



# The Effect of Teachers' Principles on Student Performance in English Language

## A Case Study of Selected Secondary Schools in Uganda

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**ABSTRACT:** *The term principle refers to beliefs the teachers hold for choosing and sticking to particular methods which in turn affect performance of the students.*

*Most of our day- to –day decisions are made almost unconsciously because they flow from and are guided by our principles, which shape our lives (Adei, 2007) .*

*Principles can be either good or bad depending on the situation where we acquired them and the kind of principles we were taught or learnt whether good or bad. (Broughton G; Brumfit C; Flavell R; Hill P; and Pincas A, 1981).*

*By using observations, interviews, questionnaires and a proficiency test, data was collected on the principles used as well as expertise of the teachers. End of term and UNEB results were analysed to measure the learners' performance. The research showed that out of both rural and urban schools only one quarter had the right principles and hence chose the right methods consequently their students performed well in UCE exams. Most of the teachers in secondary schools held wrong principles and consequently negatively influenced the performance of their students in the four language modes. The purpose of this study was to show that beyond the physical causes of poor performance, lay psychological causes which affected teachers' choice of teaching methods and consequently student performance. It proved that the internal processes in the teacher influenced their external actions and triggered certain reactions and results from the students.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher's Principles, Student performance, urban school teachers, Rural school teachers*

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:** *UST: Urban School Teacher, RST: Rural School Teacher, US: Urban Schools, RS: Rural Schools, LCM: Learner centred methods, TCM: Teacher centred methods, S4: Senior Four, S3: Senior Three, S1: Senior One, UCE: Uganda Certificate of Education, PLE: Primary Leaving Examination, UNEB: Uganda National Examinations Board, O level: Secondary school/ Ordinary Level, TQ: Teachers' questionnaire, SP: School performance*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A principle is the underlying part (or spirit) of the basis for an evolutionary normative or formative development, which is the object of subjective experience and/or interpretation. (Enacademic, 2015). According to (Gurrey, 1962) the ideal teaching-learning process should involve the following principles: material and equipment, purpose, interest, aim, setting and experience as the main principles. The teacher's perception of the teaching materials presented to him or her, his interest in them, his aim, his perception of the setting, and his confidence arising from the experience he has will determine the methods he uses. These principles are necessary in order for the teacher to communicate effectively with the students to guarantee foreign language development. Student responsibility is also encouraged through active involvement in the classroom activities. In terms of subsidiary principles the theory suggests the following principles: student confidence, plenty of practice and a sense of responsibility for their present situation and future.

The (Freeman Y and Freeman D, 1998) theory states that, the perceptual and cognitive processes of the teacher will eventuate in the action elements on the teacher's part. The teacher's actions will be followed by the perceptual and cognitive processes on the student's part, which in turn lead to the actions on the part of students. In this paradigm, the teachers' thoughts lead to their actions which in turn trigger students' thoughts and these lead to their actions in this case being their individual expression in English. Between the two domains of the teacher and the student lie the social domain of classroom and school. The principles which he advanced are: contexts and orientations, teaching language through content, lessons should be learner-centred, learning takes place in social interaction, faith in the learner expands student potential, lessons should support students' first languages and cultures, learning goes from whole to part, lessons should include all four modes.

Performance is the visible outcome of an inward change that has taken place and to the extent/ degree of change that has occurred. According to Freeman, a major goal of process-product research was to estimate the effects of teachers' actions or teaching performance on student learning. (Freeman J and Freeman D, 1996).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was employed because principles are inward mental processes that can only be drawn out by in depth close interaction with the subjects. Stratified purposeful sampling was used to illustrate the characteristics of (UST and RST) subgroups to make comparisons between the different groups. A cross sectional research design was used to observe subset of a population of teachers all at the same time, in which, groups (RST and UST) were compared at different times in respect of the independent variables namely: teacher's principles and student performance.

A document analysis of lesson plans, curricula, schemes of work and what was taught in the teacher training programs was conducted.

Data was collected using teachers' questionnaires, students' questionnaires, interview guides and observation guides which was summarized into matrixes and were analyzed to make conclusions on the principles observed through the various instruments.

The process of data analysis consisted of first processing data into codes for the various principles obtained from the various research instruments and these were placed into broad themes. The second level of data processing involved identifying major themes within the various research instruments. This was accomplished by developing cross case matrixes and content analysis by (Miles BM and Huberman AM, 1994).

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Findings

#### 3.1.1. *Effect of teachers' principles on the students' performance in terms of ability to read, write, speak and understand texts in English*

Teachers' principles determine what methods they use for teaching (Freeman J and Freeman D, 1996) Teachers who used TCM used activities that kept the teacher as the centre of the lesson and students participated by mainly writing and reading on their own. The other skills speaking and listening were hardly seen as part of TCM classroom session. We had a questionnaire for students and the responses for this section are got from the responses collected and analyzed from the students' questionnaire. The questions were about the four language modes.

Regarding interaction with the teacher, TCM allow for very limited interaction with the teacher if ever while LCM are centred on interaction between the students and the teacher (Otto, 1997). The students from both USs and RSs were asked how often they got to speak with the teacher and 50% of the US students responded that they got to speak to and with the teacher as often as they wanted and only 50% stated that they did not get to speak to and with the teacher as often as they wanted. 10% of the RS students responded that they spoke with the teacher often while 90% of the RS students responded that they never got to speak with the teacher at all outside class. These figures include all teacher both those who use recommended principles and those who use teacher centred methods. When closely analysed according to school and classroom it was the teachers 2RS and 4US who used students

centred methods who students spoke to often. Students in USs and RSs which used LCM had frequent access to their teachers who they asked questions and discussed issues with. Their TCM USs and RSs were lucky to have the teacher listen to them out of class. Unfortunately also, some RSTs who interacted with the students did so in the local language and this defeated the aim of teaching English because the students did not get to practice the language.

TCM employ a lot of comprehension exercises because they keep the students focused on the topic and simplify the teachers' work because he can predict the outcome students will either get the answers correct or wrong (Perret, 1999). In terms of reading and writing students were asked whether they got to do comprehension exercises. According to the responses collected 100% of the US students stated that they were given comprehension exercises often and none of the US students stated that they were not given comprehension exercises often. According to responses collected from RS 60% of the RS students stated that they were given some comprehension exercises in class while 40% of the RS students responded that they had not done any comprehension exercises. From the classroom observations of RS schools comprehension exercises were given even though the students had to share 1 textbook among 15 or more students. The students who responded in the negative were probably as a result of a failure to understand the word comprehension.

LCM encourage students to speak up and gain confidence in the target language but unfortunately not many teachers consider this important because they teach for examination purposes only without focusing on the students' oral ability. When students were asked whether they read aloud in class a majority of both RS and US responded in the negative. 40% of the US students responded that they got to read aloud in class during the lesson while 60% stated that they never got an opportunity to read aloud in class. 20% of the RS students were the only ones who had got opportunity to read aloud in class while 80% of the students stated that they had not done any reading aloud in class. The failure of most of the teachers to provide an opportunity for the students to read aloud in class was a major contributor to many students' inability to express themselves in English in oral communication.

Among the benchmarks of LCM are debates because they allow for student development of oral skills (Freeman Y and Freeman D, 1998). Students were asked how often they participated in debates in order to ascertain whether they got an opportunity to practice their oral skills. Over 70% of the US students stated that they participated in classroom debates and sometimes in school debates while 30% of the US students stated that they rarely attended class and school debates. 20% of the RS students responded that they had school debates while 80% of the RS students responded that they did not have any school or class debates. School debates are meant to help the students learn to express themselves in English in public. When students do not get this opportunity they later on find difficulty in speaking in public because they lack confidence and this is what is happening with many students these days who complete secondary school education.

Reading competence can be categorised under LCM and TCM depending on how much the teacher lets the students read aloud in class or in small groups to build student confidence (Broughton G; Brumfit C; Flavell R; Hill P; and Pincas A, 1981). In terms of reading competence 70% of the US students responded that they were given reading excerpts and assignments to do on a regular basis while 30% of the US students stated that they were seldom given reading excerpts and assignments. There were only 10% of students in the RSs who responded that they were given reading excerpts and assignments to do on a regular basis. When the RST were contacted, some insisted that they gave reading excerpts however through the observation sessions they did not have enough textbooks for the whole class and in some RSs only the teacher had a textbook. However, the RST who employed LCM collected newspapers and other reading materials which they engaged their classrooms with much to the delight of the students. Some students said that they loved to read because they learnt new words and they responded that they liked to learn new words and use them with their classmates in and outside class. The RS students also had a lot of interest in learning new words but it was quashed by the many setbacks they face like the lack of textbooks. In the RSs that could boast of textbooks the books were too few with a book ratio of 1 book to 12 students and in most RSs non-existent. In some classes of 80 students there would be only 7 textbooks and in that school they counted themselves lucky to have those textbooks.

Composition writing is a component of both LCM and TCM and the difference lay in how many lessons were assigned to composition writing. 90% of the US students stated that they engaged themselves and their brains in composition writing, which they liked and enjoyed very much while

10% of the US students responded that they did not do enough composition writing. 60% of the RS students stated that they often did composition writing while 40% of the RS students responded that they did not often do composition writing. Consequently, most students both from RS and US looked confident in paper 1 which is about composition writing because it was something they had practiced overtime. Most of the students in the USs responded to the questionnaire that they enjoyed composition writing because they got more marks in it. Some students enjoyed composition writing because they wrote about the events in their lives and their surroundings.

Both LCM and TCM encouraged summary writing because it shows how the student has interpreted the passage. Over 80% of the US students responded that they read and made summary notes at the instruction of the teacher basing on the texts the teachers gave them while 20% of the US students responded that they were not asked and did not often make summary notes. 20% of the RS students stated that they were often asked to make summary notes while 80% responded that they were not asked to make summary notes. Students who were given opportunity to do summary writing were good at analysing given texts and picking out the main point.

LCM and TCM both do engage letter writing but the difference is the that letter writing in LCM is alive with students writing to actual friends in other schools while in TCM they do letter writing in the book for the teacher to mark. 75% of the US students stated that they often did letter writing and this built their skill of interpersonal relations while 25% of the US students responded that they did letter writing once in a long while. 40% of the RS students responded that they often did letter writing in class while 60% of the RS students responded that they rarely did letter writing. Students who wrote letters to real people learnt the art of communication with various people which was to their advantage when it came to interacting with various people ( Mukholi.D. , Mugeere,A., 2002:3)

Grammar was part of the daily routine for both LCM and TCM but the difference was that while LCM involve life examples, TCM go by the book and examples are from the textbook and hardly give examples from the students' life situations ( Freeman Y and Freeman D, 1998) (Gurrey, 1962). A 90% of the US students responded that grammar was a part of their daily timetable, and that they were often required to fill in blanks and all the other components of grammar. There were some 10% of the US students who responded that they did not get to do grammar as often as they wanted. Over 60% of the RS students responded that they were often given grammar exercises while 40% of the RS students stated that they were seldom given grammar exercises.

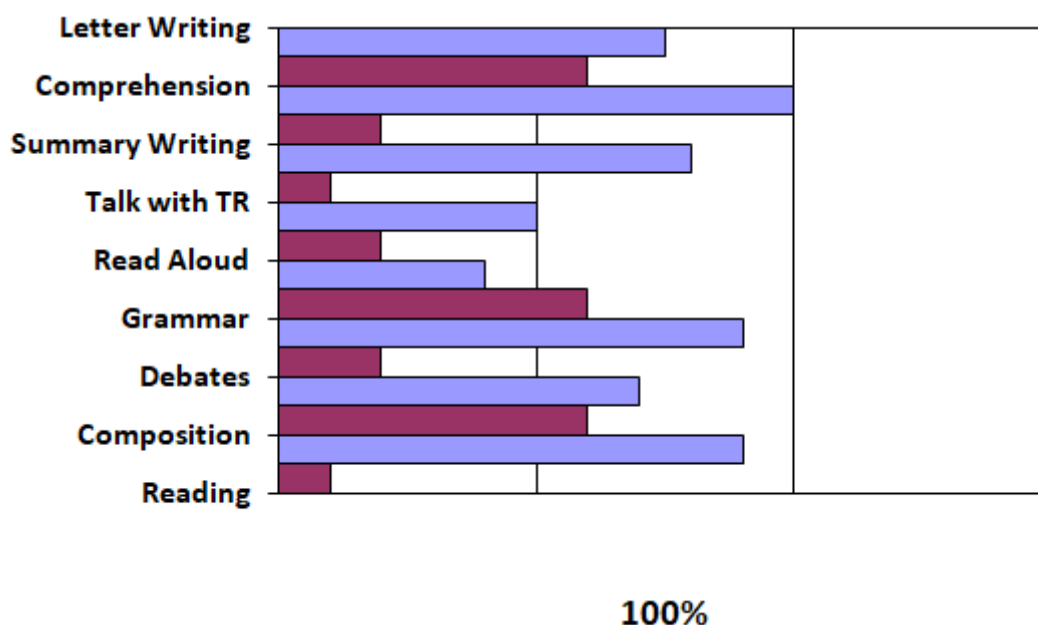


Figure1. Level of teacher involvement of students in classroom activities

The percentages are from 20 secondary school classes which represent the 20 teachers both UST and RST who participated in the study. Of the 20 teachers the teachers who employ TCM are shown on the chart as the majority who engage students in activities which involve a lot of writing like composition writing, comprehension exercises, summary writing and grammar. Activities which are LC have a much smaller percentage of students indicating that few teachers engage their students

in LC activities which include having the students read aloud in class while the teacher corrects the mistakes, debates and interacting with the teacher.

3.1.2. Effect Of Teachers' Principles On Student Performance In Examinations

In this section performance of the students was looked especially in the UCE examinations of 2016, 2017 and 2018 to establish the relationship between US and RS performance in relation to the principles the teachers had used to teach to ascertain their effect on student performance regardless of the type of school. In this section we will look at UCE results from various schools of their students' UNEB results. The school performance was also analyzed to establish how the use of different principles affects performance. In order to maintain the privacy of the various schools, names will not be mentioned of the individual schools and students but the schools will be referred to as A, B, C, D, E of either US or RS.

A Case of Student Performance in 5US and 5RS for 3 Years

Table1. Data Sheet for UCE Results of 2016

UCE 2016	D1	D2	C3	C4	C5	C6	P7	P8	F9
US 1	13	28	17	0	0	0	0	0	0
US 2	11	38	18	1	0	0	0	0	0
US 3	5	23	46	9	0	0	0	0	0
US 4	1	12	38	13	3	0	1	1	0
US 5	22	26	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
RS 1	0	1	6	6	7	16	11	3	12
RS 2	0	0	11	16	5	12	9	9	16
RS 3	0	0	5	15	3	15	13	12	15
RS 4	0	0	3	6	8	8	9	7	19
RS 5	0	1	4	3	5	12	10	12	27

Data Summary Chart of Relationship between Performance of 5 US and 5 RS in 2016

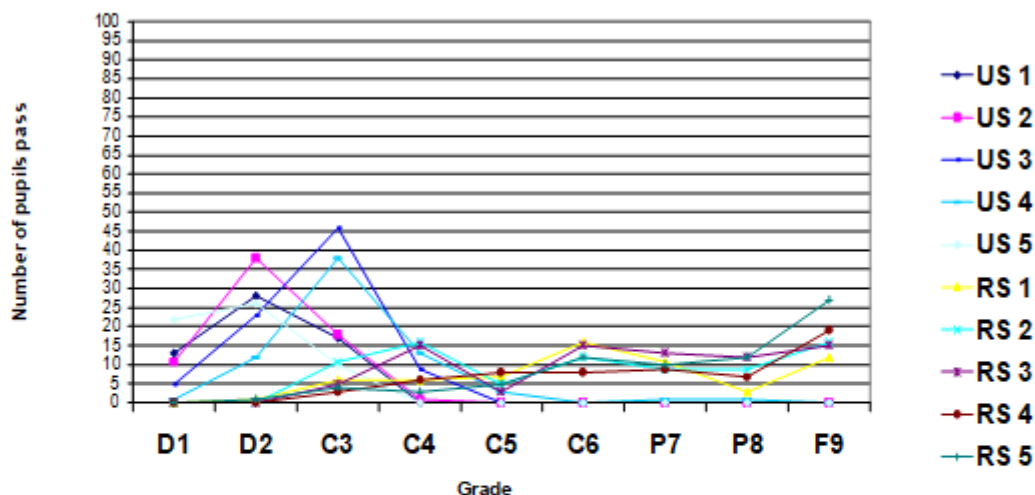


Figure 2: Performance relationship between 5 US and 5 RS in 2016 UCE

Above are the numbers of pupils who passed in different categories

KEY: D1 --- Distinction One

D2 --- Distinction Two

C3 --- Credit Three

C4 --- Credit Four

C5 --- Credit Five

UCE --- Uganda Certificate of Education 'O' level

C6 --- Credit Six

P7 --- Pass Seven

P8 --- Pass Eight

F9 --- Failure

US: Urban School

RS: Rural School

Figure2. Performance of 5 US and 5RS in 2016

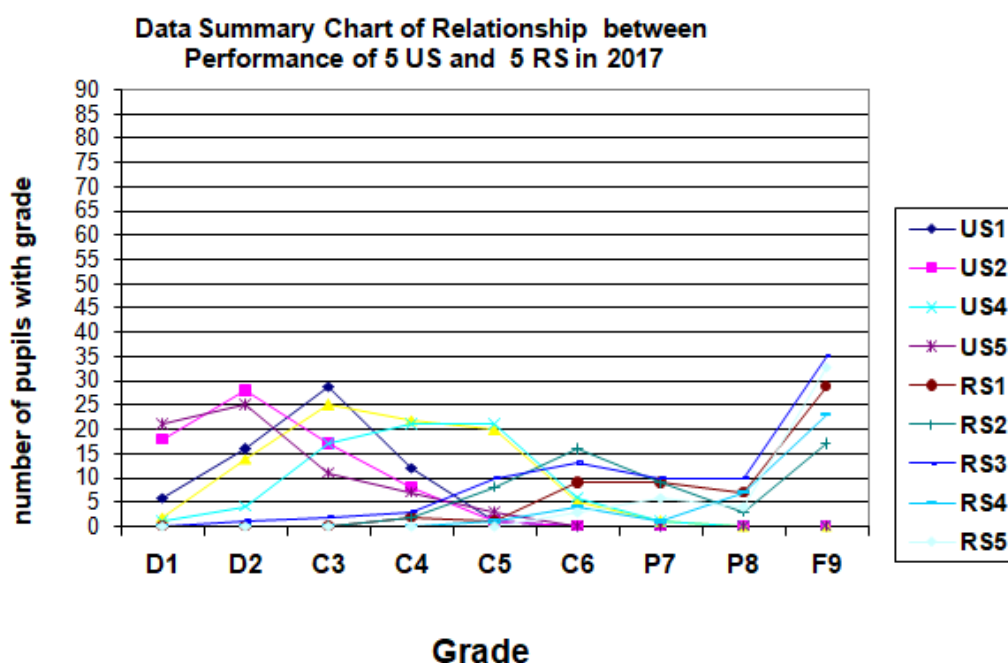


According to the results from UCE performance of 5 RS and 5 US on close observation, in spite of all the disadvantages that RS have some RST managed to get students with RS1 and RS5 and both those schools where the ones which were taught by the 2 RST who used LCM. This goes to show that LCM have the effect of making students rise above their limitations. All students from RS come from a background of very poor grades that no other school will accept and they end up in RSs and yet 2 were able to get distinctions that year and many others got credits. In that same year, US3 and US4 schools which get the cream of the nation in terms of performance had students getting as low as pass 8 and this is not because these students were not bright. According to these students results when they first enrolled in secondary school they all had 4 distinctions from their PLE and it therefore goes without saying that these were students who already knew English by the time they joined secondary school. Therefore the cause of retardation in performance can only be traced back to the teachers and indeed in the case of both US the teachers had employed TCM to the extent that they both lectured and instructed the students to go and find the necessary reading materials on their own. The teachers' perception of learning demonstrated that even the best student if subjected to TCM they may lose their cutting edge ability. One of these teachers once responded to an interview that she teaches the bright and any who do not meet that criteria she cannot be held accountable for them.

**Performance relationship between 5 US and 5 RS in 2017 UCE**

**Table2.** Data Sheet for UCE Results of 2017

UCE 2017	D1	D2	C3	C4	C5	C6	P7	P8	F9
US 1	6	16	29	12	1	0	0	0	0
US 2	18	28	17	8	1	0	0	0	0
US 3	2	14	25	22	20	5	1	0	0
US 4	1	4	17	21	21	6	1	0	0
US 5	21	25	11	7	3	0	0	0	0
RS 1	0	0	0	2	1	9	9	7	29
RS 2	0	0	0	2	8	16	9	3	17
RS 3	0	1	2	3	10	13	10	10	35
RS 4	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	7	23
RS 5	0	0	0	0	3	6	4	4	33



**Figure3.** Performance of 5 US and 5RS in 2017

Figure 3: Performance relationship between 5 US and 5 RS in 2017 UCE

Above are the numbers of pupils who passed in different categories

KEY: D1 ---- Distinction One C6----Credit Six

D2---- Distinction Two P7---- Pass Seven  
 C3---- Credit Three P8--- Pass Eight  
 C4----Credit Four F9--- Failure  
 C5---- Credit Five UCE-- Uganda Certificate of Education 'O' level  
 US: Urban School RS: Rural School

According to the UCE results of 2017, US3 and US4 the schools which had teachers using TCM their students continued to perform badly in spite of the fact that they were not poor in academics. The teachers when confronted with these results again the continued to remain adamant and they saw no reason why they should change their principles to suit LCM. The 2RST who employed LCM in RS 3 and RS2 continued to get students who performed better than had been said about them because the teachers had employed the principle of faith in the learners which made the students also believe in themselves and thus were able to perform better than had ever been expected of failures at PLE from RSs. They not only got distinctions but they also greatly reduced the number of failures F9s considering that that particular class when the researcher reviewed their PLE results 60% of the class had failed English with F9s.

The examination in 2017 was said to be difficult and even the students in the good USs got marks as low as credit 6 which was not the case the previous year. The 2 RST from RS2 and RS3 who used LCM once again had students who join secondary school with failures in English and other subjects scoring distinctions in English and so many students scoring credits. Even though RS3 had 35 students failing but that was because exams were difficult that year and even the USs did not score as highly as they had done in previous years.

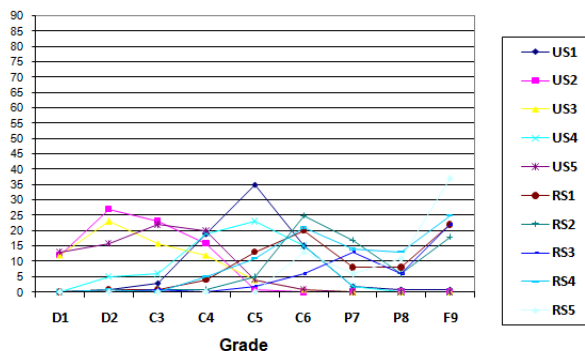
The performance in 2017 emphasised the principle of student responsibility in learning. In both urban and RSs, the general performance was not very good even though some teachers 2RST and 4 UST had taught using LCM they were not responsible for sitting the examinations. The students had to revise, remember and do the English examination on their own. Students were responsible for believing that even though the exam was difficult yet they would pass.

**Performance relationship between 5 US and 5 RS in 2018 UCE**

**Table3.** Data Sheet for UCE Results of 2018

UCE 2018	D1	D2	C3	C4	C5	C6	P7	P8	F9
US 1	1	3	19	35	15	2	1	1	0
US 2	27	23	16	1	0	0	0	0	0
US 3	23	16	12	4	1	0	0	0	0
US 4	5	6	19	23	15	2	0	0	0
US 5	16	22	20	4	1	0	0	0	0
RS 1	1	1	4	13	20	8	8	22	0
RS 2	0	1	1	5	25	17	6	18	12
RS 3	0	1	0	2	6	13	6	22	12
RS 4	1	0	5	11	21	14	13	25	0
RS 5	0	0	0	0	13	6	11	37	13

Data Summary Chart of Relationship between Performance of 5 US and 5 RS in 2018



**Figure4.** Performance of 5 US and 5RS in 2018

Figure 4: Performance relationship between 5 US and 5 RS in 2018 UCE

Above are the numbers of pupils who passed in different categories

KEY: D1 ---- Distinction One C6----Credit Six

D2---- Distinction Two P7---- Pass Seven

C3---- Credit Three P8--- Pass Eight

C4----Credit Four F9--- Failure

C5---- Credit Five UCE-- Uganda Certificate of Education 'O' level

US: Urban School RS: Rural School

According to the results from the sample of 2018 UCE results the 3UST who employed LCM in US2, US3 and US5 their student performed very well with many of them scoring distinctions. Teachers in US1 and US4 employed TCM and even among the USs where only the cream, top performers are admitted, their students scored marks as low as pass 8. This shows that suitable principles are necessary for all types of students the bright and the not so bright. That same year looking at the results of RS1 and RS2 the not so bright students who joined secondary school with failures in English some ended up with distinctions and a very big number credit passes simply because they had become confident in their ability to understand and respond in English.

### **3.2. Discussion**

As noted earlier, principles are derived from the perceptual and cognitive processes of the teacher, which eventuate in perceptual action elements on the teacher's part. The teacher's actions are followed by the cognitive processes on the student's part and in turn lead to actions on the part of the students.

The teachers who employed LCM believed that suitable content and the interest of the students in the lesson was important and selected methods depending on how well the students responded to the method. These teachers' classes were lively because the teacher's aim was to make the students enjoy the lesson because whatever the students liked they develop interest in and so learnt more easily. If students praised the teacher or participated actively then the teacher tended to use that method again. These were the rare breed of teachers 2RTS and 4UST that the researcher found using textbooks like Integrated English which is student centred.

The teachers who believed in the importance of student readiness prepared their lesson in a manner that introduced the new topic slowly bit by bit so that the students would not be overwhelmed. These teachers considered the state of readiness the students were in before introducing what is to be taught. These teachers would choose methods that involved using explanation in order to get the students to understand the background so they can be ready for the new material.

The 2RST and 4 UST most times used textbooks especially in USs and in RSs they took a large part of the lesson explaining and giving examples about the topic. (Whitehead, 1966) stated that the students have to be ready to learn that language learning is not a forced experience but one that should be approached when ready and the teacher is expected to create an environment that prepares the students for language learning. In terms of the activity the teacher is expected to keep the students busy by engaging them in activities that encourage them to express themselves in English.

The teachers who believed in the principle of activity would have as many activities as possible in the lesson because what the students practiced they more easily remembered than what they just heard. During teenage years learning is more effective when there is activity because they are at a stage when the hormones are very active and need a lot of activity. The 2RST and 4USTs had the students read from the texts, write on the blackboard, answer questions verbally and then write and in some cases even sometimes role play. Such teachers chose textbooks which encouraged classroom activity.

The teachers who believed in the use of four language modes integrated it with the significance of play and created an atmosphere where the students interacted in small groups on the topic that has been taught. To the students this would be play but to the teacher this is play with an aim because what the students say in the groups during the awarding of marks sticks in their minds longer because they have fresh examples. The 2RTS and 4UST organized their lessons around textbooks with student



activities so that the students participated by involvement in games which the students enjoyed and thus stimulated their vocabulary because of the excited need to communicate. These teachers involved themselves in the life of their students and they got to know where their students' interests lay and in turn used those interests to create dialogues with students and giving them written assignments.

The teachers who used the principle of student ability considered whether the students were bright or weak and would alternate their methods depending on the nature of the students. When students were bright then there was no need to dwell on a subject for a long time and this was the case in USs with bright students where the teacher would simply introduce a topic and let the students dig out the details from their textbooks and then present before the class. In classes where the students were dull like the RS students then the teachers there had to explain and dwell on the same topic for a long time.

The teachers who believed in teaching using a method that was easy chose TCM that came easy to them. These teachers most of the time dominated the class because they did not want to be disturbed planning so many activities for the class. What a teacher believed to be a simple method determined what method he/she used often regardless of whether he/she knew about other more effective methods. The teachers' beliefs about language teaching determined how they approached the subject and what they emphasized in their classrooms.

The major finding was that the teachers' principles determined the method they chose and by observing the teacher teach one could easily tell the principles they had used to select particular teaching methods. For example, the communicative approach is based on the principles advanced by (Freeman Y and Freeman D, 1998) considered to be appropriate for selecting a teaching method. It was due to teachers' set of beliefs/ principles which made them neglect textbooks like Integrated English which emphasized the use of the four language modes in each lesson.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study proved that the principles the teachers used impacted greatly on their students' performance. Looking at the activity charts that were handled in the findings, the schools that used the principle of activity had their students perform highly. The teachers who ensured that students did a lot of activities like composition writing, reading, grammar, comprehension exercises, reading aloud, interacting with the students had many students with good grades at UCE. Even in RS situations teachers who practiced the principle of activity had their students perform highly like in the case of RS1 in UCE 2002 which had one student with a D2, another with C3, four with C4, thirteen with C5 and twenty with C6 grades which were uncommon in RSs because of the many hardships they worked under.

There was no correlation between teachers' years of service and knowledge of suitable principles. Most teachers who had taught for over 8 years did not use suitable principles in selecting teaching methods. They used principles which were convenient to them and in most cases these were TC and not student centred.

The teachers who employed TCM demoralized even the bright students and their performance declined. While the teachers who employed LCM motivated their students and their performance improved even among the academically challenged as observed in figure 4 (Performance relationship between 5 US and 5 RS in 2018 UCE).

Students' ability to pass UCE examinations had previously been attributed to so many other exterior reasons with the exclusion of the mental process of the teacher but according to this research, the teacher's principles are the backbone of all the other exterior factors.

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