



Submission No 109

**Review of Australia's Relationship with the
Countries of Africa**

Name: Associate Professor Helen Vella Bonavita
Associate Dean, International, Faculty of Education
and Arts and ECU International

Organisation: Edith Cowan University

**Submission to the Joint Standing Commission on Foreign Affairs and Trade
public enquiry into Australia's relationship with the countries of Africa.**

Prepared on behalf of ECU International by
Associate Professor Helen Vella Bonavita
Associate Dean, International
Faculty of Education and Arts, and ECU International
Edith Cowan University.

ECU INTERNATIONAL

Joondalup Campus

270 Joondalup Drive,
Joondalup
Western Australia 6027
Telephone (61 8) 6304 2467
Facsimile (61 8) 6304 2116
agents@ecu.edu.au

ABN 54 361 485 361

CRICOS IPC 00279B

This paper speaks to two specific points of the TOR for the Joint Standing Commission on Foreign Affairs and Trade's public enquiry into Australia's relationship with the countries of Africa:

- Cultural, scientific and educational relations and exchanges;
- Development, assistance, co-operation and capacity building;

Background

ECU's relationship with African countries is among the longest standing of any higher education institution in Australia. In addition to attracting over 1425 students from African nations to study on-shore at ECU since 1985 and with over 40% of the current market share in Western Australia the university's educational relations with African countries are well established. In addition to on-shore recruitment of students, ECU has engaged in a range of off-shore course delivery in countries including Mauritius, Seychelles, Kenya and Zambia.

ECU's activities in these countries include off-shore delivery of programmes (educational relations and capacity building), development, assistance and co-operation.

Building capacity in educational delivery: Mauritius and Seychelles

Edith Cowan University commenced taking groups of students to Mauritius for a unique teaching and learning opportunity as part of a fourth year elective in the Bachelor of Education Programme in 1998. Benefits of this programme included two special citizenship projects in 2005 and 2006, with 396kg of books collected by ECU students for distribution by the Rotary Club of Vacoas to schools which lacked English materials and the resources to readily acquire these. The cost to air freight the books to Mauritius was taken up by the High Commission and the Rotary Club of Vacoas .

A further outcome of engagement with Mauritius was the AUSAID funded research project 'A Better Beginning: Building the Foundation for English Communicative Competency in the Beginning Years of Schooling.' The project, which was supported by the Minister of Education and Human Resources and which supported the Ministry's Bridging the Gap programme, aimed to assist with the implementation of a communicative approach to English language teaching in Mauritius schools and ran in 2009 and 2010 (see attached report). The results of the research are currently being written up, and will be the focus of a presentation at the 18th International Conference on Learning [5th – 8th July, 2011 - University of Mauritius]. ECU is continuing to explore further avenues of cooperation with the Mauritius Institute of Education.

Seychelles

ECU has been a long-standing education partner of the Seychelles Government, having worked with Seychellois students in degree and up-skilling programmes for over twelve years.

In 2007 the President of the Republic of the Seychelles, James Michel, announced that the nation was ready to develop a university, and UniSey commenced offering degree courses in October 2009. In January 2010 UniSey assumed the responsibility for the training of teachers in the Seychelles. The National Institute of Education (NIE) was established in 1999 by the Ministry of Education and was responsible for teacher education and curriculum development. NIE has now become the School of Education, UniSey. Teacher education is well established in the Seychelles and those in leadership have sought to build capacity within the country through a range of initiatives including engagement with external partners. ECU will work with UniSey via a Twinning Agreement to deliver two Bachelor of Education programmes (Early Childhood Studies and Primary), and the first cohort of students is about to begin this programme.

The first cohort of students is about to begin this programme and ECU is looking forward to a long and mutually productive relationship with UniSey. It is particularly gratifying to note that many of the Seychellois lecturers on the new programme are themselves ECU graduates, indicative of ECU's long-standing contributions to the intellectual and skilled infrastructure of developing countries.

Off-shore Program Delivery

In addition to the recently commenced programme in the Seychelles ECU currently offers off-shore teaching programmes via partner colleges in Kenya and Zambia. This has enabled students to access Australian standards of undergraduate and postgraduate education within their home countries.

The Australian Studies Institute (AUSI) based in Nairobi is an affiliate company of Navitas Ltd, a company listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. AUSI began operating in Kenya in October 2000, offering only foundation and Diploma programs on behalf of Perth Institute of Business and Technology (PIBT), leading to Bachelor Degrees from Edith Cowan University. It now offers not only the foundation and Diploma programs, but Edith Cowan University Degrees as well.

In 2007 AUSI received its Validation and Authority to Collaborate with Edith Cowan University by the Kenyan Commission for Higher Education. In 2008 the grant of Authority to collaborate with Edith Cowan University, Australia, to deliver the Master of Business Administration was approved by the Commission of Higher Education in Kenya.

Via its partner AUSI, ECU is able to provide Kenyan students to access an Australian standard of higher education while living in their home country, offering three degrees: Bachelor of Business (Marketing), Bachelor of Business (Management) and the Master of Business Administration (International).

Through its partnership with AUSI, ECU has established a strong profile in Kenya and more generally in East Africa. The Vice Chancellor Professor Kerry O. Cox attended AUSI's most recent graduation ceremony, and ECU looks forward to a continuing and productive relationship with this partner institution.

Research

ECU is attracting a growing number of PhD students from western African countries, many of whom have been funded by the Endeavour International Postgraduate Research Scholarships. These scholarships are invaluable in terms of building the infrastructure of the home countries of these students. ECU would support an increase in the number of these scholarships which enable students to return to their home countries and continue working there, off-setting the 'brain drain' from African countries which has been noted in other submissions to this enquiry. ECU has also supported its own postgraduates in African countries; for example for example, Ms Zoe Gibbs, an ECU sports science graduate, has received a scholarship from ECU to carry out her PhD research, with funding provided by the scholarship enabling her to conduct research into the benefits of exercise in treating breast cancer patients. There are currently 80 participants in the trial, which looks at both the effect of varying exercise in the reduction and management of lymphoedema and analyses the physiological changes that occur by varying the start time of exercise in patients undergoing radiotherapy for breast cancer.

The main areas of postgraduate research interest for students from African countries to date has been in education, the creative arts, and health care (as per the example above). ECU has to date over one hundred graduates with Research and Higher Degrees from African countries.

In 2010 the ECU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Kerry Cox, hosted Professor Cheryl de la Rey, President of the University of Pretoria, as the ECU 2010 Distinguished Orator and the Dean of Education at KwaZulu-Natal University, Professor Michael Samuel, conducted seminars at ECU. Colleagues in the School of Education at ECU have research relationships with professors from both universities.

Future Directions

ECU was one of the first universities to realise the potential of the African market, particularly, for example, Zambia, and the University has an African Students Association. The university has drawn together a regional focus group on Africa which has as its aim to draw together individuals from across the faculties who have an interest in that region, or in African communities within Australia for that matter; a recent PhD thesis dealt with the experiences of African refugees within the Australian classroom environment.

Nonetheless, more can be done. In common with the general Australian trend, ECU has looked more towards the Asia Pacific than towards the African continent in recent years, and the rising cost of study in Australia, the strength of the Australian dollar, and the changing visa requirements (depending on the country) for entry into Australia have all had their impact on student recruitment. ECU recognises the need to support and celebrate its students, both past and present. ECU is currently committed to developing its alumni network further, as well as its ongoing commitment to improving its current international student experience.

Potential areas of activity within the African countries for ECU include capacity building in educational and healthcare infrastructure, whether in partnership with AUSAID or with industry partners. For a meaningful presence in Africa for Australia as a whole, however, there needs to be sustained, coordinated and long-term commitment on the part of the Australian government (and Australian universities) to build the profile of African studies in Australia and the visibility of issues

relating to Africa. There are 54 African nations; the ABC has one African correspondent, based in Johannesburg. This may be considered representative of the low profile of African studies that has been noted in other submissions to this enquiry, and which will need to change if Australia's relationship with Africa is to develop in a coordinated and sustained fashion.

ECU - Training and Research Project, Mauritius (2009 – 2010)
*Funded by the Australian Governments (AusAID) program
to a value of approx. \$92 000*

A Better Beginning: Building the Foundation for English Communicative Competency in the Beginning Years of Schooling.

The project was a joint project between Edith Cowan University (ECU) and Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE). It was coordinated by Edith Cowan University. The project was implemented in Mauritius with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources (M of E, C & HR) and other local authorities and the Australian High Commission in Mauritius. It involved some 16 schools – principals, Year 1 and Pre-primary teachers and school superintendents – from around the island.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project had 2 components

- (1) Teacher training (teaching English as a second or additional language) using the communicative approach to language teaching – a significant amount of the funds were also used to provide the resources and materials for teachers to effectively implement the teaching approach. The training comprised one full time week in 2009 and a follow up 2 days in 2010. It was for a group of 50 pre-primary and Standard I teachers as well as a select group of school inspectors and Primary curriculum writers in Mauritius. The teachers and schools were nominated by the Mauritius Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources who liaised with school principals (via district superintendents to secure their involvement). The schools were chosen from different districts and different social and cultural backgrounds. There were 4 **ZEP** schools involved (schools from zones of educational priority). The training was carried out by Janet Fellowes, ECU with support from lecturers from the Mauritius Institute of Education.
- (2) Research into teacher efficacy and English language teaching in Mauritius. (refer research information at the end of this document). The research team was Janet Fellowes from ECU and Associate Professor Om Varma (and others) from Mauritius Institute of Education.
- (3) An English language teaching framework– *A Better Beginning* - that can be used by teachers in Mauritius (and other schools) for the purpose of developing children's competency with spoken English is in the process of being developed.

NOTE: The AusAID funding was for the sole purpose of the training and the provision of resources and materials.

The teaching approach was implemented in Mauritius' schools from term 3, 2009.

Rationale:

- The project, where a strong focus is on the provision of teaching resources is designed to provide support in an area which is a current educational priority in Mauritius. The 2006 *English Language Profiling Report for Mauritius*, by the British Council, suggests that Mauritius' students are not acquiring a satisfactory level of competency

in English, particularly in the expressive modes of speaking and writing. It also suggests that English language needs to be more present in the daily lives of students and students need to be provided with greater opportunity to use English in the classroom and the home.

- This project aimed to directly support the pedagogical development of English language teaching staff through training and professional development and the provision of resources for implementing new pedagogy. The '*English Language Profiling Report for Mauritius*' proposes that teachers of English at primary and secondary levels are provided with training and professional development in regards approaches to English language teaching.
- The Big Books, the sets of small Reading Books, the English Language Board Games and the Stimulus Picture Sets are four foundation resources used by Australian teachers of students for whom English is an additional or second language. Their use as a teaching resource, when combined with appropriate teaching strategies, is central to the achievement of various aspects of English communicative competence.

Benefits:

- *Provision of models of the target language* – Grammar and vocabulary are presented to students through the natural language context of the story book. The sentence structures and the vocabulary are presented at a level appropriate to, but just above, the present competency of the learner.
- *Repeated exposure to the English language* - The books are designed to be read repeatedly over time, thereby providing the repetition of the target language crucial to students' learning of the language.
- *A natural context for hearing, using and comprehending language* - Understanding of the language of the text is supported through the illustrations / visuals. Language is being learned but not to the detriment of understanding.
- *Balanced and appropriate pedagogical approaches* - The various resources lend themselves to the application of both teacher-directed and child-centred teaching methods and activities which are based on sound language learning theoretical principles. Students' development in the modes of speaking and writing (expressive) and listening and reading (receptive) is enhanced.
- *Home practice and English language use beyond the classroom* - The sets of small books can be used for further language input as children can take them home to read or read them daily to the teacher. Additional language activities can be implemented where the language presented in the books is applied to an alternative language situation requiring students to communicate with others.
- *Proven success* - The work of ECU students teaching English in Mauritian schools for two weeks each year has demonstrated the effectiveness of the resources and associated teaching strategies in teaching English language. The two weeks (2 hours per day) has always resulted in significant progress in students' communicative English competence.

- *Student motivation and engagement* - Students are motivated to participate in the learning activities using the resources because of the motivational and relevant stories and associated topics and the visual appeal of the resources. The child-centred nature of the learning experiences provides further motivation for students.
- *Relaxed and communicative learning context* - The Big Books and associated language learning activities provide for;
 - An anxiety free learning situation.
 - Language teaching that is interactive and child centred.
 - Opportunity for students to hear and see the target language.
 - Visuals and other cues which support comprehension.
 - The contextual teaching of the elements of language such as vocabulary and grammar.
 - Functional use of the English language.

These features are particularly beneficial to the Mauritius population where many students have little opportunity to hear and use English and where students may often lack the motivation to learn and use English.

- *Communicative competency is central* - English language board games provide extensive opportunities for students to use English language in communicative situations. The nature of a game is such that, language needs to be used in order to achieve the purpose. Games are a natural and motivational social situation for children.

The Mauritius Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources will ensure that cascade training is organized for other teachers of Standard I by the teachers who have been trained. The MIE and the MCA will be requested to assist.

As indicated by His Excellency, the High Commission of Australia, the funds for the project will be provided, in total, by the Australian Government. A breakdown of costs related to resources, consultancy, training provision was completed by ECU.

Funding: Australian Government AUSAID scheme; \$92,925 AUD (+ GST)

About the Research

Title: Implementing a Communicative Approach to Language Teaching in Mauritius Pre-primary and Standard One Classrooms

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to determine the opinions and beliefs of Mauritius teachers about the teaching of English language to Pre-primary and Year 1 children in the Mauritian educational context. The study particularly aims to identify teachers' beliefs about the efficacy of the communicative approach to Language teaching (CALT) for facilitating the English language development of children in the Mauritius teaching context. Additionally, it is the aim of the study to examine the features of the teaching context in Mauritius and the characteristics of the participant teachers in light of their influence on teacher beliefs.

RESEARCHERS: The research project is a joint project between Edith Cowan University and Mauritius Institute of Education. The research team consist of Ms Janet Fellowes from

Edith Cowan University and Associate Professor Om Varma and 3 other staff (2 x English Dept & 1 x Education) from the Mauritius Institute of Education

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What do Pre-primary and Standard 1 (Year 1) teachers in Mauritius believe to be the most effective way to teach English language to children in Mauritius schools?
- Do pre-primary and Year 1 teachers in Mauritius believe that the CALT program is an appropriate and effective approach to the teaching of English language in Mauritius? Why? Why not?
- What do teachers perceive to be the factors that impact on their ability to implement a CALT approach to the teaching of English language in Mauritius PP / Standard 1 classrooms?
- What are the features of the Mauritius teaching context and the characteristics of the teachers (refer chart) and how do they impact on the teachers’ beliefs about the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL) in Mauritius classrooms?

Examining the Features of the Mauritius Education context and Characteristics of Mauritius Teachers of PP / Standard One:

<i>Features of the Mauritius Teaching Context</i>	<i>Characteristics of the Teacher</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ministry’s policy</i> • <i>School policies and practice</i> • <i>Leadership and management systems</i> • <i>Socioeconomic status of schools’ families</i> • <i>School results in national English (and other curriculum) exams.</i> • <i>Parent expectations</i> • <i>School and classroom resources</i> • <i>Time allocation to language teaching</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Age and Gender</i> • <i>Qualifications and Years of teaching experience</i> • <i>Current teaching position</i> • <i>Present approach to teaching language</i> • <i>Belief in students’ ability to learn English</i> • <i>Attitude to participation in the CALT Professional Development program.</i> • <i>Teacher beliefs about the effectiveness of present teaching method (grammar based / performance approach) and about perceived effectiveness of the CALT program (social based / mastery approach)</i> • <i>Teacher efficacy - re ability to promote students’ learning in English</i> • <i>Teacher Efficacy – re ability to promote students’ learning in general</i>

PARTICIPANTS:

- 12 pre-primary teachers and 16 Standard 1 teachers
- School Inspectors (number not yet determined) and curriculum writers
- Principals (Head Teachers) of schools

NOTE: The results of the research are presently being written up.

