

Challenges in Selection and Utilization of Approved Secondary Kiswahili Course Books in Kenya

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kenya launched the multiple-choice textbook policy to be used in selection of course books and other instructional materials in public primary and secondary schools as well as colleges. This was in conformity with globalization of the textbook market which sought to enhance competition in the textbook publishing industry. The result was a list of six approved textbook titles per subject in the school curriculum that would be published in the "Orange Book" annually. Henceforth, public primary and secondary schools are required to select one textbook title per subject which then becomes the course book to be used in teaching of the respective subject. This paper examines the challenges encountered by teachers of Kiswahili in selection and utilization of the approved textbooks as course books for teaching of Kiswahili in public secondary schools in Kenya. Discussions in this paper are based on findings of research done in Webuye Division of present day Bungoma County in Kenya. The study was guided by Robert Gagne's Conditions of learning Theory. A survey design was used. Data was collected by interviewing eleven head teachers using a semi structured interview. A questionnaire was used to collect data from eleven teachers of Kiswahili selected randomly from eleven public secondary schools. Findings show that the multiple-choice policy guidelines were not adhered to by teachers; most teachers of Kiswahili were not conversant with policy guidelines regarding course book selection at school level; some Kiswahili textbooks were selected as course books even though they were not listed in the "Orange book"; some selected Kiswahili course books contained insufficient content in oral literature and sociolinguistics and some teachers used the course book as the sole teaching resource in Kiswahili without reference to the syllabus or any other reference book(s). The study recommended: capacity building workshops to sensitize teachers on the selection criteria and proper utilization of textbooks in classroom instruction; regular and thorough monitoring of implementation of the multiple choice school textbook policy to ensure recommended course book: learner ratios are achieved in public secondary schools in Kenya.

Key Words: Course Books, Selection Criteria, Kiswahili Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Course books refer to publications that contain content per subject taught in the school syllabus; which are intended to be used in the teaching and learning of the respective subject. They constitute the bulk of school textbooks, which include reference books, set books and supplementary leaders. In Kenya, course books play a key role in classroom instruction since they are the main learning resource. The first part of this paper discusses the role of textbooks, from which course books are selected, to be used in classroom instruction. Next is a discussion on the research findings concerning implementation of the multiple-choice textbook policy in classroom instruction with a focus on the challenges encountered by teachers of Kiswahili at secondary school level. Finally, recommendations are given to address the challenges.

Background to the Study

Globalization in the education sector ushered in competition in the textbook publishing industry in Kenya. The multiple-choice textbook policy was introduced as a paradigm shift from previous state monopoly in production and distribution of instructional materials for schools. Under the Kenya Schools Equipment Scheme (KSES) the Ministry of Education, through their semi autonomous governmental agencies, namely, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF) dominated the publication and distribution of instructional materials to schools, leaving little room for competition from private publishers and other book publishing companies. According to the guidance report released by the Department of International Development (DFID) regarding the policy and practice of provision of teaching and learning materials, state owned programs for provision of instructional

materials in Sub-Saharan Africa collapsed due to mismanagement. It is argued in the report that the quality of textbooks produced then was low in terms of page layout, illustrations and readability.

In Kenya, textbooks supplied by the KSES were unevenly distributed to schools and this further challenged learning. The chemical composition of paper used, caliper, opacity and brightness were inadequate. Teachers at primary and secondary schools complained of school textbooks that were poorly bound with covers that were not thread-sewn onto the book blocks, let alone being scored or even hinged. Such textbooks had very short life spans in the hands of learners. These complaints were not taken into account in Kenya, partly due to underfunding of the KSES or complacency that was characteristic of state monopoly in textbook publication. Indeed, there were no mechanisms in place to enhance quality assurance in publication of school textbooks.

It was therefore inevitable that KSES collapsed in 1988. Parents were compelled to buy textbooks for learners under the cost sharing program, which was championed by the wave of global Structural Adjustment Programs. The MoE, through the Koech Report, proposed radical changes in the education sector regarding publication and provision of school textbooks (Republic of Kenya, 1999). One of the recommendations was that the KICD was to be exempted from publishing school textbooks so as to concentrate on developing syllabuses and guidelines for production of instructional materials for schools and colleges, other than universities. Preparation of instructional materials was to be done by private publishing companies and multinational publishing companies through competitive bidding. The Koech Report also proposed a review of the school curriculum at primary and secondary school levels.

The KICD would vet and approve six textbook titles per subject per class in the primary and secondary school curricula. This is the multiple-choice textbook policy referred to in this paper. An official list of approved textbooks and other instructional materials in the document known as the —Orange Book would be published annually and be distributed to all public schools and colleges in Kenya; to serve as the official catalogue for selection of course books and instructional materials. Subsequently, the Government of Kenya launched ‘Education for All’ in public primary schools in 2003 and Tuition Waiver on education for public secondary schools in 2008 (Kenya Education Sector Support Program, 2005-2010). It is through the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP) that the government decided to finance the purchase of textbooks and other instructional materials for all public primary and secondary schools in Kenya, thus underscoring the importance of course books in the teaching and learning process.

Based on the background of government policy to fund provision of all text books including course books, the questions that underpinned this research were: after the government launched the tuition waiver policy in secondary schools and begun funding the purchase of instructional materials, what criteria did teachers of Kiswahili use to select suitable course books at secondary school level? Were the selected course books appropriate for the teaching of Kiswahili at classroom level in accordance with the objectives of the syllabus? How did the teachers of Kiswahili use the selected Kiswahili language course books in class? In order to adequately respond to these questions, it is important that definitions and literature review of various aspects relating to the role and use of textbooks and course books in the instructional process are provided.

The Role of Textbooks in Kiswahili Instruction

Textbooks can be defined as printed instructional materials written by subject experts, which contain carefully and professionally selected subject content that is meant for instruction at a given level of learning. Instructional materials refer to any resource that is deliberately used to enhance learning in the classroom. These include: audio, audio-visual, print, electronic and digital media. They also include real objects and resource persons. Textbooks, which are part of print media, can be categorized into three groups, namely: course books, reference books and supplementary readers. Course books refer to the subject textbooks that are selected to be used in the teaching and learning of a specific subject such as Kiswahili, History or Mathematics at a specific grade and level of education. In the multiple-choice textbook policy, a school selects one subject course book from a list of six approved titles. The other five textbook titles could be purchased to be used for further reading or references. Reference books could also include textbooks with a wide range of information and knowledge such as: dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, bibles, or textbooks related to general subject areas such as language, science and liberal arts. Supplementary readers, on the other hand comprise literary fiction and non-fiction books such as

story books, anthologies of short stories and poetry, drama and novels. The main focus in this paper is on course books and their importance in the Kiswahili instructional process at secondary school level in Kenya.

Course books are a central instructional resource because they are affordable, portable, easy to use and familiar to both learners and teachers. For most learners in Kenya, introduction to the reading skill is by use of the course book (Montagnes, 1999 as cited in Litz 2000). It is almost impossible to fathom the teaching of reading comprehension in a Kiswahili class without the use of a course book. Teachers find Kiswahili course books vital in guiding them on the subject content, sequence of topics and the pacing of instruction in class (Khalili & Mamai, 2014). This is because Kiswahili course books are meant to be written by subject experts who have sufficient teaching experience to gauge the right amount and level of content that can be taught in one lesson.

Exercises and assignments in Kiswahili course books help teachers and learners to evaluate the content learnt as well as the effectiveness of the teachers' instructional strategies (Gathumbi & Masembe, 2005). The exercises serve as an essential component of revision content to the learners when preparing for their national examinations at the end of their school course. Learners therefore refer to course book content to familiarize themselves with the specific subject areas they need to master for practice, knowledge, attitudes values and skills presumed to be essential for their learning (Crisp, Anderson Orme & Lister, 2005).

The main driving force behind reading of the Kiswahili course book in Kenya may be the need to prepare for examinations. This can be attested to by the fact that learners in secondary schools attach more credibility to course book content in a given subject than the teachers' notes. This could also be due to the perception that approved course books are generally sensitive to learner needs and are written in a language suitable to their age (Ibala, 2007). In Kenya, secondary Kiswahili course books are approved after vetting to confirm that they are written in a learner- friendly language level. Dependence on course books is not just a preserve of learners, but teachers as well. When a new or revised subject syllabus is introduced, teachers rely on course books to demonstrate how current language teaching methodologies are meant to be implemented during classroom instruction. This was the case in Kenya when the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus directed teachers to teach in Integrated Approach (KIE, 2002). The challenge has been that teachers expected to find content in the approved secondary Kiswahili course book written in the integrated format, to enable them teach Kiswahili in the Integrated Approach. There is need for further assessment of approved secondary Kiswahili course books to establish whether they guide the teacher to teach Kiswahili through the Integrated Approach.

Kiswahili course books have their shortcomings too. First, the language used in course books may not clearly define subject concepts presented in the subject syllabus (Muhammad & Kumari, 2007). This manifests in some approved secondary Kiswahili course books' inadequacy in explaining concepts in sociolinguistics such as: bilingualism, multilingualism, code- mixing and code-switching. Since content in sociolinguistics is mainly available in English language, Kiswahili authors rely upon translating the sociolinguistic concepts to Kiswahili. Translation has the challenge of dilution of concepts which makes it more difficult for learners to decipher the intended meaning of the concepts. For proper mastery of subject content, the teacher and the learner of Kiswahili in Kenya have to read reference books and even read the original sociolinguistics reference books written in English. This causes a challenge to the learning of Kiswahili at secondary school level.

Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the approved secondary Kiswahili course books revealed that some authors merely wrote subject content in course books as listed in the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus without concern for learners in different learning environments. For example in a bid to include emerging issues like technology in approved secondary Kiswahili course books, authors of one course book used a photograph in black and white color showing a computer, printer, fax machine and book binding machine. Learners of form one class are then asked to name various technological devices and state their uses in Kiswahili language. Naming computer gadgets as they appear in photographs, without giving learners information on how they are used within context may be abstract. First, presenting pictures to learners and asking them to name them is equivalent to teaching them vocabulary out of context. Without anchoring computer vocabulary within context, learners who may not have encountered computers in their

environments may find difficulties in naming and explaining the use of various technological gadgets; hence hindering learning of emerging issues.

Allwright (1982, as cited in Litz, 2000) observes that textbooks are rigid and tend to reflect the pedagogical, psychological, linguistic preferences and biases of authors. Findings in this study affirm that some approved secondary Kiswahili course books contained comprehension passages which reflected an overuse of a given stylistic device such as tongue twisters in almost all passages. Some text books tend to promote social and cultural biases (Ibala, 2007). Gender related bias in which male persons are depicted to perform superior jobs like being doctors, engineers, leaders and managers while the females are depicted as cleaners, cooks, and sellers of goods in market places portrays the female gender negatively and can influence the mind of the learner negatively.

Montagnes (1999) asserts that a good textbook should be written by a subject specialist, curriculum expert, a good teacher with classroom experience and a team worker in a given subject area. The negative side to this notion is that the extent to which a course book covers a topic may be taken to imply how important it is in the syllabus and whether the topic can be examined or not. Extensive coverage of a subject topic in a course book may imply formal recognition while limited coverage may trivialize the topic to the learners (Stolley & Hall, 1994 as cited in Crisp *et al.*, 2005). An analysis of the approved secondary Kiswahili course books in this study revealed that authors of two approved course books had given minimum information on sociolinguistics and oral literature.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Challenges in Selection and Utilization of Course Books in Kiswahili Instruction

This study focused on the selection criteria used by secondary school teachers of Kiswahili to select course books from the approved list that is contained in the —Orange Bookl. It was established that selection of Kiswahili course books was mainly done by heads of Departments (64%), while 18% of the respondents indicated that course book selection in their schools was done by teachers of Kiswahili. In schools where the Head of Languages Department alone selected a Kiswahili course book, yet he or she was not a teacher of Kiswahili, then teachers of Kiswahili in such schools were left out of the course book selection exercise. It is important for the teachers of Kiswahili to select their preferred subject course book since it helps them to acquire useful accurate, systematic and contextual insights into the overall nature of the course book material. Following is an analysis of the recommended criteria for selecting language course books at secondary school level (Brown 1995; Cunningsworth 1995; Harmer, 1996, as cited in Litz, 2000). A language course book should contain:

- a) Attractive physical course book attributes such as the layout of content, organizations and use of pictures to capture the attention of learners. This study found out that in public secondary schools, 14% of the teachers considered the physical attributes of the Kiswahili course book during selection. None of the research respondents considered illustrations, use pictures or the general layout and organization of content during the selection process.
- b) The teaching methodology to be used, aims approaches and the degree to which content is not only teachable but how it addresses the needs of individual teacher's teaching approach as well as what is specified in the subject syllabus. When teachers of Kiswahili were asked to indicate whether the course book they used to teach Kiswahili guided them on the teaching methodology to use, 43% responded in the affirmative. A larger percentage (57%) of the respondents indicated that the course books they used did not guide the teacher on the teaching methodology to use in the teaching of Kiswahili. Further analysis of the approved secondary Kiswahili course books showed that other than subject topics being sequenced as they appeared in the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus, guidelines on the teaching approach were not included in the approved Kiswahili course books. However, some teacher's guides to the approved secondary Kiswahili course books had information regarding suitable teaching strategies to be used by the teacher of Kiswahili. For the teacher to know which teaching approach was suitable for Kiswahili instruction, the teacher was to read the course book teacher's guide.
- c) Cultural and gender components and show the extent to which the linguistic items, subjects, content and topics match up to learners' personalities, backgrounds, needs and interests of teachers and learners. Findings in this study indicate that over 90% of the approved secondary

Kiswahili course books selected was learner- friendly in terms of language, content, needs and interests. These findings confirm that the secondary Kiswahili textbook vetting panel at KICD considered cultural and gender aspects that conformed to learner interests during course book vetting.

- d) Durability of the language course book should be considered during the course book selection process to ensure a longer lifespan of the course book in the hands of learners. Data from this research findings shows that 55% of the teachers of Kiswahili and 57% of the head teachers in the public secondary schools who took part in this study reported that the Kiswahili course books selected in their schools were not durable. Teachers of Kiswahili cited the falling off of course book covers, which was attributed to low quality paper and weak binding of textbook covers. Schools were forced to either spend more money rebinding the loose course book covers and book papers or replacing the course books altogether. These overstretched school budgets. As such, the learner: course book ratio was 4:1. The ratio of 4:1 is likely to hinder the teaching of reading skills in Kiswahili since making four learners to share one course book strains reading. Learners have different reading speeds hence slow readers would be disadvantaged by fast readers or vice versa.
- e) Although the —Orange Bookl was meant to guide the teachers at school level on which approved course book titles to select, findings in this study indicate that 64% of the schools selected a course book title that was not approved for teaching of Kiswahili in form one, although the course book had been approved for use in forms two, three and four. On being asked to state the criteria used by respondents in selecting secondary Kiswahili course books at school level, respondents claimed they selected the course book because it was available in the bookshops (62%); that the course book retailed at reasonable prices (57%); and that course book authors were known to the respondents (14%). These responses show that most teachers who took part in course book selection at school level may neither have read the —Orange Bookl nor followed the recommended course book selection guidelines for public secondary schools.

This study also sought to find out how teachers of Kiswahili used selected course books in the teaching of Kiswahili in public secondary schools. Findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher utilization of the Kiswahili course book

Use	Frequency	Percentage
Giving exercises to learners	11	100
Teaching the subject content	11	100
Setting evaluation tests	8	73
As the subject syllabus	5	46
Preparation of schemes of work	4	36
Preparation of lesson notes	3	27
Sole reference book for Kiswahili	3	27
Preparation of lesson plans	1	9

Source: Reseacher

Findings in Table 1 show that all teachers of Kiswahili who took part in this study used the Kiswahili course book to teach the subject content and to give exercises to learners. Teachers who used the course book to set tests for learners constituted 73% while 36% of the teacher respondents referred to Kiswahili course books when preparing schemes of work. These findings indicate positive use of the Kiswahili course book. However, 46% of the teachers used the course book as the subject syllabus without referring the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus. The teachers either assumed that course book authors strictly followed the topics in the syllabus when writing course books or the teachers may not have had access to the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus. Using the Kiswahili course book as the subject syllabus is improper since different course book authors may interpret the syllabus differently. Some course book authors may not adequately cover the syllabus yet their respective course books met the threshold marks for approval by the vetting panel. An effective teacher of Kiswahili should have thorough mastery of subject syllabus before using the approved course book for the subject content. Findings on misuse of the Kiswahili course book confirm sentiments that some teachers of Kiswahili in secondary schools had overused Kiswahili course books to the point of turning them into the subject syllabus (Kawoya, 1988). Findings in this study further reveal that the secondary Kiswahili course book was least used in

preparation of lesson plans (9%) for Kiswahili instruction. Indeed, 72 % of the head teachers who were interviewed in this study observed that teachers of Kiswahili in public secondary schools carried the secondary Kiswahili course book to class with neither lesson plans nor lesson notes.

The findings in Table 1 also show that 27% of the teachers of Kiswahili used the Kiswahili course book as the only reference book for teaching of Kiswahili in class. This is a challenge to the teaching of Kiswahili because no single subject course book contained all the stipulated content as per the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus. Even though 95% of the Kiswahili topics in the syllabus were listed in the approved secondary Kiswahili course books, not all topics were covered in a similar magnitude in the course books. Thus a teacher who only relied on one course book as the only reference book could not get sufficient content especially in areas like oral literature and sociolinguistics, to adequately teach the learners.

CONCLUSION

The multiple- choice textbook policy was a major boost to the availability of varied approved secondary Kiswahili course books in Kenya. The policy provides teachers and learners with different author perspectives of the topics in the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus. If the policy is enforced effectively, publication of quality course books will be enhanced since book publishers compete to sell their textbooks to public primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Furthermore, the decision by the Government of Kenya to fund provision of instructional materials to schools is commendable since it aims at making learners access basic learning resource materials regardless of their socio- economic backgrounds. Although this paper mainly focuses on the textbook, there are more teaching and learning resources that the teacher of Kiswahili needs to incorporate in Kiswahili instruction to encourage more interactive learning of Kiswahili.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings in this study, the following recommendations were made:

- a) The vetting process of secondary Kiswahili course book manuscripts should strictly be done according to the recommended course book selection guidelines.
- b) During the course book vetting process, more consideration should be given to the depth of topic coverage in order to avoid inadequate coverage of some Kiswahili topics.
- c) The criterion regarding binding and durability of secondary Kiswahili course books should be emphasized.
- d) Teachers of Kiswahili in public secondary schools need to be guided on course book selection at school level.
- e) Teachers of Kiswahili should be effectively supervised by the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers from the Ministry of Education, Science and technology, who should guide teachers on proper utilization of approved secondary Kiswahili course books in scheming, planning, teaching and evaluation of the revised secondary Kiswahili syllabus.

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BIO-DATA

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