’s no doubting Krio is a language in its own right. It is a transfusion of numerous African idioms and phrases, the designation of the Sierra Leone vernacular would be – *mixture of mixtures, all is mixture.* It has acquired a sacredness of its own. It is the language of the domestic life, of courtship, of marriage, of death, of intensest joy and deepest grief. (Manson, K. and Knight, J., 2009)

### Education

At 31%, Sierra Leone’s current adult literacy rate is one of the lowest in the world, and the genre divide is marked – only 18% of women over 18 can read English. Education is officially free for primary school children and approximately 70% attend school. This has resulted in massive enrolment increases, and an active school building programme. However, completion rates pale in comparison and the system lacks teachers. Those who already have jobs are chronically underpaid, and increasingly thinly stretched as the school – going population starts to overstretch, particularly in urban areas. The schooling might be free, but numerous additional costs exist, and act as a disincentive for many parents: these range from legitimate expenses for uniforms, books and stationery, to ‘taxes’ that in some cases are arbitrarily generated by teachers to generate additional income – these include charges for school cleaners, the marking of pupils’ homework, or even right to sit exams. Stories of teachers selling sweets to children, taking donated textbooks and selling them in markets, and demanding sex for grades are alarmingly common.

### Language of instruction

English is the language of instruction at all levels of schooling. For primary grades 1 and 2, however, the medium of instruction can be both the community language and English. So that the national languages are not completely lost, the education policy encourages the teaching of national languages throughout the school system, teacher colleges, and university.
So in general, they pay attention to both national languages and English.

## Quality education

UNICEF (2000) mentions five dimensions by which is measured the quality of education.
Quality education includes:

* **Learners** who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;
* **Environments** that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
* **Content** that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.
* **Processes** through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
* **Outcomes** that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

### Learners

Children need to be physically and psychosocially healthy; this provides the basis for a successful school experience, to be able to learn well. The regular school attendance influences the achievements as well. The school attendance again, depends on the family support, what is made visible in the following sentences. This also shows the causes and effects of poor family support.

* Parents having a low level of education
* Influences parent – child interactions related to learning
* Influences parents’ income
	+ Need for help in the home or field
		- Keeping children from school (🡪 irregular school attendance)
* Are less familiar with the language used in the school
	+ Limiting their ability to support learning
	+ Limiting their participation in school – related activities

By showing these causes and effects, it becomes more visible what the solutions might be for these problems. For if the parents are more educated (by an adult literacy program), it will influence the income and therefore it will also influence the children’s school attendance.
If parent involvement to the school will increase, there will be more support from the parents to their children to study at home. This again will result in better achievements for the children.

### Environments

To be able to learn, the environment has to be safe and rich for the learners.
Rich: the quality of school facilities has an indirect effect on learning. The class size is important to mention here as well. Because of the large numbers of pupils for one teacher, there are less materials available.
Safe: this is especially important for girls; that they will be treated equally and not be neglected or discriminated by teachers. So the teachers need to take care of this safe environment.
To ensure a safe environment, effective school discipline policies are needed. Well-managed schools and classrooms contribute to educational quality. Students, teachers and administrators should agree upon school and classroom rules and policies, and these should be clear and understandable (UNICEF, 2000). This will also protect against violence at school.

### Content

To ensure quality content, you need clear goals. National goals for education, and outcome statements that translate those goals into measurable objectives should provide the starting point for the development and implementation of curriculum (UNICEF, 2000).

The structures of the curriculum need to be student-centred, non-discriminatory, and standards – based. The curriculum should be based on clearly defined learning outcomes and these outcomes should be grade-level appropriate and properly sequenced.
**Literacy** is often considered one of the primary goals of formal education. In some cases, literacy skills are taught as a separate subject, in a language course, where the instruction tends to

focus on teaching the language as an end in itself. Such an approach tends to be linear —

first teaching aural skills, then speaking, reading and writing skills. Alternatively, literacy

skills may be developed through other subjects such as social studies or science. The

UNICEF study found that in these cases, there is a greater focus on language as a tool for

social development; *situations from daily life are incorporated into activities that foster the*

*acquisition of reading and writing skills (*UNICEF, 2000). Attention to the way literacy is

developed is critical since research has shown *that language learning cannot be separated*

*from content*.
**Life skills** curriculum focuses on attitudes, values and behavioural change, rather

than seeking to provide young people with a body of knowledge about a set of topics.

### Processes

When we look at the problems there are in learning (in) the English language, it becomes clear that the teachers have a significant role to play. In the report of the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO 2002) teachers are noticed as the most important actors in quality education. Teacher’s role in educational change can be positive as well as negative. Difficult circumstances, like lack of training, poverty and low motivation causes a negative influence on teachers (Davies, 1993).

The teachers’ direct environment consists of their private, the living condition and professional environment, which is their working conditions. The politic economic context influences both areas. Because of the cutting in the budgets and decentralization, the teachers’ **living conditions** are bad.

The **working conditions** are remuneration packages, management, unions, class characteristics, and the status of the teacher. Remuneration packages consist of salaries, allowances and payment administration. In developing countries and especially in (post-) conflict countries, the **salaries** are not sufficient to cover the basic needs, allowance are small and insecure and the administration is poorly organized resulting in late payment (UNESCO 2007, VSO 2002). In many developing countries the management is weak; this has a negative impact on the behavior (causes misconduct) and lowers the teachers’ identity and motivation.

**Class characteristics** like resources, class size, workload and supervision, guidance and inspection influence the teachers’ behavior and the competences. When basic **resources** like adequate class rooms, black board, desks and chairs for teacher and pupils, a sufficient amount of textbooks, papers and pencils and new technologies, like computers are not sufficient, teachers are not able to meet pupils’ needs and to apply reformed teaching methods (VSO 2002).
It also increases the **workload**, which is due to shortage of teachers, heavy administrative burdens, other responsibilities, innovations, too many teaching periods, large classes and many other, non-teaching activities like marking or teacher training in free time.

Regular **inspection** can provide positive reinforcement and communication between teachers and management. In many developing countries, due to a lack of resources, **inspectorate services** have been cut down or obtain a controlling character instead of being used to motivate the teacher (VSO 2002).

**Guiding services** consist mainly of mentoring, but because of a lack of experienced teachers and the heavy workload this is not practiced enough. Both can influence the teachers’ motivation and the identity, because it is important to receive positive reinforcement (at least in western education this is an important aspect).
Professional development can help overcome shortcomings that may have been part of teachers’ pre-service education and keep teachers abreast of new knowledge and practices in the field. This ongoing training for teachers can have a direct impact on student achievement.
Teacher education should help teachers develop teaching methods and skills that take new understandings of how children learn into account. For example, teaching and learning about life skills requires interactive, student-centered methods. Since skills are by definition active, competency is unlikely to be developed without active practice.

### Outcomes

The environment, content and processes that learners encounter in school lead to diverse

results. Quality learner outcomes are intentional, expected effects of the educational system. They include what children know and can do, as well as the attitudes and expectations they have for themselves and their societies.

Academic achievement in general and achievement in literacy and numeracy in particular

represent key educational outcomes. Testing information tends to be used primarily as a screening

device to decide who can continue to the next grade of level rather than as a tool to help

improve educational quality for individuals and systems. But ongoing assessment of student performance can provide teachers with the information they need to improve student learning, because it is critically important to identify what skills each student possesses and to use instruction to progressively build on this foundation. (UNICEF, 2000).

## Second language acquisition

The real goal of linguistics is what you can do with the language in action: greeting, go shopping, asking questions, being part of conversations, write a letter, and so on. This all makes learning a language useful. At the same time, you also need building blocks: words, expressions and structures like verbs. Finding the right balance between teaching the building blocks and the use of skills is one of the big challenges for stable language education. Decoo ( 2008)mentions three key points that are important for stable language education:

1. You cannot learn a language as a ‘study of questions’ about idioms and grammar, but especially through a lot of experience with expressions which are immediately understood. Therefore, the advice to let the children first practice a lot with correct solutions, making exercises, before you let him go to the next steps.
2. Being able to understand (through reading and listening) earns more appreciation as a prove for progress, because being able to speak and write by yourself requires more time and repeating. Sometimes people measure the language progress too early to the ‘productive’ aspects, through which the pupil can become discouraged, although ‘receptive’ he already is able to understand a lot.
3. Everything what we do with a language, has to have a meaning. Every word, every sentence has to give a picture, carry out a message, express a conviction; even a sentence of a grammar exercise.

### Understanding and speaking

If the teacher wants to give all his instructions in English, it is allowed, but the pupils have to study the instructions first very well, like by a list of translations. The teacher should say: ‘if you didn’t understand what you have to do, then ask me in the L1’. Because if you strictly force the pupils, that is the best way to lose them, and make them even more scared to speak.

Pupils are linguistic in speaking the L1, so they know what they want to say. However, in the L2, they continuously crash on the wall of their limits. The pupil makes mistakes, stumbles, feels like he is being judged. Research shows that a surprising lot of pupils experience language fear during speaking assignments in class. (McCarty, m. & O’Keeffe, A., 2004) And in large classes, in the best case, a pupil can speak an average for one minute a lesson. So most of the times even less. The causes of the fear are: the feeling that everybody around you is listening; fear that they will judge you, worries about imago, too little knowledge of the language, and frustration. That is why it can be helpful to use the mother tongue. When a child forgets a word, or blocks in a sentence, then he is allowed to say that word or part of the sentence it in the mother tongue. In class the teacher will immediately translate it into the L2. This is a perfect teaching method which provides a gain in time, and a high learning effect (Decoo, 2008). The teacher’s personality, his way of reacting, of supporting or judging, can be of decisive importance in the creation of fear for the language.

### Use of the mother tongue in language education

Already since the ancient times is the bilingual approach for language education the most natural one. First you need to understand what words and sentences mean in the foreign language, through translation. After that, you also learn a language by being able to translate from one language to the other. When we hear something in a foreign language, we immediately wonder what that means in our mother tongue. A lot of researchers have showed that if you use the mother tongue functionally, it leads to better results. Changing and mixing the mother tongue with the foreign language to pass on the message, is permitted. So it is normal and necessary that you use the L1 when learning another language. Of course it is not allowed for teachers or pupils to use the L1 useless or disturbing. The learning process itself will have the best results by using the foreign language – listening and reading texts, making exercises, doing practices, playing dialogs, etc.

### Motivation

Motivation is a deep and durable passion, converted into deeds, covering a longer period, to control another language. Motivation is crucial for learning a language.
There are two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative motivation (Decoo, 2008). Instrumental motivation is the case if the language is just an instrument for something else. In case of integrative motivation, the pupil finds himself positively personally involved, and wants to learn the language; inner motivation. Integrative motivation has more effect on the successful learning of a language than the instrumental motivation. Basically, integrative motivation is the same as a small child stimulates to acquire the mother tongue: the natural eager to belong to a family and community. Of course the instrumental and the integrative motivation can come together, and influence each other: you learn a language because it is necessary, but also because you like to know the language. All in all, it is important to stimulate the integrative motivation; the long term. Instead of focusing on the results; which are just relevant on short term. But you cannot force the child; the positive attitude towards learning the language has to come from the child himself. But still, some things can help:

* Start at an early age; as natural as possible. The positive atmosphere that comes with this way of learning, creates an affective base that in later learning stage can bring an integrative motivation.
* Reward; after the playful way comes the transition to learning at school. Parents have to go along with this transition. The most important duty that parents have, is to show interest and admiration for their achievements. Positive reactions of parents according to what happens at school, are encouraging for children. (Decoo, 2008)

The step to productive use of the language becomes really useful if the pupil really starts communicating with others in the second language. Class correspondence is one activity that can give a positive input to the pupils’ motivation. It is possible to find such classes on the internet. If this is guided well by the teachers, it can be a good teaching method to stimulate the pupils in gaining more of the English language.

As the theoretical framework shows, there are a lot of aspects to take into account when discussing the problems and solutions concerning English as the language of instruction.
The situation of poverty and illiteracy in the country, (explainable because there was no development during the civil war, covering ten years) which results in less possibilities for education, regarding finances and knowledge.
Because this research will supply more insight to the current views regarding the problems and ideas of solutions concerning English as language of instruction, it is important that I ask respondents of different groups: teachers, principals, students and parents to give their comments and ideas. The methodology for this research will be discussed in the next chapter.

# 3. Research method

## Type of research

This research is a qualitative research. This means that research ‘units’ (students, teachers, principals, parents) are studied within the totality of their surroundings. Results will be described in words. I will collect data through conversations, mainly consisting of open interview, with the help of interview guidelines. For every respondent group I use a different guideline, like displayed in annex 2.

## Research subjects

This research will take place in two primary schools and in one secondary school:

* Goflames Mission School in Grafton;
* Free Pentecostal School
* Baptist school (secondary school) in Grafton

At every school I will interview the principal, at least 5 duo’s of pupils, 5 teachers and 5 parents. I will ask all of them what their ideas are about the problems and the solutions concerning English as language of instruction.

* **The primary school pupils:**
	+ What is difficult for them? What helps them to learn the English language better? Do they study at home? What problems do they see other class members have?
* **The primary school teachers:**
	+ What makes teaching English difficult? What is difficult for the children in learning English?
* **The parents of the primary school pupils:**
	+ How do they look at the learning process of their children? Is it difficult for them to learn the English language at school? Do they support their children to study?
* **The secondary school pupils:**
	+ What is it like for them to learn the English language? What was it like at primary school, did they experience problems? What were the problems in that period?
* **The secondary school teachers:**
	+ What problems do they experience? How do they look at the education in English at primary schools?
* **The parents of the secondary school pupils:**
	+ How do they look back at the school career of their children? How was the primary school period in preparation on secondary school? Did the children experience any problems?

## Instruments of measurement

As instruments of measurement, I use guidelines for the interview, as displayed in annex 2.

Through the interviews, I would like to find out what the character of the problems is, concerning English as the language of instruction, according to the different respondents. In this section I will formulate a few general remarks.

I will start the interviews with a few general questions. They don’t seem to add to the problem, but the answers to these questions are good for me to know. It helps me to interpret the problem they will mention (according to English as the language of instruction) in a right way, and in order to get some background information.
The students I will ask what language they speak at home. If they speak English with their parents, that explains why they are that capable in speaking English during the interview, or not. Like I wrote down in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2): ‘Today the official language is English, although regular use is limited to a literate minority, mostly based in the capital Freetown.’
Further, I have some ideas in mind that might be a cause of the problem. That is why I ask for example, how they regard the English language as such, do they think it is important? If I know that, then I can include- or exclude the motivation as part of the problem. This is also part of the findings written in chapter two: ‘Motivation is a deep and durable passion, converted into deeds, covering a longer period, to control another language. Motivation is crucial for learning a language.’
That is why I ask the different respondents more questions than only the problems and solutions; I use these questions also to come closer to the problem. Then the respondents can start thinking about the topic; that is important because while talking there might come more to their mind about the problems.
To give the respondents more opportunity and time to think about the problems and solutions, is also why I made more questions that are close to each other. Because if you ask a question for the second time, in another way, then the respondent might mention something more or other interesting aspects. For there is more time given to think about the questions.

To the teachers I also ask how it is for them to teach in the English language, because in the theoretical framework, I described the impact of the quality of the teacher on education; for ‘teachers are noticed as the most important actors in quality education’. If they will say that teaching is difficult for them, then it will have effects on the way of their teaching of the English language.

I want to ask the respondents about their point of view to other groups of respondents too.
I will ask parents about the children and teachers; students about other student groups, parents and teachers; and I will ask teachers about the students and parents. In this way I will get insight in how the respondents think about each other and thus I might get a more complete view about the problems and solutions.

I will interview students and teachers from secondary school, although my research is about the problems at primary school. By hearing some problems from the secondary school, I will understand the problems for the primary school better, because then I will know something of the problems in long term. The teachers experience the problems and the effects from primary schools directly in their classes, when they see their students struggling with the language. They will also have an interesting point of view about the solutions for primary school.
I will ask students from secondary school about what they experienced during their primary school career. They can look back and with the experience and comparison of the education at secondary school, they can clearly see what the problems there were, for the school and for themselves. This might be more difficult for the pupils of the primary school to mention, so the point of view from the secondary school students will be very useful.

## Data collection method

I will try to make each interview comfortable and informal. So I will start with talking about something that just happened, or about the family, the children, the class and stream the student is in, the subject they like, etc. This is in order to get more familiar with each other, so that the person won’t fear the interview and will give clear and honest answers.

After this first talk, I will introduce myself and what we are doing here. Then the respondent will also know the aim of the interview, and what the questions are about. When the person understands and agrees, I will ask the first question. I listen to the answer, to know whether the person has understood my question, and then probably I will ask the question in another way so the person will give the answer more fitting to the question, or ask the next question. What I at least want to know is what the problems are in learning English, and what de solutions can be, according to the person being interviewed. Also, when I hear the respondent explaining something that sounds interesting, or when I know something of their situation, then I will ask some more questions. Then I will ask more about what I became curious about and also questions about things that might be part of the problem. For example a question to the parents if they encourage their children in learning English, and whether they think the education should be in a different way. I can use those questions when I write the conclusions, and this information might give me more insight in the character of the problems, and how people think.

Because the strategy is more like a conversation than an interview, I will not ask all the questions on my paper one after the other. I will start with the first question, but my next question I will ask according to the answer given. So the row of questions I prepared in advance is just a guideline. It covers the questions that I want to ask, but they are flexible. Also, this gives space to ask more questions about a specific topic. (Ton Kallenberg et al.; 2007) I can ask the questions in a different way and order. In this way I will collect the data. For the guidelines, go to annex 2.

## Data analyzing method

After finishing all the interviews, I will classify all the answers by topic. The division into groups is based on the five dimensions for quality education, made up by UNICEF (2000). This is important for my research because the research is about the quality and products of the language education. Therefore I need standards of what is regarded as quality education around the world. This definition of standards for quality education allows for an understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context (UNICEF, 2000).

* When the teachers mentioned the same problem, I will notice that (the times that one problem is mentioned; this will mean something for the importance of the problem)
and put them together, so I will get one complete narrative about this problem.
* I will put these problems in a table. In this table, I will analyze what is mentioned as ‘problem’; split this up and make them following on each other.
Because one aspect is the cause of one problem. But that problem can be the cause of a next problem.
* Below this table, I will put the solutions for the problems mentioned for the problems at this group.

# 4. Results

This chapter deals with the outcomes of the conversations I had with teachers, pupils, and parents.
After a short description of every respondent group, there is an overview displayed of the analyzed conversations with the different respondent groups. The conversations are analyzed by a division of causes, problems and solutions and it is ordered by the five dimensions for quality education (UNICEF, 2000). In this way it becomes clearer what areas most of the problems come from.

**Teachers**The Goflames mission primary school teachers teach classes 2 – 6. In this school there is one teacher who teaches all the subjects in one class.
The school system of the Free Pentecostal primary school is different; class 1 and 2 there is one teacher who teaches all subjects in one class. For class 3 till 6, there is a teacher for every subject. So the teachers interviewed, are class 1 and 2 teachers, and subject teachers in English, of class 4, 5 and 6. The Baptist secondary school teachers teach JSS and SSS classes the subject Language arts.

**Students**In all the schools I asked the principal or a teacher whether it was possible for me to interview some pupils. That was always possible, and I could carry out all the interviews. What I experienced at every school, was that they first sent their best students to me, so they could answer my questions in English. That is of course understandable, but most of the times these children came from good homes and had no real problems learning English. But they had a good view on the problems of their class members. Once I asked all the pupils from one class. Then I also got the pupils who are bad at English, and I understood why the teacher first sent me the best students. Because the students I spoke with after the best ones, could hardly understand my questions. So it was more difficult to get the right answers from them. But this experience was another way of collecting data: in this way the problems and the level distance in one classroom became very clear to me.
At Baptist secondary school I had conversations with JSS and SSS students. Here I experienced the same, according to the level distance. The vice – principal sent me very good students; they could answer my questions very well, so their answers are very useful. But I also interviewed students who did not understand everything I asked, or students who were shy to talk. In general, their remembrance of their primary school career gave me a lot of insight.

**Parents**In all the schools there were some parents around, so I could interview them easily. They were always willing to answer my questions. Also in this group it was useful for me to see how the interview developed. Many times it was necessary to have an interpreter for the conversations. In those cases the parent was not able to communicate in English at all. Also when I asked their names, some couldn’t write it down by themselves. So during these interviews I experienced the problem of the parents’ illiteracy.
The interviews with the parents were interesting because I saw that the ones that I interviewed, were involved in the school and the education of their child. But not every parent. One parent I interviewed, was selling during the interview, and watching over her toddlers. She had absolutely no idea about her children’s school career or problems.
In general the interviews with the parents were interesting because they gave me some insight in their point of view about how learning at the schools occurs.

In this chapter I will present the problems and solutions mentioned by the respondents from primary school, and after that I will show the problems and solutions mentioned by the respondents from secondary school.

## Primary school

### Pupils

#### Problems:

**Dimension 1: Learners background**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| * At home I speak Krio.
 | * It is difficult to read English, because there are many difficult words that I don’t understand.
* English is very difficult for us. I do not understand everything we read.
 |
| * Not everybody has books to study at home.
* Some have to sell
* Some play football after school
 | A lot of pupils do not study at home. |
| * They do not study at home.
* Some children don’t go to school every day.
 | They don’t know how to read, spell and write |

**Dimension 4: Processes (14)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| The children in class do not listen to the teacher. They don’t study at school. When the teacher is teaching, they are playing.  | * Some pupils of our class don’t know how to speak, and spell, and read.
* The teacher has to discipline them when they play during the lesson.
* It is noisy in class.
 |
| * It is noisy in class.
 | Then we can’t listen to the instruction. But if the headmaster is around, then it becomes quiet. Otherwise he will flog you. |
| People will laugh at me. | I don’t want to talk English in class  |
| In the classroom we sometimes have to study for ourselves. But:* The person, who has to watch over the class during study time, cannot control the whole class.
* Some children don’t study, and then they start laughing, fighting, jumping, and sometimes breaking the bench.
 | * If the teacher sees this, they get flogged
* They don’t study at school.
 |

 **Dimension 5: Outcomes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| * I don’t know the words
 | * For the other pupils in the classroom dictation and spelling is difficult.
* Reading is very difficult.
* Grammar is difficult
 |
| * I don’t know how to write.
* the questions are very hard
* There are many questions.
* We have to use big words.
 | * Composition is difficult (5)
 |
| * I don’t know how to write the words
* I don’t know the words.
* I don’t know how to spell.
 | * Letter writing is difficult (6)
 |
| * I don’t know how to pronounce
 | * The eight parts of speech are very difficult.
 |

**Summary problems students primary school***Main problems:*

* **English is strange** to them, and therefore difficult to learn.
* A lot of students **do not study at home**. That causes problems at school.
* **At school:**
	+ The monitoring is not always good; misbehaviour. This affects the learning time.
	+ The atmosphere is not safe:
		- The teachers flog
		- The children laugh at each other when they (try to) speak English.
* There is a lack of English vocabulary.

*Other aspects:*

* There is a clear relation to the home language and the difficulties the pupils face in learning in English.
* Pupils of primary school are positive about the way of teaching.
* They regard the teachers as the source and a great help. But are also afraid of them.
* Difference in the schools: the pupils of the Goflames Mission primary school don’t mention management problems, like misbehaviour and flogging. There is no corporal punishment at this school. So those aspects are only concerning the Free Pentecostal primary school.

#### Solutions:

**Language background**Students have to practice in speaking English at home and at school. They have to get used to English instead of only Krio.

**Family support***The students...*

* Need to study at home
	+ To do that you need books
	+ You need to practice speaking English at home too
	+ You need someone who can help you with homework, like parents (5), or elder brothers or sisters
* *The parents...*
	+ Need to provide someone who is educated and can teach the children after school.

**Processes***The students...*

* Need to study at school
	+ During the time for study at school, you need to study. Stop playing. (3)
	+ Speak English at school, and then you can practice. (3)
	+ Ask the teacher it if you don’t understand something. He will explain.
	+ Do not laugh at somebody who is trying to speak English.
	+ Pay attention to the instruction of the teacher.
* *The teachers ...*
	+ Have to check if everybody is speaking English at school. They may not allow speaking Krio in the classroom.
	+ Need to punish the children who don’t study. But don’t flog them.
	+ Have to check the homework.
	+ It helps if the teacher repeats the words.
	+ Have to stop flogging. *Alternative:*Take the misbehaving kids out of the classroom and let them study somewhere else. Ask him questions and talk to him. So he won’t do it again.
	That is better than flogging.

**Summary:***Main solutions:*

* Students have to study at home
* Students need books to study at home
* Parents or other relatives have to help them
* The teacher clarifies the difficult words
* At school English has to be spoken, there has to be more monitoring and discipline,
but no corporal punishment.

### Teachers

#### Problems:

**Dimension 1: Learners background**

**Language background (12)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| * English is not the mother tongue.
* Pupils are not used to the language.
* Pupils can come from remote areas; they still have to learn the basics of the English language.
 | English is strange and difficult.  |
| * At home they speak Krio; English is not their own language.
* Krio is close to English.
 | * They don’t practice English at home.
* Interference of Krio; they mix English with Krio words.
* The pronunciation is not good.
 |

**Good health and nutrition**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| A lack of nourishment  | Children cannot concentrate well. This hinders the progress of the child  |

 **Family support (15)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Parents think that teachers do all the work for the education of their children.  | There is a lack of support from the parents. |
| Parents don’t care about- and don’t know the importance and value of education. | The pupils are not forced to read. At **home is no pressure** to study. |
| The most of the parents are illiterate.  | * Pupils don’t get any teaching from their parents. For us (as teachers) this is very difficult. Students are looking at us as the source.
* Parents don’t care about education. They don’t know the importance and the value of education.
* Parents don’t care about books. They only care about the uniform and food.
* Parents have a low income, so their children have to (do domestic) work for them after school.
* The parents just don’t buy - or the parents can’t afford books to study at home.
 |
| * Parents don’t buy books for their children to study at home.
 | * Children don’t study at home.
 |
| Parents refuse to communicate in English with their children, even if they can. Some parents can’t speak English. | * Children are more used to Krio. They mix Krio with English words.
* Their children practice their speaking in English only at school.
 |

 **Dimension 2: Environment (4**)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| There are too many children in one class.  | * There is not enough space behind the desks; working in class is difficult.
* The teacher cannot monitor all the children, to hear and see if they are working correctly.
 |
| They **cannot practice enough**; only at school, when they have some access to books. | Writing and reading is very difficult for the pupils. |

 **Dimension 3: Content**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| In class 1 and 2 they don’t learn the letters and the alphabet properly. The teachers of class 1 and 2 do not pay too much attention to teaching English. That causes the problem:  | Most of the pupils have problems with reading. The pupils cannot read properly in class 3 – 6. They lack the basic skills.  |

 **Dimension 4: Processes (14)***Quality of teachers (3), methodology (3), language of instruction, management (9)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| The government doesn’t supply enough books, compared to the enrollment of children.  | There are not enough textbooks available in class. 🡪 |
| There are not enough textbooks available in class. 🡪 | * I have to write it all down on the blackboard. That is time consuming
* Not every pupil can read how the words are written, if you have to share a book with five children. 🡪
 |
| The pupils have to share a book with five children. 🡪  | * It is hard to learn the English language properly.
* It is necessary to read, because reading improves learning skills.
 |
| Teachers get a small salary. And the living costs are high. Some teachers have a lot of children to feed. | We need motivation for the teachers; We need motivation by trainings, for better education.  |
| The children have poor vocabulary. They don’t understand all the words.  | They don’t understand the questions.The children make mistakes in the tests. Often the teacher has to come down to their level, to explain in Krio.  |
| Some teachers of this country are not qualified | Then it is very difficult for learners to learn.  |
| We read collectively aloud in class  | The teacher cannot identify those pupils who do not pronounce correctly. |

 **Dimension 5: Outcomes (1)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Parents do not monitor their children to study at home too. They don’t tell their children about the importance of learning.  | Children tend to forget everything. There is a lack of determination.  |

#### Solutions:

**Solutions Language background**

* *The pupils* need to practice a lot:
	+ - At home they need to study, and practice talking English.
		- When they come to school they start building up the skills.
		They need to talk in English as much as possible.

**Solutions family support**

* *The parents...*
	+ Have to encourage their children in studying English at home.
	+ Have to buy books for their children to study at home.
	+ Have to speak English to their children so the children can practice their speaking skills at home too.
* There is an institution for parents: *Adult Literate Program*. So parents can learn how to speak and write English. This is very fruitful.
If parents know how to read and write, they can attribute to the teaching and help their children with their homework.
* *Arrange meetings* with the parents:
	+ Tell the parents about the importance of education in general and education in English.

🡪 They will encourage their children to study.

**Environment**

* The children need to *practice* more. By practicing continuously you become perfect at speaking English.
* We need enough learning materials, from Woord & Daad and CTF.

**Curriculum**

* The school has to start teaching the English language at an early stage, so the pupils can get used to the phonetics.

**Processes**

* *The teacher...*
	+ Has to talk in simple English, so the pupils can understand.
	+ Has to explain the English words properly.
	+ If the pupils don’t understand, use the mother language to explain. After that, come back to English. So the pupils will learn.
	+ Has to correct the mistakes of the children, so they will learn.
	+ Has to be a studier also to motivate the children. This is what we learn at the workshops / teacher trainings. Because we are not perfect at English either.
* *The children* need to practice speaking English more. By practicing continuously you become perfect at speaking English.
* About *the school system*: you need teachers who have enough knowledge of the subject they teach. So that is why the Free Pentecostal Mission School chose to have each teacher teach the subject he knows well.
* *The organisation* should supply enough books. If they have books, they can use them at home, and practice. Even if the parents are illiterate.

**Outcomes**

* Call some parents *to talk* to them personally. And to motivate them we give reports with the results.
* We tell about the importance of education.

### Parents

#### Problems:

**Dimension 1: Learners background**

**Language background**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| * The children are not used to speaking English at home. It is their second language. (2)
* Children cannot practice speaking English enough
 | **Speaking** English is very difficult and strange to them (2) It is difficult to **pronounce** the words. |
| Some children are **stubborn** and / or **playful** | * They don’t study at home.
* They don’t listen to the teacher.
 |

**Family support**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Some children have to work for their parents | They don’t study at home. |
| * I have no money to pay all the books my children need (2)
* I cannot speak English.
 | The children cannot practice at home. |

 **Dimension 2: Environment**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| There are not enough books and materials at school.  | The books and materials have to be shared with more (4 – 6) students. |
| *Physical safety: These aspects are also mentioned in dimension 4: processes* |
| The children in class laugh at each other when they try to speak English  | The children are **ashamed** to speak English (2) |
| The teachers are not always friendly | Sometimes the children fear the teachers.  |
| The children don’t dare to speak in class | Children cannot practice speaking English enough  |
| Some teachers don’t speak English very well. They speak Krio in school.  | The children hear Krio at school to. That doesn’t help the children to speak English.  |

**Dimension 4: Processes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The children in class laugh at each other when they try to speak English  | The children are **ashamed** to speak English (2) |
| The teachers are not always friendly | Sometimes the children fear the teachers.  |
| The children don’t dare to speak in class | Children cannot practice speaking English enough  |
| Some teachers don’t speak English very well. They speak Krio in school.  | The children hear Krio at school to. That doesn’t help the children to speak English.  |

 **Dimension 5: Outcomes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| The children don’t dare to speak in class | Children cannot practice speaking English enough  |

#### Solutions:

**Language background:**

* We (parents) need private teachers, to teach the children English at home more. Because I can’t teach them. I have to ask a relative to come and help them.
* Teach them more English at home. I can find someone to teach them more. I always ask a relative.
* Sometimes the children speak English at home. That is a good way to learn.

**Family support:**

* As for my daughter, I pray for help. I trust in God, He helps me all the time.
* I tell my daughter not to be ashamed, because she needs to practice. And now she is doing better.
* Elder brothers and sisters help them to practice. You see them getting better and better.
* The parents should say to their children: come home, study! Parents have to force them.
* Every pupil should have readers. I can’t afford them but they can use the books of the other sisters and brothers.

**Environment (4)**

* I bought books so they can study at home.
* If they have textbooks, they can practice at home, after school.
* *Some say: parents need to buy books; others say: the school has to supply books.*

**Curriculum**

* They have learnt English since nursery, so they learn step by step.

**Processes** - Methodology:

* At school they have to avoid them speaking the L1.
* The teachers should do *more oral practice*. Now most of the time they teach theory, but the children need to practice a lot. Because they don’t know how to use the words, they need to hear the pronunciation, and to participate.
* The children have to speak English in class.
* The teachers should come down in level. Then the children understand and learn more.

Quality of teachers:

* The teaching in English is very clear at school; my children don’t face any problems.
This (the Goflames Mission P.S.) is a very good school. My children are very happy to go to school.
The headmaster is also very good, he is *strict, controlling, teaching*,
and he respects the **parents**, encourages us and advises us how to deal with the children.
Also the teachers are very busy teaching.

**Outcomes**

* They cannot study and practice at home, but through the classes they learn the English language better.
* The teachers help the children to understand better.
* The school forces them as much as possible, so they will practice.
They try and do their best.

## Secondary school

### Pupils

#### Problems:

**Dimension 1: Learners background**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Speaking English is difficult for us. We are used to Krio.  | * We don’t obey the school rule of speaking English all the time. Most of the time we speak Krio.
* It is difficult to make sentences in English.
* Some students mix English with Krio.
 |
| * Students don’t want to speak English. They just don’t care. (Attitude)
* Students don’t put enough effort into studying English
 | Their English is mixed with Krio. They make a lot of mistakes.  |

 **Dimension 2: Environment**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| There is a lack of books. | Students construct their English in the wrong way.  |

**Dimension 3: Content**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Government schools don’t care much about learning the English language; they don’t stress it at all.  | Students of government schools don’t learn the English language properly.  |
| We are not used to reading and writing in this complicated way. Very often we don’t know the meaning of words.  | * Lexis & structure and writing are very difficult.
* It is difficult if you have to use big words but you don’t know the meaning.
 |
| * There is not enough knowledge of complicated words.
* The speed is too high.
 | They start too early with going deeply in these difficult words, in JSS. After that, you are expected to know them and get on to other topics. That is too soon.  |

 **Dimension 4: Processes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| * English is difficult for us
* English is difficult for the teachers
 | * Some teachers speak Krio in class
* Some teachers don’t speak the English language properly.
 |
| The number of students in one class is too high.  | The teachers cannot monitor all of us properly.  |
| * Teachers are not monitoring us properly
* There is a lack of supervising at the school.
 | * The students don’t obey the rules.
* The majority of the pupils don’t speak English at school, although it is a rule.
* We are not forced to perform well.
 |

*At primary schools:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| At primary school the teachers don’t take enough time to teach the children how to write properly. They are not patient enough.  | The handwriting is a problem. A lot of mistakes are made in tests, because the teacher can’t read what the pupils wrote down.  |
| Primary schools do not emphasize speaking English enough.  | Pupils don’t practice speaking English enough.  |
| Overpopulation at the government primary schools.  | Poor monitoring on speaking English. Pupils don’t practice speaking English enough. |

**Dimension 5: Outcomes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Not all the teachers of the primary school are qualified, not well drilled. | Bad teaching of English. The students’ level of English is very low.  |
| Teachers are responsible for the level of the pupils. They are not well qualified 🡪 the students’ level of English is very low. | If you were poorly educated at primary school, you will have problems with English in JSS and SSS too, because you have a bad foundation. |

#### Solutions:

**Learners’ background**

* Hold on, keep on learning and practicing. Then learning the English language becomes easier.
* Focus on helping the kids knowing the English language better, otherwise they will get a big problem.
* Also, we learned to speak English at home as well. So English became a part of us.

**Environment**

* I attended a private primary school; there you have classes of 15 – 20 students, which is an advantage.

**Processes**

* At the private primary school, they really stressed on speaking English. We always got a *punishment* if we wouldn’t talk English at school. That worked. We experienced the difference between us and students of the government primary schools.
* At this school they flog you 6 times if you speak Krio instead of English.
* As for primary school, I would say: severe punishment, if they don’t speak English at school.
* Solution mentioned for the poor monitoring: We have *security agents* in class. So if they hear you talking Krio, then he/she will tell the teacher and you will be slapped, 6 times.
* For the secondary school I would not punish, because we are adults. Instead, give a topic to debate on during the assembly. Then the pupil will be forced to practice too.
* There has to be more supervising of the schools. Like once a year. Inspect and visit the schools. This should also be done unexpected, so the school cannot pretend to be a good school for one day.
* *Teachers...*
	+ Have to improve their English. Some teachers speak Krio!
	+ Help us if we have difficulties. We can ask them.
	+ If they apply for the job of teacher, there should be high standards for their level.

### Teachers

#### Problems:

**Dimension 1: Learners background**

**Good health and nutrition**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Poverty: some students come to school with an empty belly, and very sleepy. This is a real problem at our schools.  | You can’t teach those kids. |

 **Language background**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| In their homes and community they don’t speak English to them.  | Most of the students can’t practice speaking English at home. There is not an English speaking community around them.  |
| English is compulsory, but it is the *second* or even third *language* of the students. (3) | English is difficult for the students.  |
| *Krio*, the general language of this country, is close to English, but not the same. (2) | * Some students think they are speaking English, not knowing that they speak Krio. The students mix it up.
* The Krio language damages and disturbs the English language. The pronunciation interrupts the English pronunciation. (2)
 |

 **Family support**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| The students have to work for their parents. Like selling, or domestic work.  | The students have no time to read and do their homework |
| The *mentality of the kids*. They don’t see the importance of learning English enough. Only when they fail the exams at the end of their school career, they see how important English is, but then it is too late. | Then they cannot go to the university because their level of English is too low. There are so many of them who experience this. |

 **Dimension 2: Environment**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| At the schools (both primary and secondary schools) is a *lack of reading materials*.  | So they cannot practice enough. |
| The students don’t have enough money to buy textbooks. | The acquisition of *materials* by the pupils.  |
| There are *not enough materials*. I my next class I have 10 textbooks in a class of 60 pupils!  | Without materials a teacher is not able to teach (2). The work process becomes hard. The only remedy is that they share their books with friends. |
| There is a lack of books and materials. | * Now there are a lot of failures because there is no background for them to rely on, like a book.
* It all depends on the teacher;
* They can’t do any research for example
 |
| Overcrowded classes | * As a teacher, you cannot control and help every child in a class of 100 students.
* You cannot check all of them.
 |
| When they have to speak in class, students think they will be wrong and make mistakes, so their companions will laugh at them. | Some pupils are ashamed of speaking English. They don’t want to speak in class.  |

**Dimension 3: Content (3)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| English is the official language at school. But the *local languages* are also in the curriculum.  | The local languages *disturb the English learning comprehension* and the speaking, the pronunciation. |

 **Dimension 4: Processes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| * The primary schools where our students come from, do not teach the English language basic skills effectively.
* Their teachers at primary school were not qualified. (4)
 |  The *foundation,* with which the students enter this school, is very weak. The students at our school miss the main foundation, like the basic spelling and grammar use (4).  |
| The students at our school miss the main foundation, like the basic spelling and grammar use.  | The teachers of the secondary school need extra time to instruct them. |
| Teachers are not well paid.  | It is hard to get English speaking teachers. |
| The teachers at primary schools are not always qualified.  | They don’t teach the student the right things in the right way.  |

 **Dimension 5: Outcomes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| The teachers at primary school are not always qualified.  | They teach their children the wrong spelling, and that remains in the heads of the kids. It is very difficult to change that.  |
| The children always believe their teacher. * The position of the teacher: the teacher is always correct.
 | The wrong things remain in the heads of the kids. It is very difficult to change that. |
| The outcomes concerning the capability of the English languages are too low.  | You can see it for example at the university. 300 students started, from that group just 17 finished. Because the level (of English) was too high for the others. |

#### Solutions:

**Language background:**

* To support the children without a good foundation in the English language, we have the *L&DS*: Literature and Debating Society. They help the pupils to improve the pronunciation skills and the presentation in English.

**Family support:**

* *Parents* have a role to play. They should guide their children to go and study. They should complement the effort of teaching in the schools. Most of them think that the teacher does everything, they don’t care.

**Environment**

* Pupils should be exposed to English language reading *materials*.
* *The government* is one of the key players. They should take their responsibility; they should ensure that the materials are available, by *supplying* exercise *books* and textbooks! (2)

**Quality content**

* For the *primary school:* they can use Krio to explain, up till grade 3. But from grade 4 till 6 they should *speak English*. Just use simple words, so they can understand.
* The *local languages* are important, they are part of us.
But they *should be removed from the curriculum*: stop teaching the L1 at secondary school!
To focus on – and improve the English language skills like reading, writing, speaking. (3)
* Then, they can *add* the local languages to the curriculum of the *primary school*. Just teach them the simple basics of those languages.
Then, when they come to secondary school, they can focus deeply on the English language, without confusion because of the other language subjects they get otherwise.

**Processes**

* *Primary schools...*
	+ Should encourage speaking English, at school and at home. (3)
	Then the teacher can softly correct them, so they won’t feel ashamed.
	+ Should have only trained and qualified teachers.
	+ Should use the theme - teaching method. That means: You only teach the subject(s) you control. Then you get more quality lessons.
	+ The principals have to make sure that they get the right persons for teaching: persons who are qualified and have enough knowledge and skills to teach the pupils the right contents in the right way.
* *The government...*
	+ Has to change the salary of the teachers, so they won’t leave their job and there will be more correct English speaking teachers in the schools.
* *The teachers...*
	+ Should use simple and clear English in class.
	+ Have to get the students interested with the lessons, not bored. By involving the students in the lessons, asking questions, and so on.
	They should sensitize everybody of the importance of speaking English.

**Outcomes**

* The child should be trained at a higher level of speaking English. They have to get used to *speaking English, at least as long as they wear their school uniform.*

### Parents

#### Problems:

**Dimension 1: Learners background***Background and conditions of the pupils*

**Language background**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| There are a lot of languages in the country. The mother tongue is different from the official language.  | Krio and the other languages interfere with the English language.  |
| English is a new language for the children who attend school for the first time.  | * English is quite **difficult** for the children.
* And for most of them, since it is enforced, the process creates **fear** in them.
* Some of them are even afraid of speaking the English language.
 |
| English is a new language.  | * Before they start writing, they should know a lot of English language **vocabulary.** So the process of word building is very challenging; the process of building the vocabulary, that is very difficult.
* Another challenge, after they have acquired some vocabulary, to understand **the rules of grammar** also takes time. Organizing their thoughts and then expressing themselves in English, following this conventional English grammar. That takes time for students to cope with.
 |
| The **children themselves.** They are not as fond of reading as in our days. Now during these days there are TVs, radios, movies, things like that. We usually read books, stories, novels, but these days this is all they like to do in their leisure time. They don’t read English books.  | It is very difficult for them to develop their skills. |

 **Family support**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Children come from homes where they cannot speak English.  | The children don’t get help and support from their homes. (3) |
| Parents don’t buy books for their children.  | Now it is more difficult to develop their English writing and speaking capabilities.  |
| A lot of children have to sell after school, for their parents.  | They don’t study.  |
| Parents don’t encourage good behavior of their children in class | Some students don’t pay attention to the teacher and get bad marks.  |

 **Dimension 3: Content**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Most of the time they write more than they read.  | Children don’t read enough.  |

 **Dimension 4: Processes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| In the **primary schools** the teaching in English is not sufficient. They have *limited time* and teaching the English language means that the children should be given adequate time to read and write. | The children cannot practice enough.  |
| In the village schools the teaching is done in the mother tongue.  | Then the children don’t learn to express themselves in English.  |

 **Dimension 5: Outcomes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cause** | **Problem** |
| Developing the vocabulary and learning the rules of grammar; these are the main challenges.  | There are students who will go through school without being able to speak, without being able to construct 2 / 3 sentences of clearly expressed English. |

#### Solutions:

**Learners’ background**

* Let the children study at home, instead of selling the whole day. Or after selling make sure that they study. (2)
* First my daughter didn’t pay attention in class and got bad marks. But now she pays attention and she is doing very well.
* **Adult literality** should be one of the solutions. Because when the adults are educated, then it means well for the children. Then they can help / support their children better.
* Try to change the **mind – set of the children.** Reduce the time they spend on watching TV and encourage them to read books at home.
Teachers as well as parents have to be involved. And the attitude of the pupils themselves has to change. That they know that they have to speak good English, write well, and develop a culture of reading.
* Together, with older brothers and sisters, they **practice at home**! Then they sit around the table, telling each other that they have to speak English.

**Quality content**

* Encourage the teachers to give their students more *reading assignments*. That contributes to the culture of reading.
* The children should be given adequate *time to read and write.* More at school and more at home. Let them read more at school, instead of focussing on writing. That has to be corrected.

**Processes**

* Sometimes my child doesn’t know the **English words**, but then he asks the teacher. Then the teacher will help him. And every time he becomes better.
* The children should ask the **teacher** if they don’t know. Then they will learn.
* The children have to pay attention in class.
* What they should do at schools: say that they have to speak English because they need to practice. Then they will do fine.

**Outcomes**

* If you want to go to university but don’t have credit on English, you won’t be allowed.
So encourage them to speak English.

# 5. Conclusions and discussion

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, this chapter first answers the secondary questions, and secondly the research question: ‘*What problems do the pupils face at primary schools in Sierra Leone where English is the language of instruction, but not the pupils’ native language? And how can these problems be solved?’*  The references refer to the theoretical framework, chapter two. Further, this chapter will provide a critical review of the study.

### The problems experienced at primary school

The primary school pupils experience different problems. When looking at these problems, it is good to divide the pupils into two groups: those who come from poor families (they don’t get any support in encouragement or in acquisition of materials); and those who come from rich families (the minority). This group speaks English at home to practice; their parents support them very well and ensure that they will study. The first group mentioned many difficulties they face in learning English. All the areas of learning a language are mentioned: speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary. For them it is very difficult to learn the English language properly. This also became clear from the way the interview went by: they experienced problems in understanding me and in expressing themselves. The second group does not experience difficulties learning the English language. But they do notice specific important problems at school. All together, we come to a full narrative of the problems experienced by primary school pupils.

At first, learning the English language causes difficulties because it is a **strange language** for them. The pupils are not used to this language. Secondly, it is obvious that a lot of pupils do **not study** at home. A lot of parents namely, want their children to sell in the street after school or they keep their children from school for this purpose. Or the parents don’t force their children to study at home, so they play football instead of studying. This all causes the problem that a lot of students don’t know how to read, spell and write. Also, there are several problems the pupils experience at school. When there is poor monitoring in the classroom, it causes **misbehavior**. As a result, the pupils cannot listen well to- and profit from the teachers’ instruction. Besides, it has become clear that in many schools the atmosphere in the classes is not safe, because some teachers flog the pupils. So the pupils fear the teachers, and they don’t dare to ask the teacher questions. What also deals about the class atmosphere is the pupils’ behavior towards each other. Pupils laugh at each other’s mistakes in speaking English. These fears cause hesitation in speaking English among the pupils, and as a result, the children do not practice in speaking as much as possible and necessary.

The primary school teachers also do experience a lot of problems. They experience the negative effects the home situations can have on teaching, and they are challenged to teach with limited resources. According to them, there is a great task for the parents. But they also regard this partly as the task (or calling) for a Christian school, to influence the parents in such a way that the parents see and fulfill their task, concerning the way they raise their children.

The first problem always mentioned, is the fact of English being a strange language for the pupils. This makes it difficult for the children to learn and understand English. After that, the poor homes are an important aspect of the problems. Some children do not get enough food before they go to school. This causes a lack of concentration in class. And there is no money to buy the books their children need to study at home. Also the parents ‘background plays a significant role. Most parents did not receive any education, so they are illiterate. This illiteracy causes the lack of support children need to finish schooling successfully: the parents don’t know the importance of education, so they want their children to sell or do domestic work, instead of encouraging their children to study. And they cannot assist their children when they have questions about their homework. The next aspect is the parents’ attitude towards education. Some parents don’t care about education for their children. Of course this is also related to the poverty, which can force people to replace their priorities. The teachers also conclude problems concerning their colleagues. Some say that the class 1 and 2 teachers don’t teach the basic skills properly. Their colleagues experience the high arrears the pupils get when they go to the higher classes. However, the class 1 and 2 teachers themselves also mention the problems they have to face: overcrowded classes, what makes it very hard to control and correct every child in reading or pronunciation for example. This brings us to the next aspect that contributes to the problems: the school environment. The school does not have enough money to supply one book for every child. So when a reading lesson is on the program, there is just one book for an average of 5 pupils. Consequently, it is impossible for at least 2 out of 5 kids to read along. They will have no profit from this lesson. There are also subjects for which the teacher is the only one possessing the book required. So he has to write the content on the blackboard. This is very time consuming, and reduces the learning time. Furthermore, the teachers mention aspects of the job as a teacher, what makes the whole situation heavier to perform well as a teacher. A teacher’s salary is not sufficient to cover the basic needs, and besides insecure. In that way it is difficult for teachers to remain motivated to perform well. Furthermore, some teachers are not qualified. They teach the pupils in a wrong way, and they teach wrong things. Due to these problems, which nearly all find their origin in a lack of money, the pupils’ progress in learning develops very slowly.

The parents with children at primary school see the problems caused by poverty; comparable to what the teachers have mentioned. They say English is difficult to learn, because their children are brought up with another language, or more other languages. Apart from that, a lot of parents don’t monitor and encourage their children to study. They want them to sell or to do domestic work. And even if they encourage their children to study, many parents are not able to assist their children with their homework. And very often they have no money to pay the books, so the children cannot study at home. Another aspect the parents mention is the attitude of the children. A lot of children are stubborn and playful, and don’t want to study at home, or to pay attention to the teacher. Furthermore, the parents hear from their children that also the school itself doesn’t have enough books and other materials available in the classroom. The next point they discovered, is that the teachers are not always friendly to the pupils. This creates fear; the children are afraid and don’t dare to speak in class. And some parents who are able to speak English notice that not all the teachers can speak English properly.

Solutions are mentioned by every respondent group: pupils, teachers and parents. A schematic overview is given in annex 3.

The problem that every respondent group mentioned is English being a strange language. The solution they mentioned is practice. The pupils need to practice the English language more: both at school and at home.

Concerning the material – problem, every group notices the need of books; books to study at home and enough books at school; according to the enrollment. In this way the pupils will be able to read the text in class. For the question where the money has to come from they all refer to the organization (EFSL, CTF or Woord & Daad), or (mostly) the government. They have to make sure the conditions for learning and teaching are there.
Very often the solution given was addressed to a certain group. That’s why I split the solutions up in the groups that have to change something.

First of all the pupils need to study well. They have to pay attention in class and try hard to study at home as well. But they do need assistance with their homework. This is addressed to the parents. What all parents can definitely do to this problem is encouraging their children to go to school, and to study at home. Therefore it is necessary that the parents know the importance of education. Also, it is very important for the children to know someone who can help them with their homework. So it is recommendable for the parent who are illiterate, to learn how to read and write. And parents who know the English language need to speak English with their children regularly, so their children can practice, what will prevent them from getting high arrears. The school also has a significant role to play to attain this change of attitude among the parents. The school can support this by arranging meetings with the parents. In that way they can tell them about the importance and value of their children, and about the importance of education. Education is necessary for their children to reach something, and to step out of poverty. What the school can also do is make sure that all the teachers are qualified and capable to teach in the right way; concerning the didactics and pedagogy. Teachers are noticed as the most important actors in quality education. (VSO, 2002) That is why a great part of the solutions deal about the teachers. It is important that the teachers are very clear in their instruction, and very patient in teaching. They have to explain everything step by step. Furthermore, it is very important that the teachers are strict in controlling their pupils. Yet, they may not punish the pupils corporally. That causes too much fear. It is also mentioned as important to implement more time to practice speaking the English language in the lessons. This can help the pupils to pronounce correctly and to overcome their fears to speak in class; by continuous practicing. When the pupils come to school for the first time, they cannot understand everything in English. Therefore it is important to use the mother tongue effectively. Start with the mother tongue, and make them get used to English, by learning words and sentences. In the higher classes English can become the language of instruction. In order to stay motivated as a teacher, it is good to study continuously, just like your pupils do. Be a learner yourself, so you can learn along with your pupils.

Differences in the responses given by the pupils, teachers and parentsPupils stress the responsibility of the pupils more. They mention that pupils have to behave well at school, so they can listen to the teacher and learn well. Teachers and parents are more inclined to point to the responsibility of the parents in this case.

Students see the kind of punishment also as a problem. Parents notice some fear towards the teacher in their children, because of the way teachers can punish the children. Striking is that students don’t mention the lack of textbooks in the classes. They might be used to share their books with others. However, they do mention the need of books to study at home. It is also remarkable to determine that the teachers don’t mention any solution about teaching after class, carried out by another person than the parents. Just as many other solutions are available. That doesn’t mean they would not agree with these kinds of solutions, but they are more inclined to point to other aspects in these cases; like the lack of teaching materials and the role of the parents.

### Problems faced at primary school from the perspective of secondary school

The secondary school pupils have a clear view on the problems in primary school, concerning learning the English language. This view is based on what they remind from their own primary school career, on what they experience now, during their secondary school training, and, if the problems don’t affect themselves directly, on what they see around them.

A lot of the pupils interviewed, mention that government schools don’t care much about learning and speaking the English language. They don’t stress the importance of it. The negative effect is noticeable at secondary school: pupils refuse to speak English at school, because they are not able and not used to it. What is also mentioned at this point is that not all primary school teachers are qualified. That is why the pupils’ level remains very low. This causes a lot of problems when they enter secondary school, because the foundation is lacking. And the teachers are not patient enough to teach the pupils the basic things, like handwriting. Because of bad handwriting, the scores of the public tests are lower than they should be. Another issue that has to do with low outcomes of education is the overcrowded classes. There are too many children in one class, at primary government schools. That is why the teachers cannot monitor them all and they will not learn very well.

The secondary school teachers **experience** the results of shortcomings of a lot of primary schools. In most cases the problems only grow bigger at secondary school, when they lack the foundation. The pupils need more basic skills to complete secondary education successfully.

The problem starts with the mother tongue of the pupils. English is strange to them; they are used to Kriol and tribal languages. And there is the big problem: Krio is close to English, so the pupils tend to mix English with Krio. Secondly, the teachers experience the effects of poverty at school. The pupils don’t get enough to eat, which causes a lack of concentration at school. And in order to be able to pay the school fees, many pupils have to work after school. They have to do things like selling for example, instead of studying. Another aspect mentioned also finds its origin in the environment. The pupils lack an English speaking community around them, which can give them opportunities to practice the language in meaningful situations. They have to learn the English language, but a lot of the pupils only hear this language at school. Also the attitude of the pupils can contribute to the problems. Because of the lack of motivation, they don’t want to study. This especially causes problems when they want to be admitted to university. And because the pupils are not used to speaking English in class from primary school, they don’t dare to do it now either. And when they don’t speak, the teacher cannot correct them, and the pupils cannot make progress in speaking. The lack of basic skills in English can be brought back to the primary school teachers. They are not always qualified enough, and teach their pupils wrong things, which once in their minds, are hard to change. But not only the teachers are blamed for this fact, also the school environment impedes the progress of learning. There is a lack of reading materials. In this way teaching becomes very difficult for teachers, being the pupils’ only source of knowledge. There are more factors that make teaching a hard job. Because of the large enrollment, government primary schools have to deal with overcrowded classes. This results in poor monitoring (thus bad behavior) and the teacher cannot check and correct everyone’s homework. The problem concerning the level and teachers’ performances is also explainable when we take the government’s role into account. The government namely, doesn’t pay teachers well, so teachers, who are good at their subject, leave the schools in order to find a better paid job. In this way, the schools loose the persons they need the most to educate their pupils.

The parents also see different problems concerning learning the English language. Though a lot of them said there are no problems, also when I asked them to look back to their children’s primary school career. Often they told me that the primary school was not good at teaching English, but that the learning process progressed at secondary school. The other parents most of the time don’t have any idea of their children’s learning process. This fact itself displays a problem too. A problem that teachers mention, but also what other, involved parents notice.

The parents also mention the fact of English being a strange language to learn, and therefore difficult for their children. Especially vocabulary and grammar is experienced as being very difficult. Therefore, their children are afraid to speak English, because of its difficulties. And some pupils are not just afraid, but also reluctant to study English in their leisure time. In that way you will never learn the English language. The parents also notice the importance of their role as a parent in the learning process of their children. There are parents who do not buy books for their children, and who don’t support their children to study at home and to behave well at school. The parents also have some ideas about the teaching. They notice that there is few time to read in class. Pupils need more time to practice. And some schools give instructions in the mother tongue, so those pupils cannot learn the English language properly.

#### Solutions

When asking about solutions for these problems, it has become clear that here is a task for every respondent group, and for the government.

The task for the pupils is to keep on learning English and practice in speaking as much as possible. They have to speak English at least at school. And in class they need to pay attention.

At school, the teachers have to stress the importance of speaking English. They can carry out this conviction by controlling their pupils on speaking English at school. If the teachers notice their pupils are not speaking English at school, they need to punish them. And, to maintain the role of being an example for the pupils, the teachers have to speak clear and adequate English in class themselves too. They also need to help students in class if there is something they don’t understand. Stimulating a reading culture is also regarded as a task for teachers. They can encourage reading among the students by implementing more time for reading and school, and by giving more reading assignments to do at home. As all the respondent groups do mention, it is the parents’ role to encourage their children to study at home and to pay attention at school. Besides, if they are able to, it is important that parents regularly communicate in English with their children, so the children get more opportunities to practice. Furthermore, the schools can improve their education, by ensuring to have only well qualified teachers. One advice addressed to schools was to admit only well qualified applicants for the job of teacher. In this way they can be surer that pupils learn the right things in the right way. It also has to be part of the school system that speaking English is stressed. Another advice to schools was to make use of subject teaching. That means that in class 1 – 3 the mother tongue is used for instruction, and that all subjects are taught by one teacher. In class 4 – 6 the teachers have to speak clear English, and expect the same from their pupils. Then they use the mother tongue only for clarification. The subjects in these classes are taught by different teachers. Each teacher is specialized in one or some subjects. In this way the teacher has the opportunity to become excellent in his subject, what improves the quality education.

For the lack of materials, most respondents refer to the role of the government. They have to supply books according to the enrollment of the children, and they have to pay teachers a better salary, in order to get more qualified teachers and more quality education.

#### Differences in the responses given by the pupils, teachers and parents

Some differences are to be mentioned in the given problems and solutions, targeting English as language of instruction. Parents mention it as a role for parents to encourage their children to study and to behave well at school. This is an interesting point, because all the other respondents regard the monitoring in class as a task for the school and the teachers. The role of motivating is for both parents and teachers and of course the pupils themselves. They all need to be aware of the importance of speaking English and studying at home. Another interesting point mentioned, is being strict in the admission of applicants for the job as a teacher. In this way also the teachers’ status can improve. And from the side of teachers with experience with subject – teaching, a solution in subject teaching is given. These are interesting points to examine.

## Conclusion

After showing the problems and solutions divided in the views of the different respondent groups, the main question, ‘*What problems do pupils face at primary schools in Sierra Leone where English is the language of instruction, but not the pupils’ native language; and how can these problems be solved?’* will be answered in this paragraph.

The problems that primary school pupils face concerning the English language are in short:

* Language diversity: at school pupils have to learn a language that is strange to them.
* Limited resources: pupils cannot practice enough at school and at home.
* Teacher education: not all teachers are qualified enough to teach.

These problems impede the progress in learning. Putting all the responses together, this paragraph describes a complete narrative about the problems and solutions mentioned.

Like every respondent group did mention, pupils at primary schools have to get used to **English**, a language that is not their own. English is the official language of the country, and when pupils enter secondary school, and later maybe even university, all subjects are taught in English. Apart from that, English is the international language of communication. One parent regarded controlling the English language even as the way to a better future for himself: *‘without English you are zero, not important. But with English, you can even go to other countries, and get a great job. Then my children can take care of me when I am old, and send money to me, I will enjoy’. (Grafton, 28 – 11- 2011).* This quote shows the high position the English language has for many people. Still, English is the second or third language the pupils have to learn. **Krio** is the language that is spoken by 97% of Sierra Leone’s population (Wikipedia.org). The vocabulary of this language is derived from English, but its structures are influenced by a lot of other languages. Because of the similarities with English, people often mix English with Krio. Solutions mentioned concerning this problem, recommended stimulating an English speaking habit, also in the families, but this is very hard to change, as long as Sierra Leone is a country with over 23 living languages.

Adding to this factor of lacking an English speaking community, **parents** are mostly not familiar with the English language at all. A lot of them are illiterate, so they cannot practice speaking English with their children, and they cannot help their children when they face difficulties with their homework. That causes a lot of problems too. First of all, illiterate people cannot get a well – paid job, so this often causes **poverty**. They earn some money by selling products in the street for example. Often the incomes are not sufficient to pay basic needs like food, so children come to school with empty bellies. Teachers notice that for these pupils it is hard to concentrate in class. And obviously, these parents cannot afford to buy books for their children to study at home. What also affects the learning process is **absence** from school**.** Parents want their children to sell or to beg in the streets, or to do domestic work at home. This shows that some parents do not value education highly. Poverty can force people to replace their priorities. This makes them totally focused on short term needs. Still, what parents despite poverty and illiteracy can do, is encourage their children to study, and to pay attention in class. Therefore it is necessary that the parents are aware of the importance of education. This is about changing the parents’ mindset, and that is difficult, but somehow possible. The school can play a significant role in it.

Another fairly stable factor in the problem is the role of the **government.** All the schools mention that the government fails to supply enough **learning materials** like books and readers. Both schools and parents can’t afford to buy all the books needed for the different subjects. Dealing with a lack of books is very difficult. For the pupils it can be very difficult to read the text along, having to share it with 3 other pupils sitting next to you. And sometimes the teacher is the only one who has the book with the knowledge the pupils need to know. A grade 6 teacher from Goflames Mission primary school linked the teaching materials and **teaching time**: *‘I have to write it all down on the blackboard, and that is very time consuming’ (Grafton, 13 – 12 – 2011)*. Also the principal notices a clear relation between the materials available and the learning time. In his explanation the contrast between reality and ideal becomes very clear: ‘*With enough learning materials, the children would learn a lot. In a good environment, every child benefits from the teaching time. Then there would also be a possibility to study the textbooks in leisure time. I would not give the books home, but we could raise a school library, so the children can study after school. Then we also have to review our timetable, because then the materials can be properly used. We would extend the lessons, to enable more child centred learning (Grafton, 13 – 12 – 2011).* Besides the government, also a teachers’ union is blamed to be the cause of the lack of books. This union presents itself as a gathering that tries to press the government to deliver books to schools. But from the books they get, they give some to schools and the rest they keep and sell in shops in the street. So this is a corruption problem that should be tackled.
 What also increases the difficulties in teaching is the lack of **space in the classrooms**. It is not easy for pupils to work in class when you have to share one desk with two other pupils. And at Free Pentecostal primary school, the groups observed had to share their classroom with another group. They put a thin bamboo wall between two classes, so you hear all the noise of the other group, which is very disturbing for both teachers and listeners.
 Another consequence of the high pupil – teacher ratio, is **poor monitoring** in classrooms. Especially pupils and parents notice misbehaviour in classrooms. Teachers mention that it is hard to control every pupil’s work. This disables the teacher to give his pupils the assistance they need. Adding, because of the large number of pupils, teachers cannot control whether every pupil is obeying the school rule of speaking English at school, what makes pupils practice less.
 Aside from the problems concerning the work conditions, a teachers’ **salary i**s very small and insecure. This contributes to the problem of qualified teachers. In this way it becomes unattractive for educated people to start teaching. Yet, these are the people the schools need. Research (Bisschop, 2011) also shows the negative influence insufficient payment has on the teachers’ motivation. And when teachers are not motivated, the quality of education will descend.

Furthermore, there is a lack of teacher **training courses and** a lack of **inspection** at schools. This deals about the teacher himself. There are many **unqualified teachers** in the country, and the government fails to offer regular training courses to teachers. This is strange, as teachers are noticed as the most important actors in quality education in the report of the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO 2002). Regarding the problems mentioned concerning the teachers, training courses are really necessary, improving knowledge as well as didactic- and pedagogical skills.
 First of all, a lot of teachers don’t **control** the English language themselves, so they are not the right example for the pupils. But still they do teach their pupils these wrong examples. This is a problem because pupils believe everything their teacher says, so it is hard to change what they once learned. And when the basic skills are not taught properly, pupils get arrears in higher classes.
 Secondly, a problem that derives directly from the teachers’ behavior is the class **atmosphere**. A lot of teachers punish or correct their pupils by flogging them, or other corporal punishments. This creates **fear** in the pupils. Also when they make mistakes, they are treated badly. Dauda Sankoh, now SSS pupil, illustrated this: ‘*when I made a mistake, he was shouting at me, and that was so humiliating. I was afraid to speak.’ (Freetown, 9 – 01 – 2012)* As a result, pupils don’t dare to speak in class, or to ask questions. This impedes progress in learning. The teacher’s attitude towards failing pupils, also affects the behaviour of other pupils in class towards each other. Pupils laugh at each other’s mistakes in speaking English. These fears cause hesitation in speaking English among the pupils, and as a result, the children **do not practice** in speaking as much as possible and necessary.

Teachers are willing to professionalize and to improve their teaching, but they hardly get any opportunity. The Unicef report (2000) regards training courses for teachers as a part of quality education: *‘ongoing training for teachers can have a direct impact on student achievement’.* Woord & Daad offers workshops and courses, but these are only accessible to a limited group of teachers, once a year. This is regretful, because trainings can **motivate** teachers. Like class 3 teacher Abdul Kamara said: ‘*We need motivation for teachers, because we get a small salary. We need motivation by trainings, for better education’ (Grafton, 28 – 11 – 2011).* And when the lack of motivation leads to bad results, nothing will be done against it, because there is no inspection.
 Appointing **an inspector** is mentioned as one of the solutions towards improving education. This may force teachers to do the best they can. This is also necessary, because some teachers are not qualified. This fact also affects the quality of education. And by trainings, they can become better at teaching, get teaching skills and learn teaching methods, and might even get their teachers’ degree.

These are mentioned causes for problems concerning learning the English language. And most of them are stable problems; situations that are not easily changed, so everybody has to deal with it. Still, there are solutions mentioned that also concern these coordinating problems. There are changeable factors that can improve the situation; on the way to quality education.

The solutions that are mentioned for these problems, are in short:

* Pupils have to study and practice as much as possible; at home and at school.
* Teachers have to be qualified
* Parents have to encourage their children to study.
* The government has to supply teaching materials

The list of solutions starts with the **responsibility of the students** themselves. They are responsible for their own learning process; they have to develop a right learning attitude: at school and at home. But, the attitude towards education and learning of a child, is highly influenced by the **parents** and the family. When they express their conviction of the high value of education towards their kids, their children will be more motivated. Because they are aware of education being of great importance for their future.
 Still, in a lot of families this **awareness** is not there yet. They first want their short term needs to be fulfilled. This is imaginable, especially when it concerns basic needs like food. But this short – term view can make parents keeping their children from school, to sell in the streets for example. In this way their children will not be able to learn well. The **long term effect** of this way of acting by the parents, is that their child cannot finish the school career successfully and therefore will not be able to find a good job. Then the negative spiral of poverty is there. So it is necessary to make parents aware that education will change the future of their children in a positive way. This will stimulate the parents to encourage their children to go to school and study. What illiterate parents can do in order to support their children’s school career, is to arrange someone like a relative, or a friend, who can assist their children with their homework. This person will also be able to communicate in English with them, so they can practice in a safe situation. A lot of pupils mentioned this kind of home – schooling to be very useful for them. It can give them confidence in speaking English. This can help the children a lot, and may prevent arrears.

Schools can contribute to achieve this aim. Because *‘only when you target a total school community, then school initiatives concerning the improvement of education outcomes, will have dividend’ (Pastor Dyke, principal of Goflames Mission in Grafton, 13 – 12 – 11)****.* Parent involvement** has positive effects on learning attitudes and therefore also on learning outcomes: when parents know what is going on at school, they will encourage their children to study. One parent’s quote makes clear what the effects are when parents are aware of the processes in school: ‘*I have a daughter in class 6, she is a bit shy to speak English. But I tell her not to be ashamed, because she needs to practice. And now she is doing better. I also bought books so she can study at home.’ (Grafton, 28 – 11- 2011).* So improving parent involvement is one of the initiatives a school can start towards a learning community. Another positive initiative to change the parents’ attitude towards education, is arranging **meetings** with the parents at school. Then the teachers can tell parents about the importance and value of education for the future of their kids. If parents will start to realize this, they will see that education has priority, and they will encourage their children to study. That this initiative has its effects, becomes clear through many interviews, like that with Rebecca (Freetown, 28 – 11 – 2011) ‘*It is very important for me that my children learn English. Through English you can learn how to read and write. And in the future they can get a good job. English gives them access to the world.’*

There are many solutions that have to do with the policy of schools. Of great importance is the time **they start teaching English.** Children have to get used to the phonetics, so it is necessary that structural teaching of English starts in the first class. This is part of the foundation pupils need, and it is an important way to help prevent problems in class 1. Because the children are not able to do everything in English in **the first years** of their school career, they gradually have to get used to it. So in these first years the mother tongue is still of great importance in order to ensure the pupils understand the instruction. But from class 4 teachers should speak simple English all the time. Of course the pupils can ask the teacher for explanation in mother tongue when something was unclear. Provided, of course, that there is a safe climate in the classroom. Because if children fear their teacher, they will not dare to ask, which can cause learning problems. An **abolishment for corporal punishment** can contribute to a safe atmosphere in class. Corporal punishment is kind of settled in the African culture, but it is observed to be possible to create a school where corporal punishment is not practiced anymore. There is a perceptible difference between this school and schools where it is still practiced. So schools should rather talk to the pupil who misbehaves and give him a task to do, for punishment. To create an English speaking community in school, it is important that teachers really stress on **speaking English**, at least at school. If this will be successful, then it becomes a habit, the pupils will get used to it. This can be reached by encouraging and supporting those who try to speak English. Like JSS – teacher Christiana M. Koroma said: *‘They should not be ashamed but speak, so that the teacher can correct them. Encourage them, softly, so they won’t feel ashamed’ (Grafton, 22 – 11 – 2011).* In this way, by rewarding the efforts, instead of just the results, pupils will feel safe to practice and become better at speaking English.

What also influences the level of English of all pupils, is the lack of a **reading community**. Teachers can stimulate a reading community in different ways. Firstly, they can implement more time for **reading at school**, because at home the students have less possibilities. A **school library** would also give pupils more opportunities to read. Besides, the way in which time for reading is used, is also important: not only by reading collectively aloud, but also in groups and individually. The second thing teachers can do, is giving **reading assignments** to do at home. So they will get used to reading, also at home. This again, since we have seen the importance of targeting the whole school community, will contribute to a reading community. But, while reading this, the question for materials like textbooks, will rise.

One of the most serious problems in the daily school practice, is the **lack of books and materials**. The only solutions mentioned for that, are referring to the government and to organizations.

A clear plan and way to solve these problems regarding the lack of materials, is written down in the proposal *‘Read your world!’, increased literacy rates among primary grade children in Sierra Leone, through (1) distribution of materials, (2) improvement of teaching skills and (3) social mobilization.* Written by Woord & Daad, in cooperation with the teacher training organization Driestar Educatief, and the partner organizations EFSL and CTF. When executed, this plan will be very successful. But regarding the situation right now (without sufficient materials) it is also possible to mention a solution. This will be described in the discussion paragraph.

It may be clear that **the government** should come into action for the education (and therefore the future) of this country. The schools hope that the government will send enough **materials** one day. But they have hoped for so long already. It is necessary that there is more monitoring in this process of demanding and delivering materials. Because in this way of delivering books, a lot of things are going wrong because of corruption, like described above. The government also has to save more money to pay a better **salary** to the teachers. Because otherwise people who are good at English will move from schools to find a better job. But these qualified people are needed in schools; to educate the people of the future in the right way. To guarantee the quality of education, the government should implement regular **inspection.** This will force schools to perform better all the time. At this point, it is also necessary for teachers to sit a **test** regularlyto see to what extent they control the English language. **Continuous improvement** is important for quality education. And as English is the base of all education, this aspect of the teachers’ level should not be forgotten.
 These aspects, demanding the government to take their responsibilities at these areas, are not easy to attain. But organizations like EFSL and CTF, with their advocacy activities, can lobby with the government to take their responsibilities at these areas. So cooperation with the government (Bisschop, 2010), and a thorough research in the processes concerning the delivery of books will be necessary on this point. For in this way the country will improve education and therefore its future.

## Discussion of findings

In the previous paragraph the main question is answered. In this paragraph the findings, possibilities and feasibilities will be discussed. This will be executed with the aid of the five dimensions for quality education, just as those in which the results were displayed.

Concerning the **learners and family support**, it has become clear that this aspect is very hard to change, because it is a negative spiral that, once in, is hard to step out. One of the biggest limitations will remain the fact of English being strange for pupils and parents. Sierra Leone is an African country with its various tribes and languages, and will never be like America, or Great Brittan. This is not desirable either, but there is a need to find a way to cope with this kind of limitation. And there is not only a need, but also a possibility to cope with these difficulties. While writing this thesis, I found a lot of research about mother tongue education, also called MTE. It would be interesting to examine how MTE takes place in Sierra Leone, and how a gradual structure could be set up concerning teaching (in) the English language. Unfortunately, this was not sufficiently analyzed in this research and therefore could be an area for further research.

Observations and conversations with pupils, teachers and parents, made clear that the Goflames Mission primary school is a school with a **safe environment** for its pupils. Pupils know they can trust their teacher, and there is a pleasant atmosphere. On the contrary, at many other schools pupils are afraid of their teachers. This comparison raised the question where the difference came from. Through the conversations with respondents from different schools it became clear that the positive atmosphere experienced at Goflames Mission was mainly reached by *abolishing corporal punishment.* Instead, when a pupil misbehaves, Goflames Mission teachers will talk with him, and give him a task to do. This measure appears to be very effective. This example shows that, though corporal punishment is usual in the African culture, it is possible for teachers and a school community to do it in another way then they are used to. Adding, it appears to be very fruitful for the school to change its attitude towards specific habits, as the pupils no longer fear the teacher, but trust him. This is one of the conditions for learning, and therefore a step forward on the way to quality education. From this it can be concluded that this concept will likely be applicable at other schools in Sierra Leone as well.

The materials available also determine the **contents** of a lesson in a certain way. There is a huge shortage of materials, which impedes the progress in learning, and child – centered teaching. The number of textbooks that a school receives, is not according to the enrollment. Instead, they for example get 20 books for a group of 60 pupils. This makes it hard to do effective reading lessons because the pupils have to share the books. Still, it must be possible to find a way to use the books, though few in number. At one school it is observed that they stock up the reading books, because there are just five copies of every kind. Of course it is impossible to read these books with the whole class. The principal had great ideas about the possibilities if they would have enough to deal with it in class, like introducing the book, reading by teacher, asking questions about it, etcetera. But in my opinion there are opportunities to profit from this supply. Group reading would make this possible. I think they are not used to it right now, because they think in the context of collective class assignments, but it will be possible. Like the principal already said, the teacher can introduce the book, tell something about it, so the children will know what kind of story it is. He will do this briefly, to all the books. After that, the pupils will form groups of about five, and read it together, one after the other. They can try to grab the content and discuss it, for example with the aid of questions about the book. Finally, when they finished reading the book, the groups can exchange books and present their favorite book to the class. In this way, all can read and will learn more efficiently. For more ideas to improve the reading at school, consult the master thesis of Stephanie Herschbach. Striking at this area is that pupils themselves don’t mention the lack of textbooks at school as a problem. They might be used to sharing books with each other. Still, they do mention the need of textbooks to study at home. It is not likely that schools will supply books to take home. Still, what schools can do, is to collect books and put them in a kind of school library, where pupils are allowed to study in their leisure time. In this way motivated pupils can be given a chance to improve their skills and knowledge, and the problem and results of poverty can be undermined. Apart from the way materials are used, it is good to see in what way literacy skills are taught. Unfortunately, this could not be sufficiently done in this research, but there are clues that point to literacy skills to be taught as a separate subject, in a language course, where the instruction tends to focus on teaching the language as an end in itself. (UNICEF, 2000) Because at Goflames Mission ‘*the first two weeks, at the beginning of the year, we only teach the English language. We involve all the parts of English. So then they practice very well, and after that we can start with the other subjects. Because being able to read and understand, is the base for everything.’ (Pastor Dyke, Grafton, 13 – 12 – 11)****.*** This may show that literacy skills are taught as a separate subject. The school already realizes the reading skills are the base for everything, so alternatively, literacy skills may be developed through other subjects such as social studies or science. The UNICEF study found that in these cases, there is a greater focus on language as a tool for social development; situations from daily life are incorporated into activities that foster the acquisition of reading and writing skills (UNICEF, 2000). Language learning cannot be separated from contents. That is why the concept CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) would be recommendable to examine on its feasibility at schools in Sierra Leone. In this concept subject content as well as language contents are just as important in every lesson. Contents and Language Integrated Learning is a form of education with a lot of learning potential. Especially the effects on the acquisition of a foreign language, the mother tongue, and the positive attitudes in relation to foreign languages and cultures are well established.

**Processes -** In order to create more quality teaching, schools can make use of **subject – teaching**.In my opinion it is a disadvantage of this method that it is more difficult for a teacher to get a relationship with the pupils, and to get to know them all. So I would not recommend this method without remarks. Especially primary school pupils can learn provided that they know their teacher, that they can trust him and dare to ask him questions. And, moreover, that they know that the teacher sees them, and knows them. It is easy to remain anonymous in a huge classroom with a teacher for just one hour. Then there is less pressure to study and make progress. It would be better if teachers coach each other in the subject they really know well. And that they ell together think about how you can teach such a subject in the best way. If the school admits only well – **qualified** teachers, then there is no need to implement subject – teaching either. Because then a teacher is qualified to teach all the subjects. What will also contribute to the improvement in processes, is appointing **inspectors** for schools. These inspectors have to be well qualified as a teacher and they need to have experience in teaching. Then they can visit the schools yearly for example, to check their results, experience some of the atmosphere at school, etcetera. The findings and new aims can be discussed with the principal and the staff of the school. Then the school will have more pressure to perform better, all the time. This is in correlation to the aim of the ‘always – a - learner’ attitude of a teacher. Training will be done by the use of the national teachers’ college which provides distance education courses. Additionally some teachers and head teachers will be trained by taking extra leadership courses and teacher training courses which are provided by Woord en Daad. This will reduce the number of unqualified teachers (Bisschop, 2010).

When these factors of quality education will improve, it will become visible in the **outcomes**. Therefore it is necessary to test the pupils regularly. To motivate the pupils, the schools give small presents to the pupils with the best grades. Still, according to UNICEF (2000) ongoing assessment of student performance can provide teachers with the information they need to improve student learning, because it is critically important to identify what skills each student possesses and to use instruction to progressively build on this foundation. This is more an child – centered approach. Also this is a change of view that can be established through courses for example.

## Debate of the study

In this paragraph a critical review of the study will be displayed. While developing a research and while carrying it out, a lot of decisions had to be made. Here it will be discussed whether they were right decisions.

First of all, the way the data was collected will be reviewed. I made up a guideline which would give lead to the conversations. This was used flexibly, so I could adapt the questions in way and order the conversation developed. Still, it was possible to compare the outcomes very well. In the analyzes of the conversations I could split up the causes, problems and solutions. In this way the outcomes with their differences and similarities became very clear and representable.

The respondents for my interviews were not large in number, but still they were representable for the (school) community because the composition was varied. Most of the times I interviewed all the teachers around, from all classes, and the principal, who could give a clear overview of the school politics covering many areas. Concerning the pupils, I spoke with the majority of the pupils from one class and at another school the whole class. In this way, I met pupils who are good- and pupils who are weak at English. In this way I experienced some of the difficulties teachers face with such a level distance within one group. Also the parents interviewed had various backgrounds. Sometimes we asked the principal to arrange parents for us so we could have conversations with them. At Free Pentecostal primary school the conversations were held in a room next to the principal’s room. I discovered a limitation in these conversations, because the parents didn’t feel free to express their own opinion to us. They said everything was good at school. When I personally asked parents to come, or when a teacher asked it for me, I heard different stories. Also the environment was different; I was in the staff room instead of the principal’s room. These parents told their own opinion, and this was very interesting. This difference in outcomes shows the high power distance that is still present in Sierra Leone. So the circumstances were one of the limitations I had to deal with. However, when realizing this, it was easy to adapt the situation, in order to prevent these situations.

At first, another limitation was the language barrier. African people have a different ways of expressing themselves. They stress words in another way and they choose other words. I was not the only one struggling with this, because for my respondents too it was hard to understand my western accent while speaking English. But the duration of the stay helped to overcome this limitation; the longer I was in Sierra Leone, the easier it became to understand this kind of expressing. Moreover, I learned some of the lingua franca spoken throughout Sierra Leone; Krio. This helped me to grab the words they used in English, because they are derived from the Krio language. This was a nice learning process for me too. In order to catch up the aspects I missed in some conversations with some teachers, I could arrange a second interview. This was very useful , because then I could specify my questions so I could exactly get the answer I needed for my remaining questions.

This paragraph contained a debate of the findings. To further solidify the possibilities towards improvement of primary schools with regard to learning and teaching the English language, concrete recommendations are formulated below. The recommendations are divided in groups of whom it may concern.

## Recommendations

Government

* Arrange supervision for the way the learning materials are delivered, in order to prevent corruption.
* Arrange regular inspection of the schools. If it cannot be arranged by the government, make the organizations arrange it. This in order to check the quality of teaching, the results and the atmosphere. Also provide guidance for teachers to set and reach new aims.

Organizations

* Invest in cooperation and lobbying with the government to take their responsibilities at these areas, so they will become more involved.
* Provide environmental support and supervise the way of distribution of materials.
* Arrange workshops and training courses for teachers. Focus on long term training and qualification of unqualified teachers.
	1. Arrange workshops about didactics: how to teach literacy skills with few books and materials for example.
	2. Arrange workshops about pedagogical skills. How to conduct behavior excluding corporal punishment for example.
* Ensure the qualification and quality of teachers at primary schools. To learn more about this topic, consult Bisschop, H. (2011) *Quality of teachers in rural and urban areas of Sierra Leone*. Master Thesis University of Amsterdam’

Principals

* Provide supervision and mentoring for teachers.
* Arrange staff meetings so the teachers can tell each other what does and doesn’t work in class.
* Ensure that teachers have a good level of English, by executing regular tests.
* Abolish corporal punishment at schools. Invest in a safe atmosphere and relationship between teachers and students, and find other ways to conduct the pupils’ behavior.
* Raise awareness with the parents, for the importance and the value of education, by literacy courses and meetings with the parents.
* Improve the parental involvement at schools. Consult for this topic the bachelor thesis of Jorine de Goffau, (2012) *‘Parents as partners’.*
* Look for ways to open a school library.

Teachers

* Start teaching English from the first years. Start speaking English from class 4 – 6.
* Raise and stimulate an English speaking – and reading community, by creating an English speaking habit at schools, and promoting the reading of English books and texts. Encourage and support those pupils who try to speak English.
* Encourage illiterate parents to join the Adult Literacy Program.
* Tell parents about the need of encouraging their children to study and being educated. Make them aware of their important role in their children’s future.

## 5.7. Questions for further study

* What ideas do teachers, parents and students have about quality education and outcomes (concerning the English language)?
* What is in the teachers’ minds concerning punishment and rewarding pupils’ behavior? Are there more schools without corporal punishment? How did the process towards an abolishment develop? Are other schools willing to change their habits at this point?
* What possibilities in teaching are there to deal with few materials and overcrowded classes?
* Is there any inspection of the schools? How is this carried out? What are other possibilities?
* Do (new) teachers get guidance? How? Are they satisfied with it?
* Are students willing to read more? What is the students’ attitude towards English? At first they mention the importance, but are they willing to study hard? What in the subject itself, apart from the awareness of the importance, can motivate them? (Secondary school).
* How are literacy skills taught? What do teachers think of the concept CLIL? Is it possible to set up a concrete step – by - step plan towards implementation of this concept, together with teachers?
* How is MTE used in the different grades? Is there a policy which ensures an increasing use of English in the lessons? What are the teachers’ opinions about this? Could the MTE be used more effectively?

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# 7. Annexes

1. Letter to EFSL
2. Interview guidelines
3. Interviews
4. Schematic display of problems and solutions
	1. Problems
	2. Solutions primary school
	3. Solutions secondary school

# Annex 1: Letter to EFSL

Dear Rev. Jonathan Titus-Williams and Mrs. Cecilia Becker,

How are you? Here in the Netherlands it is getting colder. So we are glad that we are welcome to Sierra Leone. Thank you that we get the opportunity to do our research in the schools of your foundation. We like it to come and to meet you and your foundation.

For our research we have some questions. We have heard from our lecturers of Driestar-Educatief that it would be convenient for you and for us to ask these questions before we come to Sierra Leone. We hope that you have time to arrange meetings for our research so that we can start as soon as possible when we will be arrived.

To give an idea of our plans, we will tell briefly about the content and purposes of our research.
The thesis of Jorine is about parents involvement. She wants to do research into the relationship between the parents and the school.
Can you help Jorine with arranging about 10 parents and 10 teachers and 10 students if they are able to have some interviews with Jorine. Could you look for these persons and ask them if they want to help Jorine? Is it possible to observe in a primary school and also in a secondary school?

The thesis of Lydia is about traumatized young pupils in Grafton. She wants to investigate what they have experienced during the civil war, their coping of it and how the environments deal(t) with them. Can you find 5 students, their parents/caretakers and some teachers who are able to give me answers on these questions? I would like to emphasize that I am here for my thesis, not to hurt them with remembering their past experiences . Do you want to mention that to these pupils and parents/caretakers? Lydia needs stable persons for her research. Is it possible for her to do her research on a secondary school?

The thesis of Annemijn is about English as language of instruction. I want to find out what problems the pupils may have with the differences between native language and the school language. Therefore I would like to observe many lessons in the primary school and in the secondary school. I also would like to do some interviews with pupils of different ages and with some teachers, also both at the primary school and the secondary school. Would this be possible?

We would very much appreciate your kind help. We are glad that the day we will arrive in Sierra Leone is coming closer. We are looking forward to the period in Sierra Leone. We will wait for your reply.
Thank you for all in advance.

Kind regards,

Jorine de Goffau,
Lydia van der Spek,
Annemijn van Gent

# Annex 2: Interview guidelines

## Teachers

1. Why do you think it is important for pupils to speak English in a right way?
2. How is it for you to speak English to the pupils?
3. What difficulties do you face when you teach in English?
4. How do you think it is for the students to get lessons in English?
5. What problems according to learning in English do you see that the students face?
6. What do you think that are the main problems with the English language?
7. What do you think that will be the solution of these problems?
8. What would you like to change at the primary school to improve the language skills of the pupils?

## Pupils primary school

1. What do you think of the subject language arts?
2. Which part of the English language is difficult for you?
3. What do most of the pupils find difficult in English?
	1. Why?
4. What problems do you sometimes have with learning in the English language at school?
5. What do you think that are the problems for the school with the English language?
6. What do you think that will be a good solution for these problems?

## Pupils secondary school

1. What do you think of the subject language arts?
2. Which part of the language arts is difficult for you?
3. Which part do most of the pupils find difficult?
	1. Why?
4. When you look back to your primary school career, what problems did you have then with learning in the English language?
5. What do you think that are the main problems for primary schools with the English language?
6. When you came at this secondary school, did you have problems with the high level of English?
7. What do you think that will be a good solution for these problems?

## Parents primary school

1. Do you think that it is important for your child to learn the English language?
2. How is it for your child to learn the English language?
3. Which problems does your child have with learning in English at school? Because the instruction is in English.
4. What do you think that will be the solutions for these problems? What would you maybe change at primary schools?
5. Do you think the way they teach the English language is a good way?

## Parents secondary school

1. Do you think that it is important for your child to learn the English language?
2. How is it for your child to learn the English language?
3. When you look back to the primary school career of your child, what were his problems with the English language at that moment? Because English is the language of instruction.
4. How was it for your child to go from the primary school to the secondary school, where they speak more English and at a higher level?
5. What do you think that will be the solutions for these problems? What would you maybe change at primary schools?
6. Do you think the way they teach the English language is a good way?

# Interviews

## Goflames mission primary school

### Teachers:

* Principal Mr. Dyke
* Teacher grade 6: John Patrick Kapiudi
* Teacher grade 5: Simion Blaliy
* Teacher grade 4: Olivia R. Giah
* Teacher grade 3: Abdul Kamara
* Teacher grade 2: Fengai Kadowa

### Pupils: (class 6)

* Aminata Kamara & Alpha I Koroma
* Abu Bakarr Kalokoh & Baindu Bockarie
* Fatmata B. Kargbo & Mohammed Bendu
* Miatta Susu & Musa Kamara
* Ngadie Samai & Sydney Grasif

### Parents

* Fatmata Kabia
* Nancy Nablie
* Willy Suma
* Howa Foku
* Kadiatu Timbo

## Free Pentecostal primary school

### Teachers:

* Principal James Fayia Kpamaah
* Teacher English, class 6: Winston
* Teacher English, class 5: Arthur James
* Teacher English, class 4: Foday S.T. Sesay
* Teacher class 1: Sahr Mattia Kongomany
* Teacher class 2: Edward S. Kamara

### Pupils:

* Veronica Sia Kongomany & Alimany K. Bonguva, class 5
* Soudatu Samura & Shaka Collier, class 5
* Fatmata D. Tunay & Kadijah Sallu Kamara, class 5
* Augustine Jimmy & Josephine Conteh, class 5
* Fatmata – Alusine – Kamara & Haja Fatmata Kamara, class 6
* Ibrahim M. Kahonla & Mohammed Banguhe, class 6
* Ishatu M.F. Vambo & Gbassay – Koroma, class 6
* Zaiarab Jallok & Zainab Alfred Banguta, class 6
* Alie Mansaray & Michael Lamin Swaray, class 6
* Hawa Barrie & Fatmata B. Kamara, class 6
* Samuel Matter Silvali B. & Abu Bakurr Kamara, class 6

### Parents:

* Margret Songu
* Nancy Matthia
* Rebecca
* Mary
* Isatu

## Baptist secondary school

### Teachers:

* Victor JSS
* Mr. Mohammed Kabbah JSS
* Mary Y Tholley JSS, SSS
* Mambu Barkuna Sheriff SSS
* Christiana M. Koroma SSS
* Edwin Bundu Koroma

### Pupils:

* Emerica Colaer & Ahass Koroma JSS3
* Lenyek Charles & Mohammed G. Sesay JSS3
* Margaret I Kamara & Samuel K. Konteh SSS3
* Bella Jallok & Henry Kantek Sesay SSS3
* Tamba Pessima & Christiana Johnson SSS3

### Parents:

* Alfred Kargbo
* Adama Lebbie
* Fatmata Kamara
* Fatmata Konteh
* Asia

## Goflames Mission primary school

### Teachers

#### Principal Pastor Dyke

**Problems mentioned:**

* English is not the mother language of the children. So they have to learn how to speak the English language. They grow up with another language so the English language has to be studied.
* Spelling and writing is difficult for them. And sometimes they don’t understand and speak the difficult words. Because they are not used to the language.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* It is important to **explain the English words** properly. In this school we all talk English to the pupils, in an easy way so they can understand the words. If they don’t understand, we explain in Krio, and then come back to English, so they will remember the English word for the next time.
* The teaching in English depends on the learning stages. In the nursery school they **build up** the skills, with common words. There they cannot talk English very well, but they learn to listen. In the following grades we practice also spelling skills, reading, etc. They have to learn, to develop the skills.
* In this school we have very good results in English. I think part of the reason is because in the first two weeks, at the beginning of the year, we only teach the English language. We involve all the parts of English. So then they practice very well, and after that we can start with the other subjects. Because being able to read and understand, is the base for everything.

**Second interview:**

* When do you think it will be good to start with all the instructions in English?

From class 3, because the children must first have understood the alphabet, now they try to learn the eight parts of speech. Now they are expected to read by themselves. Then you go deeper into the subjects and do you need more participation from children. All has to be in English, because the books are in English.

* About the problems of which the causes point to parents

They regard learning as an individual case. They just want their children to get a little bit of education. Just some parents do it because of the future of the child.

* Is it a task of the school to change the mindset of **the parents**, when they don’t see the value of education? *(solutions)*

Yes, it is possible that the school can change the attitude of the parents. Now I live for 12 years in Grafton. I have attended many workshops, and have seen different programs to create a better situation in Grafton. But only when such actions will target a total school community, then it will have dividend. There are certain things a school needs to do to enable parents to have more interest for learning.

* We have CTA – meetings. That are meetings with all the parents in which we pass on the message regularly, but that is not enough.
* We have activities where in the parents can see the need of education, like in drama.
* If the school initiates a sensitize program, like workshops with the parents about different topics, then the parents can become more involved. Topics can be for example ‘how to encourage children to learn’, ‘how to stop absenteeism’. Then, a subtopic can be ‘how to discourage child begging’, There have been some action plans, but that didn’t work, because the parents were listening, not involved. What I am thinking about, is raising the question like ‘how to stop child begging’, and discuss this (and how to prevent) with the parents in a workshop. Then they will mention what they think that will be the ideal situation, and at the end they make an action plan by themselves, and a promise.
Then they’ve had to think about this for themselves and in that way the solution will become a part of themselves. That will be much more effective, I think. All will contribute to that the parents will see the need of education, and will support.
*Question: will the right parents come to these workshops? Like the ones for who it is meant for?*Yes, then we will make it compulsory. If they don’t attend one, then they have to attend the next time. And the parents will come, because they look up to the school. It is just like a button, you put it on and they will follow. That will be no problem.
*Question: did you share this idea with someone, like CTF or Woord & Daad for example?*No, before W&D it has to go through CTF. But CTF doesn’t always pay attention to things like that.

*During this interview the principal said a lot of important things. I could not write down everything but just the key words. The solutions he mentioned are interesting.*

* About the problems that come from a lack of materials. What is the cause of these problems?

The government asks for the enrolment of the school. So we tell them how many pupils there are in every classroom. But what they do, they supply just 20 books for each class. They just supply in what they want, they don’t care. Also they supply too few learning materials. *He shows me a geometric lineal to draw with at the blackboard, for mathematics. This is what they gave us for teaching materials. And then they think ‘we have supplied teaching materials’, and for 4 years we don’t receive anything anymore.*But yearly they should ask what we need. So we can also replace the books that are too old, and care that there are always enough books.
*Question: what about the organisation? Because the Goflames is government assisted, and assisted by an organisation.* They do the same as the government.

* If you would have all the materials, what would your perfect lesson look like?

Oh, teaching would be very easy. The children would learn a lot. Then you have a good environment, so every child benefits of the teaching time. Then there would also be a possibility to study the textbooks in leisure time. I would not give the books home, but we could raise a school library, so the children can study after school. Like group study, we could encourage groups to do so.

Then we also have to review our timetable, because now we know that the materials are properly used. We would make the lessons longer, to enable more child centred learning. Because with a lack of materials, you have to make shorter lessons because you have not enough (books) to encourage the pupils. If you have the materials, then you have much more possibilities, like raise group discussion, more interactions, more class participation. There has to be enough time for that lesson so everything will be well understood.

* How do you motivate the children for learning English?’
	+ By books with colourful pictures to make it visible, so simple to understand. But we have not a lot of this. But nice books, nice stories, are motivating.
	+ Whatever you want to teach, illustrate that, so they will understand.
	+ By songs, the children don’t easily forget songs
	+ By idiomatic expressions, like parables.

#### John Patrick Kapiudi, teacher class 6

**Problems mentioned:**

* The homes of the children. Parents refuse to communicate in English with their children, even if they can. Some parents can’t speak English, so their children speak English only at school. So they cannot practice so much. Parents don’t speak English to them. But children need encouragement from their parents.
* The children make mistakes in tests because they don’t understand the questions.
* The majority of the children don’t study at home. They have to do domestic work for their parents. Or children who live with foster parents for example, they have to work for them. Like selling, fetch wood for cooking, walk a long distance to collect water from the tab, etc.
* They mix English with Krio words.
* Some children cannot concentrate because of a lack of nourishment, food. They come to school without having had breakfast. It is hard to communicate to such children. It hinders the progress of a child.
* Most of the children don’t have books, so there is no availability of textbooks. I have to write it all on the blackboard what they have to learn. That is time consuming.
* The space they have behind the desk. There are too many pupils at one desk, so it is not easy for them to work.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* The children need to **practice** more. By continuous practicing you become perfect at speaking English.
* Every child in this school is supposed to have English **textbooks**. So the school / parents / government / organisation has to supply them. It gives them the skills how to use words, how to speak. It facilitates work. It enables them to study and practice at home.
* Encourage the **parents**: these children are the future leaders! Tell the parents about the **importance of education** and English. You expect something back from your child, that he will take care of you when you are old, that he can support you.
The text in the Bible about the corner stone fits in this case: The stone the builders rejected had become the capstone. Ps. 118: 22
* Don’t throw any child away, every child is important, also the children who are not your own (foster parents).
Maybe this child will become someone. We give the parents examples from the things that have passed, about rejected people who became very important.
Every child is important. No one is here by mistake, God has a plan for everybody.

**Other aspects:**

* He tells me that it is also a little bit difficult for teachers to speak English. It is important to read continuously. Study yourself, because English is the second language.

**Second interview:**

* About the problems in learning for the pupils:

The tenses are very difficult for the children. Why?

* Most of the children do not get any teaching from their parents. The majority of them is illiterate. For us (as teachers) this is very difficult. Students are looking at us as the source.
* The children tend to forget everything. There is poor monitoring, parents do not monitor their children to study at home too. And they don’t tell the importance of learning to their children. So there is a lack of determination.
* So the most of the problems come from the parents? What to do about that?

Sometimes we call some parents to talk to them personally. And to motivate them we give reports with the results, and we give presents to the pupil with the best results of the class.

* Do you think it is the task of the school to change the attitude of the parents?

No I don’t think so. There is an institution, called Adult Education. There the parents can get education if they didn’t got the change to when they were young. Where I can I encourage the parents to attend that. Even my father became a doctor at the age of 40.

* Part of the solutions:

We have to tell the children continuously about the Word of God, then the heart will change. That is what the Bible says. That is the same for the parents.
And we tell both children and parents about the value of education. We tell the parents that if they take care for the education of their children, then they will care for you too, when you are older and not able to work anymore.
We tell the children: wherever you go, when you are educated, you can go. It will be very shameful for you if you would refuse speaking English. So they will learn to know the importance of learning English.

* About the lack of books

If there were enough books, I won’t give them to take them home. Children are displacing and spoiling it, so we don’t give them home.

* How do you manage teaching without the materials?

Then we show the tenses in front of the class. For example the continuous tense, then I call someone to come in front, and walk. Then I ask the class: ‘what is she doing?’ ‘She is walking’, and that is continuous tense. Or I draw someone walking, or I use myself, we are the material.

* What if there were enough materials? How would you teach then?

It will be very simple for the children to understand. Then they will be able to see the pictures in the book, what is happening. They need to look at the pictures, then it will remain in their heads.
The lessons will be very good, 95% of the pupils will understand what I am teaching. Now a lot of them don’t know the essence, it are just words for them if you cannot show it.
If they see the picture, they will grab it.
In the lesson I would read with them, look at the pictures, let them point with their finger different aspects of the picture. At the end we would form group work. I would let them copy some sentences from the book in their notebook and underline and name all the tenses. Every group will present their work afterwards. Then all the pupils will know the past or the future tenses.

#### Simion Blaliy, teacher class 5

**Problems mentioned:**

* Children are familiar with Krio. If we don’t practice English with them, they will talk Krio.
* Parents should help us. We teach English but they should attribute to the teaching.
Especially the educated ones. They can talk English, but they talk Krio to their children.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Parents have to create an English speaking habit into the children, by talking English with them if they are able. And if not, they should encourage their children to study.
* We already created an institution for parents: Adult Literate Program. So the parents can learn how to speak and write English. No one is too late or too old for education. We see it is very fruitful.

**Other aspects:**

* We see good results in the ‘rule’ that everybody has to speak English. They practice a lot. If they talk Krio, we warn them. If they keep on doing this, we visit the parents.

#### Olivia R. Giah, teacher class 4

**Problems mentioned:**

* At school we force the children to speak English. But at their homes they talk more than at school. We put our effort, but also the homes contribute a lot. It is difficult for the children to learn English because at home they speak **Krio** or another tribe language.
* Writing and reading is very difficult for the pupils. They **cannot practice enough**; only at school, when they have some access to books.
* At **home is no pressure** to study. They can’t afford books, so they are not forced to read.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* We have to have access to **enough books at school**. Now we have just a few books, which they have to share in groups. That is not good because not every pupil then can see how you write the words.
* The **organisation** should supply enough books. If they have books, they can **use them at home**, and practice. Even if the parents are illiterate.

#### Abdul Kamara, teacher class 3

**Problems mentioned:**

* Most of the children come from different homes and schools. **From remote areas**, without an English teacher, they speak Krio at those schools. So when they come here, it is very difficult, we have to be patient, because we have to teach them the basics.
* Children need to get books for themselves, the one at school is not enough. Now we have 1 book for 5 pupils, that is not sufficient. But parents cannot afford them.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Talk Krio as less as possible. We correct their mistakes, so they will learn from them.
We only speak Krio for explanation.
* We need enough learning materials, from Woord & Daad and CTF.
* We need motivation for the teachers, because we get a small salary.
We need motivation by trainings, for better education.

**Other aspects:**

* It is important to start learning English at an early age, so they can get used to the phonetics.
* We as teachers are not perfect in English. As teachers, we also have to be studiers to motivate the children.

#### Fengai Kadowa, teacher class 2

**Problems mentioned:**

* There are not enough textbooks available.
* Parents talk Krio to their children; most of them are not educated.
* Parents don’t care about education. They don’t know the importance and the value of education.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Tell the **parents** about the importance of education and English.
They need to encourage their children for school. So come together with the parents and talk with them.

### Pupils from class 6

#### Aminata Kamara & Alpha I Koroma

* I like the subject Language Arts. It is not difficult. I also speak English at home.
* Everybody should speak Englis. That would be better. Change Krio into English.

#### Abu Bakarr Kalokoh & Baindu Bockarie

* English helps education. It is easy, not difficult.
* If I don’t understand one word, I ask the teacher. He explains it to us.

#### Fatmata B. Kargbo & Mohammed Bendu

* At home I speak Krio. It is difficult to read in English, because there are many difficult words that I don’t understand.
* What helps: the teacher repeats the words with us, so we understand more.

And he checks our work.

#### Miatta Susu & Musa Kamara

* They talk Krio and Mende at home.
English is very difficult for us. I do not understand everything we read.

Conversation was very hard with these children, because they often even didn’t understand my questions. Very low level of English.

#### Ngadie Samai & Sydney Grasif

* It is difficult how to use the big words. Also the letter writing is very difficult.

The teachers don’t allow speaking Krio in the classroom.

* The children in the classroom may not laugh at somebody who is trying to speak English.

### Parents

####  Fatmata Kabia & Nancy Nablie

I asked two parents, and they came together. They mentioned the same things.
One teacher translated for me in Krio and to English. One parent could not write her name.

* The children are feared, ashamed to talk English. The other children laugh at them.
* It is very hard for the children to talk English. They are not used to it at home, so it is very difficult.
* They need textbooks! Because I cannot speak English. But if they have textbooks, they can practice at home, after school.

#### Willy Suma

* My job is breaking stones, for the construction building. I won’t be able to do this for a very long time. So I need to sent my children to school, so they can take care for me later. That is also why I want them to learn English, so they can get a great job. Without English, you are zero, not important. With English, you can even go to other countries. Then they can sent money to me, I will enjoy.
* The teaching in English is very clear at school, my children don’t face any problems. This is a very good school. My children are very happy to go to school. The headmaster is also very good, he is strict, controlling, teaching, he respects the parents, encourages us and advises us how to deal with the children. Also the teachers are very busy with teaching. The school also supplies everything, books, pens. And I have bought books for them to study at home.

#### Howa Foku

* English is very important. Then you can go to other countries, you need it everywhere.
* I have a daughter of 14 years old at home. She did very good at school, but this term she didn’t attend school, because I have no money to pay the fees. If I have money, I can sent her to school again.
* She was very good at school, she didn’t have any problems with learning English. Also my daughter of 4 years old, at nursery, she learns very fast. She knows the alphabet and some small words. This school is very good, they teach very well.
* Some children are stubborn, they don’t study at home, but then you will become stupid, and have no future. But in Grafton there are not enough facilities to help.
* As for my daughter, I pray for help. I trust in God, He helps me all the time.

#### Kadiatu Timbo

* English is very important. If God wants, then they can go abroad, and get a good job. Then you cannot speak Fula or Krio. Also if you work in a big office, you need to talk English.
* At first it was difficult for my children to learn English, but not now anymore. They learn English since nursery, so they learn step by step.
* I have a daughter in class 6, she is a bit shy to speak English. But I tell her not to be ashamed, because she need to practice. And now she is doing better.
* Solutions: the children have to make it up. They have to speak English, it is not their language at first. I bought books so they can study at home. At school they have to avoid them speaking the L1.

## Free Pentecostal primary school

**School system:**
In class 1 and 2 there is one teacher who teaches all the subjects in one class.
From class 3 till 6, there is a teacher for every subject.
Some books are provided by the school, to use in the classroom. But the others have to be paid.

### Teachers

#### Principal James Fayia Kpamaah

**Importance:**

* English is the medium of communication in this country, because of the colonial heritage.
* All the subjects are taught in English.
* In some shops, like supermarkets you need to talk English.
* If you want to do business, you have to talk English. Inside, as well as outside the country.

**Ideal lesson situation:**

If every child has a reading book for himself, so he can read along. And enough space to write.
Also, we need audio materials. Then I would record a part from the radio, the news for example. Then I would make questions, and play the fragment in the class. Every pupil will listen carefully and answer the questions. After that, we would discuss the answers. This is good for them to practice the listening- and also speaking skills. Because the pronunciation is often a problem to them.

**Problems mentioned:**

* Most of the children can only practice their English at school. As soon as they come home, they speak the lingua franca again. Mostly Krio, but also tribe languages. So they don’t know the right pronunciation either.
* It is difficult for the children to understand the English language. So often you have to come down to their level, to explain in Krio.
* We have not enough materials. The government doesn’t supply enough books.
* The salary of teachers is never enough. (About $75 a month) And the living costs are high, some teachers have a lot of children to feed.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* We have sent our request to the government, and we hope they will sent more materials one day.
* We really need books and audio materials to practice the reading-, writing-, listening- and communicative skills of the children.
* We get trainings from EFSL to motivate the teachers.

**Other aspects:**

I asked the principal about the use of materials.

* *How do you manage teaching with a shortage of teaching materials?*We write all the sentences we have to discuss on the blackboard. But that is time wasting.
* *How would you create your lessen with enough books?*The books for everyone are necessary because then every pupil can read the text where we are talking about and reading from, during the lesson.
* *Would you use the books only at school or would there also be a possibility for the children to take them home? (for the ones who cannot afford)*I would use the books just for the lessons at school, not to take them home. They have to practice at home, but the parents have to buy books for at home. That is not the task of the school.
* *How would your ideal lesson look like?*Every pupil has a book for his own, so they are able to practice and read along.
And I would use audio in the lesson. Then I would record a part of the radio for example, give them a sheet of the text, and questions about that fragment. In the lesson I would put the tape on, and let the children listen carefully and answer the questions.

I also asked questions about how to **attract** pupils to learning English, and how to improve the level. But those questions are answered with ‘by encouraging the pupils to speak more in English’.
To motivate them for learning English, they also set in competition. With some exercises they can win prices. The best ones can win books.

Because in almost all the interviews **parents** are mentioned, I also asked questions about them. A lot of parents are illiterate, their job is selling on the street and they don’t see the importance of education. The school offers English lessons to parents, on 2 evenings a week. There are just few attending, but at least some do.

#### Teacher English, class 6: Winston

**Importance:**

* English is the international medium of communication. If you meet other people inside and outside Sierra Leone, you have to speak English.
* All subjects are in English, so if you want to learn, you have to know the English language.

**Problems mentioned:**

* Interference of the first language. Their pronunciation is not good because English is not their own language.
* There is a lack of teaching- and learning materials. There are not enough readers. But it is necessary because reading improves learning skills.
* Poor homes cannot afford books for themselves.
* Parents are most of the times not literate. They cannot read or write.
* Some parents don’t care about books. They just care about the uniform and food. They think the teachers teach, they do the work. So there is a lack of support from the parents.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Sensitize the parents. By meetings, for example. Explain them the need of materials at school. Tell them the essence and value of education.
* The **government** should be sending these materials to the schools. Not just a bit, but they should sent enough books to every school. They say that they have given enough, but it is not enough. If there are hundred in one classroom, they supply 30 books. But we have to do book reading. This is the responsibility of the government.

#### Arthur James, teacher English, class 5

**Problems mentioned:**

* There are not enough books. Some cannot afford to buy them.
* Most of the pupils have problems with reading.
	+ Cause: in class 1 and 2 they don’t learn the letters and the alphabet properly. That is why they cannot read in class 3, 4, 5 either. The teachers of class 1 and 2 do not pay too much attention in teaching English. That causes the problem.
* Speaking English is difficult for the children too. At home they speak Krio, the parents don’t speak English to them and the children cannot practice.
When they come to school they like to speak Krio too, but they have to speak English.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Give the children more **books** so they can practice. They will be able to read and write properly. Parents have to buy them.
* Don’t speak **Krio** at school. We force them to speak English, otherwise we give them punishment.
* Parents: **engage** your children to speak English at home. That helps them to read and write.
Because some pupils can read and write very well, their parents help them.

#### Foday S.T. Sesay, teacher English, class 4

**Problems mentioned:**

* The reading materials are very few. We have large classes of 60 pupils, but just 20 readers. That is difficult because I have to write it on the blackboard for them.
* The government is trying, but do not give enough materials.
* The different home languages (L1) make it very difficult to teach the English language. The children mix Krio and English without being aware. So I have to correct them.
Most of the children can only practice at school, so there is not much time for them to practice.
* Some teachers are not qualified. Then it is very difficult for learners to learn.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* The government has to provide enough materials for the whole class.
* There are less facilities. The children need to practice oral skills too; therefore we need the materials.

#### Edward S. Kamara, teacher class 2

**Problems mentioned:**

* I don’t face problems. The children are beginners, so the level is low.
* We have a lack of materials. The children cannot practice reading properly.
* There are too many children in one class. I can’t monitor them all to hear and see if they are doing correctly. We read collectively, so I cannot identify those who do not pronounce correctly.
* The pronunciation is difficult for them. English is their second or third language, so they hardly understand certain words. it is very strange for them.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* The number of the children should be reduced to 50 or 45 children in one class.
* Let there be sufficient materials. Supplied by the government.
* The classrooms should be more spacious.
* The teacher has to pronounce slowly and loudly so all the children can hear well.

#### Mattia, teacher class 1

**Problems mentioned:**

* I don’t have real problems. Sometimes I bring the level down to Krio, but I ask the questions in English, and want them to reply in English too. The children learn by stages. In this way, English becomes a part of us.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* For the beginners, come down to the local language.

### Pupils

#### Veronica Sia Kongomany & Alimany K. Bonguva, class 5

* Composition is difficult for me. For the other pupils in the classroom dictation and spelling.
* They don’t know how to spell, they do not study at home.
* My parents help me with my homework. I can practice English at home; sometimes I speak English with my parents.

#### Soudatu Samura & Shaka Collier, class 5

* English is not difficult for me.
* Some pupils of our class don’t know how to speak, and spell, and read.
* Because, they don’t study. When the teacher is teaching, they are playing.
* The teacher has to discipline them when they play during the lesson.
* We study at home, our parents help us. Most of the times we speak Krio at home, sometimes English, to practice.

#### Fatmata D. Tunay & Kadijah Sallu Kamara, class 5

* At home we speak Krio.
* Reading is very difficult.
* Other pupils don’t study at home.
* My parents help me sometimes.

#### Augustine Jimmy & Josephine Conteh, class 5

* The eight parts of speech are very difficult, because I don’t know how to pronounce.
* We have to speak English more.

#### Fatmata Alusine Kamara & Haja Fatmata Kamara, class 6

* At home we talk Krio. Sometimes English to practice.
* I don’t want to talk English because then people will laugh at me.
* Composition is difficult, because I don’t know how to write .
* The children in class do not listen to the teacher.
* We know if we ask the teacher and pay attention in class

#### Ibrahim M. Kahonla & Mohammed Banguna, class 6

* At home we mix English, Mende and Temne, but most of all we talk Krio.
* Letter writing is difficult, because you don’t know how to spell.
* Composition is difficult because then we have to use big words.
* It is noisy in class. Then we can’t listen to the instruction. But if the headmaster is around, then it becomes quiet. Otherwise he will flog you.
* Everybody should speak English. If not, teacher writes down your name and the headmaster will flog you.
* That is not a good solution, because in the morning I sometimes go to school with no lunch. That is bad when you get flogged, then you are wounded.

#### Ishatu M.F. Vambo & Gbassay Koroma, class 6

* At home we speak Krio, and sometimes English, to practice.
* Composition and letter writing is difficult. Because the questions are very hard, and there are many questions.
* When we are in class, some are playing.
* *Solutions:* they have to stop playing during class work. If we don’t, you get flogged.

#### Alie Mansaray & Michael Lamin Swatay

* Letter writing and grammar is very difficult. Sometimes I don’t know the words.
* Not everybody has books to study at home.
* Some children don’t go to school.
* And some don’t have time to study after school. They have to sell or play football.
* We study at home, that helps. If I don’t know, my older brothers help me.

#### Samuel Matter Silvalib & Abu Bakurr Kamara

* Letter writing is difficult, I don’t know how to write down the words.
* In the classroom we sometimes have to study for ourselves. But some children don’t, then they start laying, fighting, jumping, sometimes breaking the bench.
* If the teacher sees this, they get flogged.
* There is a someone who has to watch over the class in this study time, but they cannot control the whole class.

*Solutions mentioned:*

* If they would study, then they would have less problems with English.
* It is not good to flog.
* Take the children who are not behaving well out of the classroom and let them study somewhere else. And the teacher has to ask him questions, and talk to him. That is better than flogging.

### Parents

#### Margret Songu & Nancy Matthia

**Importance:**

* Yes, you have to speak English to show that you are educated. Also important for your job.
* It makes you to expose, you can speak in public when you speak English.
* Other people will recognize your status when you speak English.
* If they talk English, I am proud of my children.

**Problems:**

* It is very difficult for the children at first, but teachers make them understand.
* It is very difficult for them, but at school they force them to practice. They try as much as possible.
* Some children don’t have books. They cannot practice at home. They are supposed to be reading. But not all of them can afford.
* Some pupils are playful. After school they don’t study but play or work for their parents.

**Solutions:**

* Elder brothers and sisters help them to practice. You see them improving by stages.
* Every pupil should have readers. I can’t afford but they can use the books of the other sisters and brothers.
* The parents should say to their children: come home, study! Parents have to force them.

#### Rebecca

**Importance:**

* It is very important for me that my children learn English. Through English you can learn how to read and write.
* Also for work, to get a better job, their future. Now for me there has to be an interpreter for this conversation. For my children it won’t be necessary.
* And it gives them access to the world.

**Problems:**

* It is very difficult for the children to learn the English language, it is **strange** to them.
* They have not enough **materials**. Not enough books at school. They have to share with more. And I cannot afford all the books for the children.
* At times **teachers** don’t speak English very well. They speak more Krio in school, but that cannot help the children to speak.
* And sometimes the children fear the teachers. Because they are not friendly all the time. So sometimes they don’t dear to speak in class.
* Some children are stubborn, and don’t listen to the teacher.

**Solutions:**

* Teaching method: they should do more oral practice. Now most of the time they teach theory, but the children need to practice a lot. Because they don’t know how to put the words, they need to hear the pronunciation, and to participate.
* We (parents) need private teachers, to teach the children English at home more. Because I can’t teach them. I have to ask a relative to come and help them.

#### Mary

**Problems:**

* It is easy for the children to learn English at school, but difficult for them to pronounce. Because they don’t know how to pronounce the words. It is their second language. They can only learn how to talk, at school. Not at home. But they can understand, through the classes they built their knowledge.

**Solutions:**

* Teach them more English at home. I can find someone to teach them more. I always ask a relative.

#### Isatu

I have 7 children. One at primary school, 6 at secondary school. But they had no problems. First they had to learn the English language, but because the teacher comes down in level, there were no problems. Every year they learn more. They also speak English at home sometimes.
Also when they went to secondary school, they are did well.

## Baptist secondary school

### Teachers

#### Mr. Mohammed Kabbah, English teacher JSS

**Problems mentioned:**

* English is the official language at school. But the *local languages* are corporate in the curriculum. They *disturb the English learning comprehension* and the speaking, the pronunciation.
* *The standard of the children*; they are not well grounded. Their teachers at primary school were not qualified, so they miss the main foundation, like the basic spelling.
* At the schools (both primary and secondary schools) is a *lack of reading materials*. So they cannot practice enough.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* The *local languages* are important, they are part of us. But they *should be removed from the curriculum*, to improve the English language skills like reading, writing, speaking
* The children should be *more encouraged* to speak English all the time, especially in school. There has to be more emphasis on it, but the schools don’t take it really seriously. They have to stress more on the importance of learning English.
* English language reading *materials should be exposed*.
* Primary school *teachers should be trained and qualified.*

#### Victor E. Aniderson, English teacher JSS

**Problems mentioned:**

* The acquisition of *materials* by the pupils. They have not enough money to buy textbooks. So then you are not able to teach. The only remedy is that they share their books with friends.
* The *foundation* with which the students enter this school, is very weak. So we need extra time to instruct them. The primary schools do not teach the English language basic skills effectively.
* Their *homes*: they have no time to read and do their homework, because they have to work for their parents. Like selling, or domestic work.
* *Krio*, the general language of this country, damages the English language.
* *Poverty*: some students come to school with an empty belly, and very sleepy. This is a real problem at our schools. You can’t teach those kids.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* To support the children without a good foundation in the English language, we have the *L&DS*: Literature and Debating Society. They help the pupils to improve the pronunciation skills and the presentation in English.
* At the *primary schools* they should *use the theme - teaching method*. That means: when you are good in teaching spelling, and not in teaching grammar, then you should only teach spellings and let someone else (who has enough knowledge to teach it) teach grammar. Otherwise you get teacher who punish too much because of their own lack of knowledge.
* The child should be trained at a higher level of speaking English. They have to get used to *speaking English, at least as long as they wear their school uniform.*

#### Mary Y Tholley, English teacher JSS & SSS

**Problems mentioned:**

* English is compulsory, but it is the *second language* of the students.
* The *Krio* pronunciation interrupts the English pronunciation. Just as the other tribe languages. These languages are even taught at this school.
* There are *no materials*. I my next class I have 10 textbooks in a class of 60 pupils!
* The *primary schools* where they come from. There are *unqualified teachers*; they teach their children the wrong spelling, and that remains in the head of the kids. It is very difficult to change that. Because when you say to a primary school kid: ‘how you write this, is wrong, it has to be..’ then he says: ‘no, because the teacher says this.’ The teacher is always correct.
It is hard to get real English speaking teachers.
* *Overcrowded classes*. You cannot control and help every child in a class of 100.
* I don’t know where the real problem (cause) lays. Some (schools) take it light and say there is no problem. But there definitely is. You can see it for example at university. 300 students started, from that group just 17 finished. Because the level (of English) was too high for the others.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* *The government has to supply* the kids with exercise *books* and textbooks! Now there are a lot of failures because there is no background for them to rely on, like a book.
* There is a need for *qualified teachers*! The good teachers take another job because they get paid much more for that. The salary of teachers is so small, the *government* has to change that to get more correct English speaking teachers.
* For the *primary school:* they can use Krio to explain, up till grade 3. But from grade 4 till 8 they should *speak English*. Just use simple words, so they can understand.

**Causes & effects:**Local languages 🡪 speaking problem
Primary schools teaching 🡪 grammar use & basic spelling problem

#### Mambu Barkuna Sheriff, English teacher SSS

**Problems mentioned:**

* For many people in this country is not the English language their mother tongue, but Krio. So they *transfer Krio into the English language*. Krio and English are very close, but the structures differ totally.
* The *availability of materials*. Very few students can afford to buy materials. 🡪 the teachers become computers, the students rely on them. That takes a lot of time.
* *Electronic problems*. It is really difficult to get materials from the internet. So it is hard to change and adapt on the modern developments. The government doesn’t take care of that.
* *The class size*. There are a lot of classes of 100 pupils. That makes it impossible to give assignments, because there is no time to check them all.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* I would recommend a *limitation of the L1*: the local languages. Stop teaching the L1 of the students at secondary school.

They should add the subjects of L1 to the curriculum of the primary school. Just teach them the simple basics of those languages.
Then, when they come to secondary school, they can focus deeply on the English language, without confusion because of the other language subjects they otherwise will get.

#### Christiana M. Koroma, English teacher SSS

**Problems mentioned:**

* L1 interferes into L2. Some pupils think they are speaking English, not knowing that they speak Krio. Some words sound similar in Krio and English, they mix them up. So the L1 disturbs the English language. Just like
* Some pupils are ashamed of speaking English. Because they think they will be wrong and make mistakes, so their fellow pupils will laugh at them.
* Their backgrounds, homes, community. They don’t speak English to them, so they can’t practice.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Help to improve the English language skills of the pupils; encourage them to practice. Then you learn how to speak. They should not be ashamed, but speak, so that the teacher can correct them. Encourage them, softly, so they won’t feel ashamed.
* Younger kids can learn easier; so there is a task to the primary schools. Don’t use jargon, but *simple and clear English*. Private schools emphasize more on speaking English than government schools. Although the government schools are trying.
* Stop teaching Krio at secondary school, so they can fully focus on learning English.

#### Edwin Bundu Koroma, head of department English

**Problems mentioned:**

* English is the second or even third language of the pupils; that causes difficulties. *Krio* is similar to English, so they mix it up.
* There is a lack of teaching and learning *materials*. Most of these kids can’t afford, they don’t have textbooks; it all depends on the teacher. So they can’t do any research for example.
As a teacher you can’t teach when you don’t have the materials. The work process becomes hard.
* The *environment*. If you want to learn another language, you need to find yourself in this speech community. But outside school, for a lot of children, this is zero.
* The *mentality of the kids*. They don’t see the importance of learning English enough. Only when they fail the exams at the end of their school career, they see how important it is, but then it is too late. Then they cannot go to university because their level of English is too low. There are so many of them who experience this.
* The *untrained and unqualified teachers at primary school.* The foundation of the children is very weak.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* *Parents* have a role to play. They should guide their children to go and study. They should complement the effort of teaching in the schools. Most of them think that the teacher does everything, they don’t care.
* The *government* is one of the key players. They should use its responsibility; they should ensure that the materials are available.
* The *teachers* also have a role to play. Make them interested with the lessons, not bored. They should sensitize everybody of the importance of speaking English.
* The principles of the primary schools have to ensure that they get the right persons for teaching. So persons who have enough knowledge and skills to teach the pupils the right contents.

### Pupils:

#### Emerica Colaer & Ahass Koroma, JSS3

**Problems and solutions mentioned:**Sometimes it is difficult, but most of the time it is very nice, interesting, important.
It is only a little bit difficult for the first time, but when you go on, it becomes easier.

**Other aspects:**The pupils of JSS don’t mention real problems. I asked the teacher for this, and he said that it can be because they are shy, of because they don’t understand me completely. I think it is maybe also because the interview took place in the staff room, so they could be afraid to tell everything, or say negative things about the teachers.

#### Lenyek Charles & Mohammed G. Sesay, JSS3

**Problems mentioned:**
There are no problems. It is very important to learn English. I love the subject.
There is a rule at school that you have to speak English, but some do speak Krio.
Sometimes it is difficult to make sentences.

**Solutions mentioned:**We have security agents in the class. So if they hear you talking Krio, then he/she will tell that to the teacher and you will be slapped, 6 times.
We ask the teacher if we have difficulties. He helps us.

#### Margaret I Kamara & Samuel K. Konteh, SSS3

**Problems mentioned:**

* Some *teachers* speak Krio in class, for explanation. And some teachers don’t speak the English language properly.
* The children mix Krio with English.
* Government schools don’t care much about learning the English language, they don’t stress at all.
* Government schools don’t have enough materials to teach the children properly.
* The way the students construct English is a problem. Especially the grammar, they mix it up. Cause:
	+ The lack of books
	+ The attitude of the pupils: they care less about it, especially about grammar.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Stress on the kids to know the English language better, otherwise they will get a big problem.
* Teachers have to improve their English. Some teachers speak Krio!

**Other aspects:**

* *Flashback* from Margaret: It is very difficult for kids to get the English language. For me also, I found it very difficult to speak English. Then they flog me, and from that moment, I started to talk English. And I am happy because from that moment I could practice English very well.
* These students attended the *international primary school.* That means that they are well educated in English; they stress on speaking English very much. But still it is reliable what she tells about the government schools, because first she was in a government school, but later moved to the international school.

#### Bella Jallok & Henry Kantek Sesay, SSS3

**Problems mentioned:**

* Lexis & structure and writings are very difficult. Because we are not used to it.
* Attitudes: Students don’t put enough effort in studying English
* At primary school the teachers don’t take enough time to teach the children how to write properly. They are not patient enough.
* The majority of the pupils don’t speak in English at school, although it is a rule. Teachers are not monitoring us properly, like we are used to at the private primary school. We always got punishment if we wouldn’t talk English at school. Here you can easily escape.
* There is a lack of supervising at the school. So they are not forced to perform well.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* As for primary school, I would say: severe punishment, if they don’t speak English at school.
* For the secondary school I would not punish, because we are adults. Instead, give a topic to debate during the assembly. Then the pupil will be forced to practice too.
* There has to be more supervising. Like once a year. Inspect and visit the schools, also unexpected, so the schools cannot pretend to be a good school for one day.

#### Tamba Pessima & Christiana Johnson

**Problems mentioned:**

* Idiomatic expressions are very difficult. Like using the big terms, if you don’t know the meaning.
* They start too early with going deeply in these difficult words, in JSS. After that, you are expected to know them and get other topics. That is too soon.
* Primary schools do not emphasize enough on speaking English.
* Overpopulation in government primary schools.
* Not all the teachers at primary schools are qualified, not well drilled. Teachers are responsible for the level of the pupils.
If you are poorly educated at primary school, you have problems with English in JSS and SSS too, because you have a bad foundation.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* At this school they flog you 6 times if you speak Krio instead of English.
* I was in a private primary school, there you have classes of 15 – 20 students, that is an advantage.
* Also, we learned to speak English at home as well. So English became a part of us.
* If you apply for the job as a teacher, there should be high standards for your level.

#### Dauda Sankoh

**Problems mentioned:**

* At primary school I was really afraid for the teacher. When you failed to speak English in class, he called you in front of the class, and beat you. Or when I made a mistake, he was shouting at me, that was so humiliating.
* So sometimes I was afraid to speak. But my dad made me practising at home; that was really good and useful for me. So he gave me the confidence to speak the Queens language.
* There are not enough books in the classrooms.
* The switch from primary to secondary school was very difficult for me. Everything was taught in English, even mathematics.
* There is a teachers union, so they can press on the government to supply books. But the problem is that they want to make money on it. So they give just some of the books to the schools and the rest they will keep. They open stationaries and put different people to sell there. It is corruption.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* The government should supply books for the schools. And they can build up a library so the pupils can study there.
* The government has to make sure that the books come in full number to the schools they belong to. The persons who keep the schoolbooks for themselves, should be punished.
* The government has to conduct a kind of workshop for the teachers so they can learn better teaching skills and use better teaching methods.
* The teachers have to stop the corporal punishment to pupils.
* The government has to ensure that the books will find their right destination: in the schools instead of in stationaries. The people who still want to sell school properties, have to be punished.

### Parents:

#### Alfred Kargbo

**The importance of learning English:**

* Internationally, most countries of the world transact business in English, and it is very important for Sierra – Leoneans to be able to interact effectively with other parts of the world. It is very important for them to know English, so the teaching of English in schools is very paramount, because it connects them to the outside of the world.
* Because of the colonial heritage. The educational system in Sierra Leone is based on English. Therefore, it is very important for students to be educated in English. Because it has become the official language that is used in Sierra Leone for all transactions; whether academic, whether it is business, and of all sorts.

**Supporting children at home:**

The children learn English at home too. When they learn the English language at home, it helps them, it reinforces what they are learning at school. For Sierra – Leoneans there is a lot of interference. The Krio interferes the English language. So we found out that if at home we don’t give them extra exercise, we don’t expose them to learning English at home, then it becomes very difficult for them at school. So to learn the English language easily at school, we have to ensure that even at home they communicate in that medium. Now they can find it very easy to interact with their teachers and colleagues at school. There are times we talk English and also we let them know the native tongue, that is also important.

**Transition from primary school to secondary school:**

This is always a bit challenging. Normally when the time comes to the highest level of primary school, the teachers give them extra lessons, because of the national exams. So that is the transition stage. So most of the times, to ensure that the children get through successfully, they have to be given **extra lessons** by the teachers. So children get through the secondary school because they have been given extra lessons to go through the national exams. The exams are theoretical, so teachers intensify the classes, give them assignments, and through this, they build up their ability to do the exams, pass and be admitted into secondary school, where they are expected to do a lot more talking and writing of English. For some it is not a problem to transfer from primary school to secondary school. But for quite a few it is still a problem.
It depends on the **quality of schools**, schooling they had in primary school. Some schools that work very hard, that give good exercises to their pupils, or that prepare their pupils very well, those pupils won’t have problems when they go to secondary school.
But for poor schools, that have not set a solid foundation for their pupils, when they go to secondary schools, they face a lot of difficulties in speaking and writing of English.

**Problems mentioned:**

* For Sierra – Leoneans there is a lot of interference. The **Krio** interferes the English language.
* During their **first days** at school it appears quite **difficult** for the children. And in fact, for most of them, since it is enforced, the process creates **fear** in them.
Now because the English language is being enforced, most of the children going to school for the first time, find it very difficult. And some of them, are even afraid of speaking the English language right there. So it is very difficult for them at first, but gradually, when time goes on, they get used to it.
* Before they start writing, they should have known a lot of English language **vocabulary.**
So the process of word building is very challenging; the process of building the vocabulary, that is very difficult.
* Another challenge, after they have acquired some vocabulary, to understand **the rules of grammar** also takes time. Organizing their thoughts and then expressing themselves in English, following this conventional English, English grammar. That takes time for students to cope with. There are students (except from the fast learners) who will got through school without being able to speak, without being able to construct 2 / 3 sentences you know, of clearly expressed English. It is all because of the problem: developing the vocabulary and learning the rules of grammar; these are the main challenges.
* The **native tongue interference.** We are coming from a society that have other languages as the primary language, the mother tongue. And the English language is the second language.
* The **availability of reading materials.** Because some children come from homes where they cannot speak right English, it is very difficult for those children to have extra support at home. To develop their English writing and speaking capabilities.
* The **children themselves.** They are not as fond of reading as in our days. Now during these days there are TVs, radios, movies, things like that. We usually read books, stories, novels, but these days this is all they like to do in their leisure time. They don’t read English books. And because they don’t read it makes it very difficult for them to develop their skills.
* In **primary schools** the teaching in English is not sufficient. They have limited time and teaching of the English language means that the children should be given adequate time to read and write. Also, most of the time they write more than they read.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* **Adult literacity** should be one of the solutions. Because when the adults are educated, then it means well for the children. Then they can help / support their children better.
* **Encourage the teachers** to give their students more **reading assignments**. That contributes to the culture of reading.
* The children should be given adequate time to read and write. More at school and more at home. Let them read more at school, instead of focussing on writing. That has to be corrected.
* Try to change the **mind – set of the children.** Reduce the time they spent on watching TV and encourage them to read books at home.

So teachers have to be involved, parents have to be involved. And the attitudes of the pupils themselves have to change. That they know that they have to speak good English, write well, and develop a culture of reading.

#### Adama Lebbie

**Problems mentioned:**

* Sometimes my child doesn’t know the **English words**, but then he asks the teacher. Then the teacher will help him. And every time he becomes better.
* **I cannot help him** at home. I don’t know the English language.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* The children should ask the **teacher** if they don’t know. Then they will learn.
* Together, with his older brothers and sisters, they **practice at home**! Then they sit around the table, telling each other that they have to speak English. Also, he can use the **book** of his older sister.

#### Fatmata Kamara

**Problems mentioned:**

* I don’t know how to speak English, so how can I know the problems? I don’t know of any problems of my children. Ask the teacher!

**Solutions mentioned:**

* -

**Other aspects:**

* This mother was also selling during the interview. She has a lot of children, and She says yes if I ask her if she thinks education is important, but according to the way of communicating with her, it became clear that she doesn’t care a lot about education. (Her answer to my question if she knows of some problems her children are facing or have faced at school, was: ‘ask the teacher!’

#### Fatmata Konteh

**Problems mentioned:**

* After selling, I tell my children to study for school. I do not allow her to go out at night.
But many other children do not study at home, they sell the whole day.
* First my daughter didn’t pay attention in class and got bad marks. But now he pays attention and she is doing very well.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* Let the children study at home instead of selling the whole day.
* The children have to pay attention in class.

**Other aspects:**

* The mother is selling, but she knows the importance of education.
* There was no more time left, that is why I couldn’t ask more about paying attention in class.

#### Asia

**Problems mentioned:**

* At first, the English language looks strange for the children. But now they are able. My daughter was first attending a village primary school. There she was afraid and ashamed of speaking English.
* At the village school the teaching was also in Mende, but that doesn’t help the children to express themselves in English. They didn’t need to speak English. They were not strict on that.

**Solutions mentioned:**

* At secondary school, first she spoke broken English, she was poor at English. But now at least she is doing very well. She is even the second best of her class. Because she learned to speak English very well at this school. Because she had to practice.
So that is what they should do: say that they have to speak English because they need to practice.
* If you want to go to university but don’t have credit on English, you won’t be allowed.
So encourage them on speaking English.