

Instruction of Reading for Nationhood: English Language Teachers' Cognition in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper discusses secondary school teachers' cognition of the instruction of reading to instill human values among students in secondary schools in Kenya. The main purpose of the study was to determine how teachers of English use curriculum implementation to enable learners to acquire moral values stipulated in the philosophy of education in Kenya. Data was obtained from 30 teachers of English within Uasin Gishu County. Instruments used to generate data were informal interviews and observation of classroom practice. The study established that several contextual factors such as the school administration, Quality Assurance and Standards Officers among others made teachers to believe that enabling students to score high marks was more significant than instilling human values. Teachers developed their cognition through benchmarking, collaboration with colleagues, teacher guide books, teacher workshops, teaching practice and teacher education. The findings are important to teacher educators, curriculum developers, Quality Assurance and Standard Officers, policy makers and researchers. They will realize that teachers are not robots to implement the curriculum as it is, they are rational beings and many factors affect their classroom practice..

Keywords: teacher cognition, instruction, reading, nationhood and curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The mission of education in Kenya is to: *promote and coordinate quality life- long education, training and research for Kenya's sustainable development and responsible citizenry* (MOES&T 2005). This can be achieved through curriculum implementation hence teachers are seen as significant in shaping the destiny of the nation by instilling human values that would make citizens to be responsible. English being a compulsory subject to all secondary school students has been identified as an appropriate channel of instilling human values through purposeful selection of reading material with appropriate content. Kenya vision 2030-research team (2007) also acknowledge the fact that education is a social pillar that can be used, "to create a cohesive society with a culture of hard work." (Kenya vision 2030 research team 2007). These human values stipulated in the philosophy of education are believed to enable graduates from such an education system to live in harmony with other human beings nationally and internationally. At national level, it is described as achieving nationhood. Unless Kenyans love their nation, become loyal to the nation and value harmonious co-existence, it will be hard to achieve Kenya vision 2030.

Starting from the philosophy of education in Kenya to the goals of teaching English and specifically the

objectives of teaching reading, nationhood should have been achieved. The scenario is different. What has been happening in the country shows that the core national values are not upheld by many Kenyans. Disrespect for the rule of law and other vices are the order of the day. Many youths in the custody of Kenya police face serious charges ranging from murder, arson and rape. This shows that the driving factor is to hurt people from other speech communities. The Commission of Inquiry into Post Election Violence- the Waki Commission –reports that almost everybody is to blame ranging from politicians, government officials, businessmen and the police force,(Omanga, 2008). The violence claimed 1,133 people: 1,048 men, 74 women and 11 children. The police shot dead 405 people, including children and raped women instead of protecting them. Gangs of youth raped women in their own houses before their spouses and children (Wanyonyi, 2008). Most of the crimes were motivated by ethnic hatred. Precedence is given to tribalism, not nationhood. Tribalism, corruption, impunity and lack of professional ethics are the order of the day. The report says senior national leaders were involved in planning for the butchering of many civilians instead of unifying Kenyans (Obonyo, 2008). The education system seems to have failed in promoting moral and ethical values, social responsibility virtues and appropriate attitudes necessary for promoting

nationhood. Teachers' cognition of the instruction of reading to instill human values is important, i.e. what they know, belief and do concerning teaching reading to instill human values. Teachers develop personal principles that inform their approach to teaching. These principles function *like rules and* guide the teachers' choice of instructional decisions. It is for this reason that the researchers sought to find out English language teachers' cognition of the instruction of reading to instill human values or nationhood among students in secondary schools in Kenya.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to: find out teachers' cognition of the instruction of reading to instill human values among students, establish how teachers developed cognition of the instruction of reading for nationhood and examine the language teaching approaches used to instruct reading to promote nationhood in Kenya.

RELATED LITERATURE

Language Teacher Cognition

Development in cognitive psychology brought to light facts through research that there is a complex relationship between what people do, and what they know and believe. Researchers in education became aware of the fact that the same relationships must be existing in teaching, that there must be a relationship between teachers' mental processes and their instructional choices. This means that teachers were not robots, who could not think, but simply implement a curriculum designed by other people. Teachers are thinking human beings; they make decisions both before instruction and during instruction. These decisions become the focus of educational research by language educators (Borg, 2006).

Studies in teacher cognition have developed and led to similar studies in language education, specifically second Language (L2) and foreign language (FL) education. Studies in L2 teacher cognition began in 1990's. Freeman and Richards (1996) expressed the value of understanding language teaching by examining the mental or psychology processes of teachers.

From 1990's there was increase in research about various aspects of what L2 teachers know, belief and think; and how these cognitions influence what they do in the classroom. Borg (2003) reviewed sixty four such studies while Borg (2006) reviewed over hundred such studies. Therefore language teacher cognition is an established field of inquiry. Andrew (2007) examined the knowledge teachers draw on in teaching grammar. Studies about teachers' cognition

of reading instruction have been scarce (Borg, 2003, 2006).

Teachers understanding of language pedagogy and learners, including teachers' educational and professional knowledge, significantly influence their instructional decisions and practices in formal instruction (Borg, 2006). Teacher cognition has been acknowledged as a vital source of data to understand formal instruction. The cognitions are explored with direct reference to teacher's actual classroom practices. Language teachers' knowledge of grammar has been equated with their classroom practice efficiency. However, the relationships between teacher's cognition of subject matter knowledge and classroom practice in language teaching have not been researched on extensively. Besides grammar, teachers' cognition of reading pedagogy is scarce.

Goals of Education

The goals of education in Kenya are to promote: National unity – Education and training inculcates patriotism and nationalism without compromising responsibility on global issues; Unity of purpose – Teamwork and striving for the national common good forms an integral and critical component of the education and training system; Social responsibility – education and training integrates social responsibility, including nurturing our cultural heritage, spiritual values, combating drug and substance abuse, sensitivity to the spread of human calamities like HIV/AIDS, development positive attitudes to work, promoting gender equity, as well as care for the vulnerable regions and groups; Moral and Ethical Values – education and training inculcates such values as peace, integrity, hard work, honesty and equity; Life-long learning – education and training must embrace the importance of learning throughout one's lifetime as critical to effective social and economic development. Access to information and knowledge resources for both the young and the old will be an essential component of learning. For this reason formal and non-formal, as well as a traditional and modern learning methodologies and approaches will be integrated as important pillars of education and training; Science and technology – Technology is a critical form of wealth to any nation. For this reason, innovation, research, development, information and communication Technology (ICT), and science and technology will form one of the key pillars of education and training; Equity – education and training must embrace equity issues such as equal opportunities for all, access, retention and completion; Quality - in order to meet the demands for the 21st century our education and training Programs must be of the highest quality to compete favorably with the international standards; Environment – Education and training must empower our people to conserve, sustain and exploit our

environment for sustainable development (MOES&T 2005)..

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County. The county experienced the worst effects of post election violence in Kenya (PEV) in 2008. The reason is, the county has large tracks of land, and hence Kenyans from almost all speech communities have bought land and settled there. It therefore has students in some secondary schools from diverse cultural backgrounds. Unlike some counties in Kenya which are largely dominated by one speech community. Some counties may have members of other speech communities but they may not be as diverse as it is in Uasin Gishu County. The researcher therefore used purposive sampling to select thirty trained teachers of English in secondary schools in Kenya with four and more years of experience. Teachers Service Commission return forms in Uasin Gishu County were used to select schools with the most number of trained teachers of English and literature with over four years of experience. Setting being important in qualitative studies, one national school, two county and two district schools within the

county were selected. Teachers of English from those schools formed the sample size.

The study used the qualitative research design. It is a flexible approach that seeks to generate and analyze holistic data on an issue ensuring trustworthiness in the research process and observing ethical considerations (Jwan and Ong’ondo, 2011; Mason, 2002). Qualitative researchers are concerned with details of the research process as with the outcome. The approach uses non-numerical data that has not been coded at the point of generation in terms of a closed set of analytical categories, numbers or scales. The paradigm was appropriate for the study because the researchers gathered in-depth understanding of how English language teachers’ cognition of the instruction of reading to instill national values among secondary school students in Kenya developed and influenced their classroom practice. The techniques used to generate data were informal interviews and observation of lesson presentations as summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1: Sequencing of Research Instruments during Data Generation

Sequence of Research Instruments	Research Question to Be Answered
Informal Interview	What cognitions do teachers of English have about the instruction of reading to instill national values among students in secondary schools in Kenya?
Informal Interview	How have these cognitions developed?
Non-Participant Observation	How are their cognitions reflected in their classroom Practice?

Source: Author (Pilot Study Data)

To ensure reliability in the study, the researchers conducted a pilot study in one school which was excluded from the actual study. The researchers experienced certain limitations: The study was about the teaching of reading. Despite prior visits to target schools to check instructional planning documents, respondents did not follow their plans hence more visits had to be made to the schools to generate data.

**STUDY FINDINGS
Teachers’ Cognition about National Values in Kenya**

In this study, we sought to find out English Language teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the instruction of reading to instill national values among secondary school students in Kenya.

One of the questions asked during the interview was, “What national values should secondary school students in Kenya acquire through the instruction of reading?” The values mentioned by most participants in the transcribed data were:

Obedience honesty, integrity, respect, democracy equality, peace, security, equity, love

tolerance, cooperation, corruption, drug and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS.

These values are outlined in the philosophy of education in Kenya. Such values can make school leavers to possess virtues and develop positive attitudes, they learn to co-exist and appreciate other members of the society. However, there are other values outlined in the philosophy of education and in the new constitution of Kenya that were not mentioned. The values that were not mentioned were:

Respect for human rights, gender equity spiritual values, terrorism, and ICT. Other values not mentioned were patriotism, national unity, the rule of laws, human dignity discrimination, and protection of the marginalized, good governance, integrity, transparency and accountability. Most of the values in the philosophy of education in Kenya have also been captured in the new constitution of Kenya. Article ten of the new constitution is about national values and principles of governance. It states that; “The national values and principles of governance in this Article bind all state organs state officers, public officers and all persons whenever any of them;-

Applies or interprets this constitution; Enacts applies or interprets any law; or Makes or implements public decisions” (The constitution of Kenya, 2010: 15).

The national values and principles of governance include, Patriotism, national unity, sharing and devolution of power, the rule of law, democracy and participation of the people; Human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equity, human rights, non-discrimination and protection of the marginalized. Good governance, integrity, transparency and accountability and Sustainable development” (The constitution of Kenya, 2010: 15).

As stated in the constitution, nationhood or national values should guide all public decision made by people or leaders in all positions or organizations within Kenya. Such values can best be acquired by young generations through education, and English in Kenya being a compulsory subject in secondary schools (both public and private) becomes a reliable avenue through which such values can be acquired during the instruction of reading materials if the objectives of teaching are to instill the national values.

Development of Teachers’ Cognition about the Instruction of Reading

We sought to establish from participants how their cognitions about the instruction of reading to instill national values among students in secondary schools in Kenya were developed. We generated data using informal interviews with teachers of English. There were varied responses although most participants had common responses. We therefore used extracts that would best represent the common views of the participants in response to the question, ‘How have these cognitions developed? Meaning, how teachers’ knowledge and thoughts about how reading can be used to instill national values among secondary schools in Kenya developed. When interviewed one of the participants said:

“I developed my cognitions through the teacher education program offered at the university. Specifically, the course that deals with pedagogy, called special methods in teaching English and Literature. Besides how to teach other language skills, teaching and learning activities that can be used to instruct reading were comprehensively covered by the concerned lecturer.’ (Cs1Tr7).

The participant acknowledges the pivotal role of English Language teacher educators (ELTE) in equipping English language teacher trainees with pedagogical skills on how to teach the different skills of English Language. Another participant simply said,

“I acquired my cognitions through learning the bachelor of education courses.’ (Cs1Tr2)

Some participants expressed that they learnt or developed their cognitions through their interaction with English teachers during teaching practice.

“I developed my cognition during teaching practice. The HOD and HOS used to guide one on how to tackle each skill, reading included”. (Cs4 Tr2)

Reference to the head of department (HOD) and head of subject (HODs) means that cooperating teachers during the practicum shape cognition of trainee teachers which they later use while teaching long after the practicum period.

Collaboration with colleagues is another way teachers develop cognition about the teaching of reading. Collaboration means learning from others how to perform a certain task (Baker, 2011). The collaboration is both within the learning institutions and outside the learning institution. One of the participants said:

“I acquired knowledge of teaching reading from other English teachers, especially those ones whose classes or streams perform well in reading comprehension. I ask them the strategies they use to ensure that students understand and pass exams highly.” (Cs1 Tr4)

Similarly another participant echoed the same remarks saying:

“My stream is mostly composed of the tail. It is almost impossible to compete other streams but I request my colleagues in the department to suggest to me teaching strategies that can boost their performance”. (Cs1 Tr9)

When I sought clarification to know what ‘tail’ means, I understood from the teacher’s explanation that it means students who are below average. The top students were referred to as the ‘head.’ The two extracts show that internal collaboration with colleagues is a source of developing teachers’ cognition. However, some participants said that their source of cognition is external collaboration.

“I got to know how to teach reading materials through collaboration with teachers of English from other schools. We usually do external examinations at the end of each term. The Kenya Secondary School Heads Association members at district level have agreed to release teachers to meet in one school to set the external examinations. During those meetings, we discuss how to teach students reading with the aim of improving their scores.” (Cs2 Tr3)

Likewise another participant said:

“We interact with teachers from better performing schools. I ask them the strategies they use to teach reading materials. At times they come with examinations from other well performing schools plus marking schemes. We peruse through them and get ideas about how to set exams and how it case implicated when teaching.” (Cs5 Tr1)

The above extracts reveal that teachers do not only rely on initial teacher education knowledge to make instructional decisions, they also acquire pedagogical knowledge which shapes how they think and influence classroom practice through collaboration with colleagues. Given that emphasis is on better performance meaning scoring more marks in the specific language skill of interest, teachers prefer to learn from other teachers whose students perform better than theirs. Closely related to collaboration, another participant reported that she develop cognition or knowledge about teaching reading through benchmarking.

“When results for external exams are released, as a department, we analyze them and check the ranking of schools. We particularly identify schools that have performed well in English then we request the management to go there to find out what they do to realize the good performance. We keenly check the strategies teachers use in such schools to teach the four languages skills, speaking, listening reading and writing. We also keenly check the strategies they use to teach grammar and punctuation.” Cs5Tr4.

This means that participants rate schools in terms of best practicing and otherwise. The danger with benchmarking is that many other factors within the school environment maybe contributing to the best practices including teacher motivation. Best practice may not necessarily fit the benchmarking school. However, one cannot rule out that knowledge about performing certain tasks, English Language Teaching (ELT) not excepted can be acquired through benchmarking.

Other participants responded by saying that they developed cognitions about the instruction of reading materials to instill national values among students through English Language teachers’ workshops on the implementation of the new English syllabus.

“I attended a workshop about the implementation of the New English curriculum. I acquired knowledge on how to integrate the four language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) while teaching. We are told that no skill should be

taught in isolation. A teacher should always look for ways of integrating them.”

The response of the teacher reveals that the goal of the new syllabus of English implementation workshop was to train teachers about the language teaching approaches to be used during the implementation of the syllabus. Most participants said that they acquired cognition of knowledge about teaching reading from books written by the Kenya Institute Education (KIE) or from books recommended by the KIE outlined in the orange book or provided as teachers’ guide books as presented below.

“The preamble section of course books offer a good guide on how to teach different language skills including reading skills.” (Cs1Tr6) “The teachers’ guide books provide a comprehensive guide on how to handle all language skills, even reading skills. I rely on the notes provided in this section.” (Cs2Tr7)

“The KIE has written a book titled’ *A Hand book for English Teachers*. It provides teachers with necessary knowledge concerning the teaching of reading comprehensive, skills and all aspects of reading besides the other language skills. The varied revision books and reference books recommended by KIE have notes on how to teach reading materials integrating with other language skills”. (C53 Tr 4).

The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), which is left with the responsibility of designing the curriculum and syllabus for schools in Kenya, also recommends teaching and learning resources both in primary and secondary schools. English language teachers acquire a lot of their knowledge about ELT from the resources designed and recommended by K.I.E. Majority of the teachers rely on the course books, reference books and resources recommended by K.I.E. English Language Teaching workshops about the implementation of curriculum in Kenya are organized by education officers.

Teachers’ Cognition about Language Teaching Approaches

We also established the cognition or knowledge and beliefs of the participants about the language approaches they used while instructing reading for nationhood. The interview question was; “What language approaches do you use to instruct reading to instill national values in learners?” Responses were varied. Most participants explained how they teach instead of mentioning the specific approaches.

“I tell students to read the text silently. Then they answer comprehension questions as I guide them” Cs3 Tr3.

“I tell students to read silently or at times one student reads aloud as others read silently.

We answer a few comprehension questions in class, and then the remaining assignment is given and marked by the teacher.” (Cs5 Tr 4)

The participants’ belief that the reading approach is appropriate for teaching reading to instill national values. Another participant said:

“I let students read silently. Then one student reads aloud after which they answer comprehension questions. I also ask questions on grammar and punctuation.” (Cs2 Tr3)

Related to the above participant’s response, the other responded saying,

“When teaching reading, students read the reading material silently. At times I tell them to read in turns. Afterwards they answer comprehension questions. I use the text to revisit grammatical items taught in the unit earlier. Sometimes I use it to teach or revise punctuation items. I then give students a writing task of a skill learnt earlier.” (Cs2 Tr1)

The extract reveals that the participant uses an integrative approach to language teaching. Richard and Rodgers (2001) refer to it as the whole language approach. The approach integrates all the four skills of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. It is referred to as the whole language approach because all other items of language that may not necessarily fall under the major language skills such as grammar and punctuation are also taught during the integration of the skills. Most participants used the integrated approach to language teaching including Cs3 Tr6, Cs4 Tr1, Cs5 Tr2 and Cs1 Tr1, Tr2 and Cs1 Tr3.

Cs1 Tr 3 said:

“The teaching of reading should reflect how the evaluation of the skill is done. Students should use the same reading text to answer some comprehension questions, explain grammatical items, explain the contextual meaning of words, and do writing exercises like writing notes or summarizing a section of the text.” This extract is also based on the integrated language teaching approach. The teacher integrates all items of language when teaching. “National values can be taught using reading materials and activities such as dramatizing, discussion, role play, debates and hot selecting.” (Cs1, Tr10).

The strategies mentioned fall under the communicative language teaching approach. The teaching of English language is designed to use activities students will engage in to sustain communication or a conversation. The instruction

based on writing tasks can be referred to as task-based learning. Learners were to learn certain items through performing language tasks.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Teachers’ Cognition of National Values

One of the questions asked during the interview was, “*What national values should secondary school students in Kenya acquire through the instruction of reading?*” The values mentioned by most participants in the transcribed data were; obedience honesty, integrity, respect, democracy equality, peace, security, equity, love tolerance, cooperation, corruption, drug and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS. Teachers know that values stipulated in the philosophy of education in Kenya should be instilled among secondary school students. However, there are thirteen values that the participants did not mention indicating that their knowledge of national values was limited.

Teachers selected national values to be taught being guided by the course books recommended by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). Teachers also used the schemes of work to select values but the schemes of work were a mirror of the values in the course books. Some participants even used photocopied schemes of work provided by the publishers of the course books they were using. Class readers recommended to be used during the instruction of reading were not taught in class.

Development of Teachers’ Cognition of the Instruction of Reading

Participants reported that they acquired knowledge about the instruction of reading for nationhood in Kenya through teacher education programs including teaching practice. The experienced teachers especially the heads of department and heads of subject guided them on some issues.

Teachers also developed cognition through collaboration. They learnt from their fellow teachers whose streams were performing better than theirs. External collaboration was encouraged and is common because of the setting of external examination. As teachers go to set the external examinations that are done by students at the end of each term to boost their performance, they learn from their colleagues from other schools how to instruct reading. However, findings revealed that the collaboration enabled them to know how to instruct reading to improve learners’ performance or their scores. But instructing reading to instill national values was not addressed. Closely related to this, is what some participants were calling benchmarking. Teachers go to best performing schools to know the strategies they use to instruct reading to achieve better grades for learners but not how it can be used to instill moral values.

Another way teachers developed cognitions was by attending English Language teacher workshops. The workshops trained teachers about the use of the integrated approach in language teaching. How to integrate the four English skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, besides the subsidiary skills; grammar and punctuation.

Teachers' Cognition of Language Teaching Approaches

We established the knowledge teachers have about the language approaches they used while instructing reading for nationhood. Most of the teachers did not mention or name the language teaching approach. They explained what they did then we could deduce the approach they used from the explanation.

Integrated language teaching approach is recommended by the ministry of Education. However, the ministry of education reports that the integrated approach should involve 'teaching English language and literature in English as one subject unlike before when they were taught separately. This means that integration is done at different levels, integrating the different skills while teaching or integrating English language and literature. Participants relied on the comprehension passages to instruct reading. None of the case schools used the class readers recommended by the Kenya Institute of Education and outlined in the orange book to instruct reading and integrating with other language skills such as listening, speaking and writing. Participant (Cs1Tr10) disclosed that the *communicative language teaching approach* is used. Learners discuss, role-play and debate on certain issues raised.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the study was to determine how teachers of English use curriculum implementation to enable learners to acquire moral values stipulated in the philosophy of education in Kenya. Based on the findings of the study, this paper concludes that Teachers' cognitions significantly affect the implementation of the school curriculum. Teachers form principles or maxims that guide them on how to approach teaching. Instructional planning and classroom practice is conducted conforming to teachers' cognitions. Being thinking human beings and not robots, teachers do not just implement the curriculum as designed. They are guided by what they think and know; and why they should do certain things and not others. However, teachers' cognitions are influenced by a number of contextual factors as reported by (Borg, 2006). In this study, the contextual factors that affected teachers' cognition of the instruction of reading to instill human values among learners were the school administration, external examinations and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Teachers developed their cognition about the instruction of reading for nationhood through,

benchmarking, collaboration with colleagues, recommended course books by the KIE, teacher guide books, teacher workshops, teaching practice and teacher education.

WAY FORWARD

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

- English *language teacher educators* should design a course for English language student teachers about the instruction of reading for nationhood in Kenya.
- Value addition should not overemphasize marks scored as it has made teachers to believe that the rationale of teaching language skills including reading is to enable learners to score high marks. This has influenced instruction of reading to instill human values negatively.

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