

Influence of the examination-oriented model on students' performance in literature classrooms in secondary schools in Kenya

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Abstract: The Kenya education system is an examination-oriented model in which examination results determine a student's path. The teaching and learning activities are geared towards rote learning so students can memorise content to pass the national examination. This paper discusses the influence of the examination-oriented model on students' performance in literature in secondary schools. The study was conducted in Nandi Central, Nandi County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive design where the form four students and teachers in Nandi Central Sub-County formed the target population. The researchers used simple random sampling to select schools and teachers and develop four students to participate in the study. Instruments of data collection included: Questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists. Piloting of the study was done in two schools that were not included in the research. Data collected were analysed using a descriptive design per the study objectives. Data was presented in frequency tables, descriptions, and percentages. The results of this study revealed that the secondary school Literature syllabus was not implemented as stipulated by the KICD due to; insufficient time to cover the syllabus; hence teachers were forced to resort to the examination-oriented teaching model. The examination-oriented model puts pressure on teachers and learners for excellent results. The researcher concluded that the examination-oriented model led to rote learning in literature. Students spent most of the time doing a series of examinations. It was recommended that the examination-oriented model be replaced by other student-centred teaching approaches, such as performance, which includes engagement that involves recitations, narrations and song and dance. Implementation can be carried out in poetry, oral literature, and drama.

Keywords: Examination-oriented model, performance in literature, Kenyan educational system.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya's education system is expected to foster unity, prepare and equip the learner with the knowledge, skills, and expertise required and instils the right attitudes in the learners for them to play an influential role in the nation, such as promoting social justice and morality (KIE, 2002). Learning is not about passing examinations but a holistic educational experience that imparts desired knowledge, values, attitudes, and practical skills (Karimi et al., 2014). According to the International Institute of Planning (2003), the primary purpose of education is to produce good citizens who respect human rights laws and fairness. Sifuna (1990)

puts it that education, especially in secondary school, is to prepare learners to make a positive contribution to the development of society and to acquire attitudes of nationalism, patriotism, adaptability, self-respect, self-reliance, and cooperation, a sense of purpose and discipline among others. However, due to the high stakes placed on excelling in examinations, learning in recent times is about passing tests. Since examinations guard the gateway to each level, the reward for success and penalty for failure in these examinations is substantial, (Karimi et al. 2014). In today's society, examination results decide people's future, forgetting that every individual is unique; some may excel academically while others may rely on hands-on expertise—grades matter in an examination-oriented education (Peter, 2005). The primary function of examinations in an education system is selecting and placing pupils/students in various institutions and societal stations to assure the output of the educational system in which it operates, among others. The quality of an education system is judged according to how well its creation performs and the quality of social life they lead (Eshiwani, 1993; Karimi et al., 2014).

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

2.1 Kenya's Education System

In 1963, an education commission chaired by Prof. S. Ominde was constituted. The commission was to advise the government of Kenya on how to formulate and implement national policies for education. The Ominde commission (1964) suggested changes to the education system from 4-4-6-3 to 7-4-2-, 4 with examinations at the end of each level. The tests were meant to enable learners to transit from one level to another. The primary level had seven years, while the second section was divided into two level groups of 4 years for the ordinary rank and two years for the advanced level.

East Africa Certificate of Education (EACE) was administered in form four. It was later named the Kenya Certificate of Education (KCE). The East Africa advanced certificate of education (EAACE), later referred to as the Kenya advanced certificate of education (KACE), was administered in form six. However, students in Harambee schools (self-help schools), as recommended by the Ominde commission, were to have another examination in form two that would promote them to form three (Mackatiani et al.,

2016). The students had to do the Kenya Junior Secondary Examination (KJSE). The purpose of these examinations was to enable students to transit from one level to another. The university segment covered the last three years of the education structure. This education system was operational until 1984, when the 8-4-4 education was introduced in Kenya. In 1981 the Mackay commission recommended adopting a new method of teaching, the 8-4-4 system, a recommendation accepted in March 1982 and implemented in 1985. The plan had three segments: primary (8 years), secondary (4 years) and university (4 years). There were examinations at the end of every level to warrant promotion to the next level. The (KCPE) and (KCSE) examinations were used to determine those transiting to secondary school and university, respectively. Although the 8-4-4-system was acclaimed as a vocational-oriented system, it remained an examination-oriented model where examinations remained the driving force for students to get promoted to the next level of education (Otiende et al., 1992).

2.2 Teaching of Literature in Secondary Schools in Kenya.

Literature in the secondary school curriculum is critical for understanding society and its functions. Literature increases language proficiency, gaining cultural experience and literary knowledge. The literature describes people and their interaction with the environment. Secondary school students get the opportunity to understand the motivation of human behaviours. Teaching literature in secondary schools should therefore focus on improving human relations in society. The reaching of literature should result in a broadly educated person who can articulate social and international issues in a manner that all can understand. Literature is today taught using the Integrated Approach (KICD, 2013).

The objectives of teaching Literature, as stated by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, are; to show a better understanding of cultural foundations as expressed in both oral and written literature, develop a critical response to oral literature, respond to literature as a reflection of everyday experiences, understand the texts in terms of plot(s); narratives techniques, language use, imagery, creation of atmosphere, mood and tone and other literary devices used in poems, plays, novels, short stories and oral literature (KICD, 2013).

The secondary school literature curriculum is an integration of English and literature. The integrated literature curriculum is geared towards teaching and learning for transfer and thoughtful learning (Perkins, 1991). Since 1987, teaching and learning literature in Kenyan secondary schools has been compulsory. Three examination papers at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination examine different aspects of literature. For instance: paper 101/1 examines poetry, paper 102/2 examines oral literature, and paper 101/3 discusses set books (KIE, 2002).

The literature curriculum seeks to shift learning from memorising isolated facts to a constructivist view of learning,

emphasising in-depth knowledge of literature content (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). The reason for teaching literature in Kenya is multifaceted. Literature allows students to develop linguistic skills and cultural and literal knowledge (KICD 2013). Ongeti (2011), states that teaching is a complex process that cannot be learned by imitation. Ongeti & Wasike (2017) state that the teachers of Literature face challenges in teaching literature. Before integrating English and Literature, the literature syllabus consisted of five set books in form Four, mainly drama and the novel. The Advanced Level syllabus consisted of poetry, four plays and four stories examined in three papers. Barasa (2005) noted that effective teaching and learning approaches result from a teacher's knowledge of utilising them in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, teachers are directly responsible for using various strategies and methods to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Ong'ondo (2011) pointed out that teaching examination prediction does not provide students with opportunities to develop pedagogical reasoning.

Teachers, however, do not know whether to teach English or Literature (Murgor, 2016). According to Murgor (2016), teachers attempt to teach using the integrated approach in forms one and two. At Forms three and four, literature and English are taught separately to complete the syllabus. Content not previously taught in forms one and two are introduced in form Three and is hurriedly instructed to complete the syllabus.

The different types or genres of literature to be taught in secondary schools are not explicitly stated in the KICD (2013). However, there is a pedagogical difference between poetry, short stories, novels, and drama. Ideally, poetry should be performed, sung, or recited before an audience. Nonetheless, students are confronted with written poems. The novel and the short story portray character and action in a setting. A short story concentrates on at least one of only two themes (Robson, 1982). Teaching fiction should cover the novel's setting, plot, characters and characterisation, themes, narrative style, point of view, and language (Benton & Fox, 1985).

The study of literature offers a wide range of significant materials. Literature possesses rich heritage, social, political, philosophical and economic reflections of an era (Maharsi, 2016). Maharsi (2016) also states that literature helps the student to depict various circumstances, have sound social critiques on a particular phenomenon, reflect characteristics of a specific age, portray cultural aspects of a particular society and reveal conspiracy in a country. Collie & Slater (1987) support the teaching and testing of content in literature as it provides valuable, authentic material, develops personal involvement, and helps contribute to students' cultural and language enrichment. These will not be achieved if teachers choose to use teaching approaches that are not effective for content delivery, putting into consideration the objectives of teaching literature in secondary schools in Kenya.

Teachers have curriculum guides outlining objectives and content expected of all students in a particular subject area (Burden & Byrd, 2013). Literature has its own goals tailored to foster development and communicate Kenya's rich and varied culture (KICD, 2013). The objectives of teaching literature, as stated by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, KICD (2013), include: students should demonstrate a better understanding of their cultural foundations as expressed in both oral and written literature, develop a critical response to oral literature, respond to literature as a reflection of everyday experience, enjoy literature and its pursuit as a general cultural activity, understand the texts in terms of plot (s), narrative techniques, performance in literature, language use, imagery, creation of atmosphere, mood and tone and other devices using poems, novels, short stories and oral literature and lastly, to evolve a natural self-expression and cultivate a fluent and coherent style through exposure to well-written literature. The content of Literature is meant to provide skills like critical thinking, problem-solving skills, desirable moral standards, positive attitudes, and respect for fellow humans. These are what the examination should measure in the learner.

The Kenyan education system, which focuses on the examination-oriented model, was inherited from the British colonial government. The structure of imperial education was 4-4-6-3. The students were examined under the Competitive Entrance Examination (CEE) at the end of lower primary education and the Kenya African Preliminary Examination (KAPE) at an intermediate level. At the end of every level of education, students were allowed to transition from one level to another based on their performance in examinations. The focus was on passing the test as probes were used to give to the next level.

2.3 The Examination Oriented Model

Peacocks (2011) posits that in Kenya, examinations generally determine people's future, in that those who pass are assured of joining good secondary schools and pursuing prestigious courses at the university. Those who fail feel useless, and this affects their self-esteem. They believe nothing good can come out of their efforts. Suicide cases have been reported in Kenya, resulting from failing to pass in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) (Karimi et al. 2014).

Findings of a task force on the Framework for Education and Training Republic of Kenya (2017) indicate that the current education model is examination-oriented as it selects students for higher education and often excludes the majority, depicting them as failures. It also develops wrong attitudes and divides the nation into white-collar workers and labourers, leaving little room for technical education. Peter (2005) explains that grades at any level are indicators of an individual's academic ability. Those who do well are held in high esteem by teachers, students, parents, and the public. For this reason, teachers and parents will do anything at their disposal to ensure good grades are attained, thus putting the teachers and students in Kenyan secondary schools under

tremendous pressure to produce good results (Karimi et al. 2014). Education officers expect teachers to attain good results, and in turn, teachers and parents push the learners to optimum ability, especially those in examination classes (Karimi et al. 2014). For instance, during the 2014 Kenya Secondary School Heads Association Conference held in Mombasa, speakers warned head teachers of dire consequences if they did not attain satisfactory results in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) (Karimi et al. 2014; Makokha 2009). This concern is also brought out by Bray (2003), who observed that parents are indifferent to the school curriculum but are concerned with the steps schools and teachers take to improve performance in examinations. In addition, the Ministry of Education and the politicians send direct or indirect signals to schools that children must pass examinations as a sign of a school's efficiency or quality. Peacocks (2011) explains that if the goal is high test grades, other activities will have to be sacrificed. Teachers are bound to cut on extracurricular activities such as sports or discourage creative activities so students can study longer. They then concentrate on aspects to be examined and skip core values. Buhere (2010) posits that undue emphasis on examinations undermines practical learner assessment. The school overburdens learners with frequent, continuous assessment, extra tuition, remedial teachings and loads of assignments. Some learners are enrolled on private education by parents over the weekend and holidays (Karimi et al. 2014). Makokha (2009) expresses concern that examination classes are taken through mock past papers from districts that showed excellent performance in KCSE. Instead of learning for understanding, learners are taken through theoretical knowledge and skills without any time to assimilate and apply what they know. Practical instructions receive insufficient emphasis, and students have little opportunity to develop technical competencies and problem-solving experiences.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design. This design was used in the study due to its suitability in bringing out the aim of the research, which is to provide a general understanding of the research purpose, which investigated the influence of the examination-oriented model on content delivery in Literature in selected secondary schools in Kenya.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 Performance in Literature

Performance in literature involves engagement, audience, and emotions. Implementation can be performed in poetry, oral literature, and drama (KICD, 2002). Their origins are in oral presentations, meaning that poetry, oral literature, and drama are carried out in the sounds of spoken words (Ongeti & Wasike 2017). These genres should be performed, sung, or recited before an audience.

Students often confront written poems/songs, oral narratives, short forms, and drama. To appreciate a written poem, the reader has to read these genres of performed literature orally

in their minds (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). The printed words represent only a shadow of the full actualisation of a poem as an aesthetic experience of the poet and the audience (Finnegan, 2012). For example, if a poem is a dirge, quite apart from the separate question of the overtones and symbolic associations of words and phrases, the actual enactment of the poem involves the emotional situation of a singer's beautiful voice, her sobs, facial expression, vocal expressiveness, and movements (all indicating the sincerity of her grief), and not least, the musical setting of the poem. All the variegated aspects we think of as contributing to the effectiveness (Finnegan, 2012).

Performed literature has mutated to become a solitary engagement. It depends on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion. There is no other way to realise it as a literary product (Finnegan, 2012). Students are confronted as individuals and must read silently (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). In contrast, the performed literature remains a completed art except in an examination where learners are confronted with written texts (Finnegan, 2012).

The significance of performance in literature goes beyond a mere definition: the nature of the performance itself can make an essential contribution to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited (Finnegan, 2012). Performed literature is divided into various sub-genres: narratives, songs/oral poetry, chants, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters, puns, and jokes, all of which require a live audience for the performance to be consummated (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). Each of the genres can further be subdivided into smaller sections. For example, narratives can be subdivided into myths, legends, etiological tales, suspense stories, monster/ogre stories, animal tales, fables, dilemmas and trickster narratives (KICD, 2013). Records are meant to be told to an audience who will enliven the story session through active participation. Storytelling allows learners to use and practice different forms of language. Sometimes the narrator chooses to involve listeners directly, as in story-telling situations where it is common for the narrator to open with a formula which explicitly arouses the audience's attention. The narrator often expects them to participate actively in the narration and, in particular, to join in the choruses of songs introduced in the narrative (Whiteley, 1964; Finnegan, 2012). Although many records originate in African languages, learners should be trained to be creative and present their reports in English (Finnegan, 2012).

Songs provide an exciting genre for students to learn. They are defined according to the function they perform. Songs may be classified into spiritual, love, wedding/marriage, initiation, work, dirges, or lullabies (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). The songs are supposed to be in local languages, and therefore they are to be translated into English; hence teachers have the challenge of solving them (Whiteley, 1964; Finnegan, 2012).

Proverbs are of universal occurrence, and there is hardly any speech or language in which they are not found (Henry & Ngam, 2016). Students learn them as stock phrases. The proverbs can be used to warn individuals. The text presents the

surface meaning of the proverb and the more profound meaning (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). The significance of proverbs is that they give learners wisdom if they use them often. The other short forms of oral literature, such as riddles, puns, jokes, and tongue twisters, are categorised according to their environmental background (KICD, 2013).

Drama is a highly captured moment of action. It is the interplay of situations by characters. Plays are conceived and developed to be performed on stage. However, they are after that written and published (Ongeti & Wasike, 2017). Such published plays become set books for study by Kenya certificate of secondary education.

Given that plays are written to be performed on stage, teaching drama must always keep cognisance of this. The space must be seen in performance before it is understood (Brown & Olmstead, 1986). The most fruitful way of teaching drama is by showing the play to the students first and then reading later. Teaching drama should cover plot, characters, characterisation, styles, and themes. Learners will often be required to show an understanding of these aspects of the play. In written sports, much meaning is carried by the tone of voice of characters, the positioning on the stage, the movement they make, the gestures and other non-verbal forms of communication (Johnson & O'Neill, 1989).

4.2 Students' Performance in Literature.

The researchers observed that teachers used the KNEC and the KICD syllabus recommended by the ministry of education. The researcher was also able to record two observations from the field. The researcher observed four teachers in different schools who used various teaching/learning activities such as dramatisation, role-play, storytelling, and singing and dancing during their lessons. The researcher observed that the students actively participated in the lessons' activities. When asked questions at the end of the class, the students could respond to the questions asked with correct answers. For this study, the researcher concluded that the performance of literature plays a role in the delivery of content.

From the interviews on whether frequent use of performance in literature helps students master content in literature, they said that routines help them perform well if this is done after teaching the units. They said that it serves teachers and students to identify weak areas and consolidate their efforts to improve on those areas.

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From the data collected using a questionnaire analysis, it was evident that the student's performance in literature relied on the teachers' selection of the instructional approach. The questionnaire asked teachers to give their views on the selected instructional methods used to enhance students' performance in literature. It was noted that teachers used methods that made their work more accessible to make their learners grasp content on selected areas that were examinable, ignoring aspects of the performed literature.

This means that students are not given time to assimilate, internalise and apply what they learn through performance. Learning, therefore, is reduced to an activity of passing examinations; due to this, Kenyan secondary school learner's graduate with a lack of practical skills and desired values and attitudes. Students are not taken through a holistic educational experience to enable them to understand their abilities and realise their academic aspirations because of an over-emphasis on theoretical knowledge and skills.

Performance in literature involves engagement, audience, and emotions. Implementation can be carried out in poetry, oral literature, and drama. It is practical engagement with literature, e. g. singing, dancing, fieldwork, dramatisation, role play.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ From the findings, it can be concluded that teachers of English in Nandi central Sub- County need to improve their pedagogical approaches. This can be done through adopting quality-oriented teaching approaches that are learner-centred, recognition of special skills, individual talents, and creativity. In other words, the system has to benefit both the teachers and students by changing the notion that the examination-oriented model is the best and adopting quality teaching approaches that promote the delivery of content, thus quality education. About these conclusions, it is at this moment recommended that:
- ❖ The frequent examination only aims to drill students on how to answer examination questions. Therefore, teachers should be sensitised to the fact that periodic tests help in the delivery and mastery of content in literature but only drill students for examination purposes.
- ❖ The literature syllabus, as recommended by KICD (2013), is orderly and sequential. In other words, the system has to benefit students and teachers by changing the existing examinations-oriented model to a quality-oriented one. The quality-oriented model

will develop students by recognising special skills, individual talents, and creativity.

- ❖ Students are not given time to assimilate, internalise and apply what they learn through performance in an examination-oriented model. Learning, therefore, is reduced to an activity of passing examinations; due to this, Kenyan secondary school learners graduate with a lack of practical skills and desired values and attitudes. It is recommended that a quality-oriented model be adopted that will take the learner through a holistic educational experience to enable them to understand their abilities and realise their academic aspirations rather than emphasising theoretical knowledge and skills only.

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