

Reflection on English Textbook in the Kenyan classroom

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Abstract

An English textbook plays a crucial role in a secondary school level classroom in Kenya. It gives newly recruited tutors proper guidelines in the English course and learning activities. It enhances continuity and consistency in the presentation of content and presents students with a sense of system and progress. Further, textbooks play a crucial role in modelling the required values, social behavior and norm; it provides a lens through which the world is portrayed thus acting as a potential medium of socialization. English is an important language in Kenya and the world at large. Languages textbooks especially the English ones assist learners in attaining communicative competence. English language textbooks play a central role in teaching and learning in many developing countries where English is either a subject and/ or medium of instruction. English is one of the languages offered in the Kenyan secondary school curriculum, and it is the medium of instruction for all the other subjects offered (except for other languages). Textbooks are critical materials used to support the implementation of the curriculum. The textbooks provide input in the form of explanations, texts and activities to simplify educational activities that appear complex. Specifically, the linguistic items and the visual images used in the presentation of the content are key in ensuring production of quality English textbooks. Again, textbooks are agents of effective and long lasting change that shape learners' mindsets, perceptions, and attitudes in their later life. Textbooks are crucial tools in as far as the conveyance of direct or indirect meanings regarding the way happenings produced in society is concerned. Specifically the language textbooks are influential instruments, which present indelible experiences to the learners. Consequently, it is important to think about this powerful tool in the Kenyan classroom.

Key words: *textbook, English, curriculum, reflection,*

1.0 Background information

Kenyan government is committed to ensuring that its learners get quality textbooks to enhance quality education. Textbooks play a key role in shaping the social skills, values, and attitudes essential to achieving the curriculum goals. Education and quality education is been given much prominence because of the key role that it plays in the learners' lives. Notably, education is organized in form of lessons in a classroom, is an ever-changing interaction among teacher, materials, and learners. This interaction has to be managed in order to provide the structure and predictability that are necessary in making the event socially tolerable to the parties that are involved. The management also enables learners and teachers to know where the lesson fits into the general pattern of the lessons' structured pattern, to save teachers and learners work, and to give legitimate external parties access to, and possibly influence upon, what takes place in the classroom. The very fact that a lesson is a dynamic interaction, therefore, leads not to a need for maximum flexibility, but to a need for a predictable and visible structure both within the lesson and across lessons. The textbook, is the best means of providing this structure.

The teaching and learning process, as a shared experience with already predetermined objectives requires a blue print or a map to achieve the desired outcomes. There are only three places where this map can reside—in the teacher's head, in a written syllabus (produced by external authorities or mediated between teacher and students), or in the form of pre-planned materials (that is, a textbook). If the map were within the teachers mind, no one else would access it. On the other hand, when the map is in the form of a syllabus, it would be accessed more but only by the experts who understand the code in which the syllabus is framed, even though the syllabus lack the actual content of the lessons structure. A map, therefore, needs to be as full and as accessible as possible and this characteristic can be achieved by the textbook. In the Kenyan context, textbooks continue to dominate in the packaging of the curriculum and the government is committed to producing quality textbooks.

Kenya initiated educational publishing to ensure that quality textbooks are published. Educational publishing in Kenya has evolved through the years to the current educational publishing context. The first textbook policy was put in place five years after independence, 1968. The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) was established as a curriculum body in 1968 by an Education Act. The KIE put in place subject panels, came up with materials, and published them through parastatal companies, namely the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF) and the Kenya Literature Bureau (KLB). The Ministry of Education (MoE) made a recommendation of textbooks to be bought under the Kenya School Equipment Scheme (KSES), whose responsibility was procurement and distribution of books. Chavaka (1992) explains that change from the 7-4-2-3 to the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985 brought life to the publishing industry but books from private publishers were discredited on the basis of being costly and irrelevant to the school situation in Kenya. The MoE, at last, mandated the KIE to write the required textbooks. The institute organised writing workshops, which involved bringing together teachers with no prior training or experience in writing, with the instruction to 'produce a manuscript' for a specific subject within a stipulated time. The manuscripts which were produced were passed on to state publishing houses with the direction to 'produce a book,' and in stipulated time. These books were to become the official textbooks for schools while books from commercial publishers were relegated to supplementary material or teacher reference.

Kiai (2012) advances that the 1998 National Policy of Textbook Publishing, Procurement and Supply became fruitful in 2002 when the curriculum was reviewed leading to high enrolment in primary schools in 2003, as education at this level was declared 'free'. This move demanded new and higher quantities of learning materials. Commercial publishers engaged in materials development, while KIE's mandate was limited to materials evaluation and recommendation for approval of a maximum of six books per subject to the MoE. Approved materials are captured in the 'Approved List of Textbooks' and other Instructional Materials for ECDE, Primary Schools and Teacher Training Colleges, an annual publication of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Schools would then decide and choose the textbooks which best suited their teaching and learning needs since books would not be classified as 'mandatory' or 'supplementary'. The policy also intended to promote high-quality textbooks and enhanced reading culture. This textbook policy has been in place until 2017, when a re-evaluation of the existing approved school textbooks was conducted by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), which was established by the Kenyan Government in 2013 under the Act of Parliament number 4 of 2013 as the successor of the KIE.

Before the re-evaluation exercise, schools were free to choose and buy textbooks based on a catalogue of approved textbooks prepared by KICD on behalf of the MoE. Each school made purchases using funds allocated to them through a specific votehead earmarked in the school capitation grant. While this process of textbook acquisition enabled schools to control which books to use, the money used to buy books by schools in Kenya was quite high compared to other Sub Saharan African countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Namibia, and Rwanda. The re-evaluation sought to achieve a 1: 1 student- textbook ratio, a goal that had not previously been met. Migosi (2017) observes that 'one of the four main components of Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQIP). The SEQIP is a nationwide project aimed at ironing out major challenges in the achievement of quality education among them poor quality Science, Mathematics and Language education at the secondary level. Beneficiaries of the project would be secondary subject teachers of the three subjects, county and sub-county officials, MoE technical staff, KICD, Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Kenya National Examination Council(KNEC). The project would be implemented by MoE state department of Basic Education, a Project Steering Committee (PSC) and the Directorate of Project Coordination and Delivery (DPCAD).

One of the components of SEQIP is to improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that textbooks used in Kenyan secondary schools are available. One of the areas that contribute to poor learning outcomes is the availability of textbooks'. Under SEQIP, more textbooks would be made available in English and Mathematics in forms one, two, three, and four.

2.0 Why the English textbook?

Kenya has more than 70 indigenous languages (termed local languages), and two official languages, Kiswahili and English. In many nations where English is an official language and language of instruction, which includes former colonies of British in Asia and Africa, students and pupils have a tendency of using English in specific spheres, specifically school, as most conversation away from learning institutions is in the native languages. This scenario applies in the Kenyan context. Official educational policy states that the foundation three years of schooling (Class One to Three), should be in the mother tongue, or the indigenous language spoken in the respective catchment areas where the schools are located; and that in Class Four,

English is used as the medium of instruction (Nabea, 2009). English is one of the teaching subjects in secondary schools in Kenya; it is one of the compulsory subject-all students take the subject. "English as a medium of instruction in Kenyan schools is indeed a very important subject both in our curriculum and as a service subject" (English Language Syllabus 8-4-4, 1994:45). It is the latter statement, which underlines the function of English Language in the system of education. The purposes are varied, beginning with "the school leaver would need good English in an enormous range of technicalised, commercialized and daily affairs in the Kenyan and International environment". Further, "English is there ...to facilitate debates and discussions amongst many African states" (Eshiwani, 1990:19).

English like all other foreign languages that are official languages is taught and learnt in Kenya to achieve several objectives, which include: (i) To nurture and grow the learner's intellectual powers. (ii) To increase the learner's personal culture by reading literature and philosophy. (iii) To increase the learners' understanding about how language works. (iv) To teach the learner to learn a language so that he can do research. (v) To enhance the learners' understanding of worldwide issues. (Ministry of Education 1994). English as a subject influences students because all the learners are taught therefore has an impact on many people who go through the Kenya 8.4.4 education. The learning and teaching materials used in secondary schools are textbooks and in this case the English textbooks. Teachers and students perceive textbooks as sources of authority.

Textbook play an essential and incontrovertible part in the day to day teaching and learning English, and that the usefulness of the textbook tend to be substantial cycles of change. The English textbook has thrived since the colonial times. Many more textbooks have continued to be published and distributed every year by the government. Strikingly, each latest generation sets of textbooks is more compendious than the previous ones. English Language plays a vital role in the language situation in Kenya. In addition, English is the official language of communication as well as the medium of instruction in Kenya primary four through secondary education, colleges and universities (Okwara, Shiundu & Indoshi, 2009). This means that English is a subject across the entire school curriculum. Moreover, English as an international language is one of the leading media for communication in international conferences and meetings. Consequently, those who master the language are likely to reap many academic, social and professional benefits (Othuo & Tella, 2011).

3.0 Textbooks during Pandemics

Textbooks especially the English languages textbooks become the only learning tools during pandemics especially in areas where communication technology has not been embraced After closure of schools following, the confirmation of the first case of COVID 19 in Kenya, few learners who could afford the required gadgets and power embraced remote and digital learning. In 2019, Kenya had approximate 3.26 million secondary school students. When schools were closed in response to COVID-19, the education system turned to electronic information and communication technologies (ICT)—internet, laptops, smartphones, and even earlier broadcast technologies like radio and TV, to deliver the curriculum. Few learners who could afford the required gadgets and power embraced remote and digital learning. However, most learners were excluded from online education due to challenges of access to internet, information communication and technology and access to electricity. Bell, Cardoso, Giraldo, El Makkouk, Mizunoya ... (2020) and Buchbinder (2020) established inequalities in electronic

abilities and access to digital and remote learning. In the family units, which had smart cell phones, it was not possible to necessitate digital learning since the parents and guardians had to attend to their daily routines outside home because not all could work from home. Accordingly, the learners could not access the smartphones. Another reason would have been that some parents could not entrust their children with their phones as they protected them from cyber bullying and pornographic materials.

To bridge the gap, textbooks came in handy. However, the negative effect of closures was especially severe in areas, where textbooks are often the main teaching tool and significant proportion of students (most of the times the majority) had their own copies. In areas where learners had textbooks at home, tutors would use voice calls, WhatsApp messages, or announcements on the radio to instruct parents and guardians on the pages the students should cover and at what time. Differently, in some cases, teachers had given assignments to students that were derived from textbooks and the textbooks were the main points of reference in doing the assignments.

4.0 The place of English textbooks in the Kenyan classroom

Textbooks play an important role in almost any school system in the world, representing a useful resource for both teachers as course designers and students acquiring knowledge. Textbooks are of great value and effect in the process of teaching and learning. According to Zohrabi, Sabouri and Behroozian (2012), textbooks are considered an essential component of any ELT course so that the use of ELT published materials is more widespread than ever. They serve teachers with guidelines concerning syllabi, teaching methodologies, and the materials to be taught. Here, care should be taken in choosing the best suitable text for a particular context. Textbooks are valuable in each language classroom, and they have several roles in English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum and help the process of language teaching and learning. A textbook has a virtual role in teaching and learning of English. According to Ahour and Ahmadi (2012), "textbooks are the main sources that can convey the knowledge and information to the learners in an easy and organized way" (p.176). As noted by Zohrabi, Sabouri, and Kheradmand (2014), "textbooks are one of the elements that may advance or try to prevent students based on their materials. They provide a kind of support to teachers and learners. Textbooks provide learners a kind of consistence"(p. 95). They have an essential influence in the teaching process. ELT textbooks have key major function in the present discussion. Sheldon (1988) states that 'a textbook represents the visible heart of the ELT curriculum in the classroom.'

English textbooks are an important constituent of curriculum and the system of education as they bring about uniformity in the Kenyan classrooms. The English textbook determines the components' and method of learning by controlling the contents, the method and the procedures of learning. Therefore, all the students in secondary schools in Kenya are exposed to the same linguistic content. In this sense, languages textbooks bring about uniformity in the Kenyan classroom. Following textbook re-evaluation the MoE has been managing the procurement of textbooks since January 2018. The MoE through KICD invited all publishers', whose textbooks are in the current catalogue to resubmit the proposal with revised unit prices, including book production and distribution costs. Publishers were also invited to present new books for review. The best-evaluated book based on content, quality and price per subject and grade was selected as the respective course book. Starting January 2018, the MoE, through

publishing firms, has been distributing enough textbooks to all the public secondary schools in Kenya. Currently all learners in public schools are provided with one textbook per subject from among the approved. This policy ensures that all students in the Kenyan secondary schools classroom consume similar linguistic content.

In addition, English textbooks enhance the practicability of some skills right from the classroom. English as a subject imparts listening, speaking, writing and reading skills. Most of these skills are applied outside the classroom many years after graduating to institutions of higher learning. Some of the practical writing skills, which are useful, are; writing application letters, which provides learners with skills that may be useful later in life as the learners are looking for jobs especially when they are required to do so through an application letter. Learners who are ultimately employed as police officers, nurses, doctors, can apply further, report-writing skills; auditors among others are expected to make reports by making entries in daily occurrence books and specific reports involving their nature and conditions of working. Speech writing skills are substantial in circumstances when the learners are called upon to address a certain audience. Recipe and shopping list writing are practical skills that the learners can make use in their day-to-day living.

English textbooks provide the primary language input in the Kenyan classroom. This role is substantial as textbooks play a central role in English reading lessons especially in areas where information technology has not been embraced. Kasule (2011) highlights that a reading activity consists of several constituents, but textbooks and other materials of instructions used by the teachers of English are the most substantial. Kiai & Maroko (2013) advance that the textbook predominantly turn out to be the actual course of study which permeates the endured culture of teachers and learners as they interact during their classes. Nunan (1999) adds that a textbook is the key component in ELT and it is impossible for a class to do without it. In Kenya, teachers use textbooks to meet curriculum needs. Richards (2001), further notes that textbooks are essential components in many language programs since they provide the primary language input that learners receive and practice in the classrooms, especially during lessons in most of the institutions. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) note that textbooks play a crucial function in society by modelling the required values, social behavior and norms.

Textbooks provide a lens through which the world is portrayed, thus acting as a potential medium of socialization. These materials become the “‘real curriculum’ that is filtered through the lived culture of teachers and students as they go about their daily lives in the classroom” (Apple 1989, p.282 as cited in Kiai, 2012, p. 33). Additionally, textbooks are ordered set of instructions consisting of the curriculum content that promotes teaching (Tomlinson, 2011). Textbooks facilitate timely syllabus coverage, ensuring that learners are involved in emerging issues and suitable language is used. Therefore, the textbooks should be written in relevant language, provide for learners’ participation and gauge their discrepancies in their enthusiasm levels.

Textbooks are central and influential tools in teaching and learning that help in molding covetable attitudes in learners. Learners’ perceptions about the world and the future are substantially influenced by language that is commonly represented in an English textbook in the Kenyan context. Textbooks remain the most multifaceted instruments of enculturation in the society. English textbooks provide crucial information in teaching and at the same time are powerful basis on which images are formed. The content in the textbooks shape attitudes by

transmitting a society's way of life. The manner in which women and girls, men and boys are represented in textbooks contribute to the type of images that students and pupils pick up about females and males in the society. Textbooks are thus crucial tools in the teaching and learning process for they are primary carriers of the content that is disseminated to the learners at different levels of learning. They play a substantial role in the preparation of the future actors in society. That is, (the learners by molding their perceptions and providing for them an overall worldview of gender roles and the society in general.

Further, the English language used in the secondary schools English textbooks configures the learners' perception of females and males and the relations that exist in the sexes. It mirrors and propagates the perceptions in the culture and what the society expects of every gender. It suggests who we should be as females and males thus people are informed of culturally prevalent traditional engendered roles and that the content in English textbooks for secondary schools accounts for this awareness, which influences the views of the learners concerning themselves and their perceptions on gender. The English textbook is an important means of fulfilling the range of needs that emerge from the classroom and its wider context. Education is a complicated process, which needs to be simplified. The textbook creates a sense of order in a potentially chaotic environment. Textbooks give visible and practicable framework around which the many forces and demands of the teaching—learning process can cohere to provide the basis of security and accountability that is necessary for purposeful action in the classroom. This vital management role takes on even greater importance in the insecure context of change. Rather than denigrating and trying to do away with textbooks, we should recognize their importance in making the lives of teachers and learners easier, more secure and fruitful, and seek a fuller understanding of their use in order to exploit their full potential as agents of smooth and effective change.

English textbooks are central and influential tools in teaching and learning that help in molding covetable attitudes in learners. They remain the most multifaceted instruments of enculturation in the society. Textbooks provide crucial information in teaching and at the same time are powerful basis on which images are formed. These images may bring change in character and behavior that depending on the knowledge and skills that are imparted based on the subject matter. Poetry and comprehension content provides a basis on which students can be transformed from weak and evil young men to strong and virtuous leaders in the society. Most often than not the passages portray characters from a wanting level to a level where they end up being transformed to likeable and dependable characters. Such passages when brought in the classroom in form of textbooks may help change some learners involved in questionable activities like drug and substance abuse. In this sense therefore the languages textbook is invaluable in the Kenyan classroom.

Further, some reasonable study skills contained in the languages textbooks may bring change of perception of academics by the learners. Summary study skills enhance the learners understanding on the other subjects especially when they are required to read and condense the content for easier revision as they prepare for examinations. Again, some skills as note making and note taking may assist the students during lessons for lesson involvement and grasping most of the content delivered in other subjects. Additionally, some content in some sections of the textbooks is based on realia and facts. For instance- comprehensions on realities on calamities such as famine, drought, war, outbreak of some deadly diseases such as polio, cerebral malaria, COVID-19 among others. Other passages are based on scientific

developments inventions and innovations as developing vaccines, atomic bombs as a terroristic tool, organ transplants, cloning as a possible way of procreation and real phenomena such as climate, global warming, managing lifestyle diseases through diet, exercise and drugs to subdue the disease causing organisms and the ozone layer. Therefore, the languages textbooks bring ‘the world’ in the classroom. This particular content helps the students to understand the world even without interacting with the environment one on one since it mirrors the society.

The structure provided by the textbook saves the teacher work and helps him or her to manage the class. The English textbook is structured in units which consist of specific content to be covered on comprehension, grammar, study skills, writing and listening and speaking sections. This structuring frees the teacher to concentrate attention on coping with new content and procedures. Furthermore, since English subject is taught on a daily basis, the textbook is portable and permanent, and can therefore provide constant support. Availability of languages textbook means that teachers are not spending their time sourcing for materials and producing visual aids, but are free to concentrate on planning the lessons and understanding the subject matter. A textbook, which is well structured in terms of grammar and vocabulary, present, and offer some balance of the skills taught and gives teachers easy time to prepare and deliver lessons. This results in better-planned lessons, a more creative methodology, and more useful materials adaptation and supplementation. The textbook can provide as complete a picture as possible. Through structured scripts, (particularly when supported by a teacher's guide) it can show as explicitly as possible what to do, and because it is immediate to the actual context of use, there is no problem of transfer from training context, such as a seminar, to the classroom.

Lessons on grammar of the English language are crucial for the learners in and outside the classroom. For one, use of correct grammar enables learners to express themselves well and coherently when writing creative compositions and essays based on the set text in the examination. In addition, grammar is also important in responding to the functional writing question which is tested in paper one. Most importantly, in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination question four, which is examined in paper two. In this question, the grammatical competence of the student is tested. This section is awarded fifteen marks. Grammar is also tested in the comprehension and excerpts questions. The grammar learned in the classroom is useful away from the classroom as it enables learners to choose proper words when speaking for effective communication.

Listening and speaking skills learned in the languages classroom enable the learner to communicate effectively through proper articulation of sounds and pronunciation of words including proper stress and intonation of words. Further, the learner is also able to be a good team player following the acquirey of skills such as, conventions of conversations, active listening, role-playing, hot seating, negotiation and discussion, giving and receiving instructions, debating, proper use of non-verbal cues in communication. Study kills like notification of minutes, writing speech, letters of application, writing messages of condolences, thankyou notes and congratulatory messages, minutes writing, writing invitations, advertisements, shopping lists, letters of apology, filling forms and telephone messages. All these skills are practical in life and the learners can use them in their day-to-day interactions. As they are contained in the textbook, the students can read and read them both in class and outside the class since the content is contained in the textbooks, which are readily available to the learner

In some classrooms, the English textbooks uphold the tutors' instruction in the ELT teaching and learning process. Principally, teachers believe that textbooks provide the basis for the content allotted for scheduled lessons, for the balancing abilities to be taught, besides providing the required practice of language that the learners need in the classroom. For the ESL learners, the textbook becomes the major source of contact they have with the language apart from the input provided by the teacher. Prior to selecting a textbook, educators should thoroughly examine the program curriculum. If the goals and curriculum of the program are clear and well defined, the parallels with certain textbooks may become obvious. For example, if one of the goals of the program is to give students an opportunity to interact with authentic texts, then books that use articles written for native English speakers would be appropriate. If the program focuses on developing reading fluency, books designed to support the development of reading skills would be appropriate. According to Gretchen (2003) research, the textbook has a process for developing curriculum that is based on a needs assessment of learners and includes participation and input from other stakeholders. The curriculum and instructional materials are easily accessible, up to date, appropriate for learners, culturally sensitive, oriented to the language and literacy needs of the learners, and suitable for a variety of learning styles. Sample Measures for Instructional Materials: They are up to date (e.g. published within the past

Textbooks provide source of learning during leisure times. Holmquist (2006) a textbook, if well-designed, is a basis for learners' exploration, learning, and enjoyment. Course textbooks should be learner-centered to nurture the minds of students, without enhancing or strengthening stereotypes and gender biases. Textbooks aid learners in mastering the languages content in a leisurely way. Students can recite poems during their free time. During such times, they end learning on their own in a flexible and relaxed environment as they take a break out of the confining classroom.

6.0 Conclusion

The influence of new technologies notwithstanding, languages textbooks will certainly keep on playing a key part in teaching language and providing a practical means for tutors and students. Quality textbooks satiate to transform the guideposts in the formal government syllabus into an invaluable source of content, texts, and activities, which are beyond the capacities of most teachers to develop on their own. The use of textbooks should not be interpreted as a reflection of a deficiency on the part of the teacher, any more than the use of computer-based materials would be so regarded. Textbooks should be considered as one among various resources from which tutors draw upon in coming up with productive lessons. However teachers should be trained on how to adapt and modify textbooks as well as in utilizing original materials and in coming up with their own teaching materials. Again, the government should make immediate, major, and perhaps sacrificial investments in textbooks to ensure that all learners have textbooks.

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