

**WHO IS TO BLAME- THE TEACHER OR TEXT BOOK? IMPLICATIONS FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY READING SKILLS**

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Abstract

Modern trends in educational reforms all over the world indicate that Communication and Creativity are the two key drivers for social transformation in the 21st century. Reading skills are critical for survival in the dynamic 21st century society. Many governments around the world invest heavily in education to facilitate the acquisition of reading skills. This paper reports the findings of a study done in a typical Kenyan rural context to establish the predilection of teachers and pupils towards the textbooks provided by the government through MOE in an effort to inculcate reading skills that serve as the springboard for any meaningful development in the ever-changing society. The study adopted a combination of survey and ex post facto research designs to seek the attitudes of teachers and pupils towards text books: a critical resource in the achievement of these skills and used the questionnaire as the main research tool. Anchored on the adaptation of the textbook model, the study found that the difference in the attitude of male and female teachers was statistically significant which perhaps influenced how textbooks were utilized in the classroom which may account for the trends in reading skills observed among learners in the sub-county. School type was found to be a significant predictor of teachers' attitude to the textbooks in primary schools in Muranga South Sub-County. The study recommends the inclusion of attitude change as part of teacher in-service programmes as a strategy to ensure that both teachers and learners interact with textbooks for poverty reduction and social transformation.

Key Words: Teachers, Reading skills, textbooks, Creativity, Communication 21st Century skills

1.0 Introduction

Reading is a critical skill in the 21st society. While so much emphasis has been placed on technological advancement and incorporation of ICT in education, there have been concerns in literacy levels among the youth in Africa. Provision of basic education as the foundation of human capital development and the beginning of an earnest endeavour to achieve individual potentials has experienced a myriad of problems. For instance, reading proficiency among elementary school learners has been linked to poor performance and pupil attrition (UNESCO, 2007). While children at this early age look forward to joining high-ranking professions such as Medicine, Law and Engineering, sadly, research reveals that most end up taking up non-specialized farming activities (Hernandez, 2007) as they fail to qualify for other opportunities.

Educational opportunities especially during the formative years have elicited concerns related to the availability of instructional materials (Macharia, 2015). More so the reading proficiency has seen the rural

populace embrace the use of the mobile phone for communication and conducting basic business transactions via the mobile banking platforms that characterize the 21st century society. Basic education has served as a springboard for poverty reduction and social transformation. Notably acquisition of reading skills is never an automated process but integrates motivational and attitudinal aspects. This notwithstanding, the public keenly evaluates the performance of education system by the proficiency in and the “employability” of its graduates. Despite the provision of textbooks to teacher and pupils in primary schools in Murang’a South Sub-county, pupil mean scores are not in tandem with the governments’ investment in primary education as a poverty reduction strategy. Several researchers have attributed this state of affairs to teacher-pupil ratio (Macharia, 2015 and Makoqo, 2013) and poor leadership practices (Marks & Printy 2003; Morgan 2015 and Kormla 2012).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The quality of education has elicited concerns among stakeholders. There is also limited literature on the determinants of learning achievement particularly in relation to the utilization of textbooks among primary school learners. Motivation to learn, attitudes, cognitive factors and learners’ self-efficacy are yet to be investigated with a view to account for the trends in learning achievement in Muranga Sub-county in Kenya. This Paper therefore reports the findings of a study done to assess teachers and pupils attitudes to textbooks in Muranga’ South Sub-county Kenya.

2.0 Review of Literature

Reading proficiency in the 21st century society can be compared to a key that opens a door to access life and all its goodness. It informs the meanings drawn and influences the way the individual responds to a given script. Reading skills encompass five core areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. Guthrie and Anderson (1999) posit that the learner identifies with the conceptual aspects of a text so that “absorbing its meaning is an effortless activity’ that translates into creativity; a key driver of the 21st century society. The availability of the textbook and trained teachers are insufficient on their own in the inculcation of communication and creativity as poverty reduction skills for the 21st Century. The success of the school is judged by the extent to which it equips the learner with these skills. Many educational policies have sought to ensure that learners at all levels interact with textbooks.

While teachers may be knowledgeable about the sound structure of the language and their areas of specializations, the learner is expected to recognize words, comprehend, react to words and make a logical decision on what has been read (Cushenberry, 1983) in responding to learning tasks in the classroom. Recent studies indicate many students complete elementary education without a good command of the reading skill. This begs the question: who is to blame for this state of affairs- the teacher, learner, textbook or school management? The textbook programme places emphasis on the development of “reading skills” among learners at the elementary stage. Reading is a skill which needs to be nurtured particularly in primary schools since it serves not only as a base for knowledge and skill development but also an essential component in pupil learning. When children have increased access to stimulating, reading material they enrich their vocabulary, show improved grammatical fluency and acquire general knowledge which enhances the pupils’ approach to all other areas of learning (MOE, 2007). It is also through the reading skills that children can transfer learning by attending to those tasks that draw on their reading skills. Provision of text books and attitudes to schooling were necessary but not sufficient conditions to improve learning achievement. Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982, cited in Gaziel (1998) also observed, “improvement in facilities, teaching and provision of curriculum materials are necessary elements in the school but are unlikely to support the students learning achievement since school effectiveness is multifaceted”(p.325).

This study employed an adaptation of the textbook model as described by Mohammad & Kumari (2007). This model was selected because availability and utilisation of textbooks was critical to achievement of the intended learning outcomes (ILO) which characterize an effective school. Warren (1981) conceptualised a textbook as “a printed instructional material in bound form, the content of which are organised and intended for elementary or high school curricula” (p.43). Any material that schools use for classroom instruction to teach a particular subject matter in line with the planned curriculum for a particular grade may be regarded as a textbook. Thus a collection of short stories, reference books, atlases, dictionaries, story books and supplementary readers are considered to be textbooks. This definition is consistent with that of Koski (2001) cited in Oakes and Saunders (2004), who asserted that text books include all instructional materials that are designed to convey a variety of exercises, problems, lesson content and information. These, according to the same scholar include work books, library books and students’ main texts.

3.0 Research Design and Methodology

The study applied a combination of two designs: survey and *ex post facto*. Survey enabled the researcher to collect descriptive data in relation to the attitudes of teachers and pupils to the textbooks used in the school. This design was appropriate for the study in that it enabled the researcher to describe the status of the attitudes of teachers and learners with regard to the textbooks provided through the Ministry of Education in Muranga South Sub-county. The *ex post facto* design was useful in the study since the attitudes of teachers and learners to the textbooks in Muranga South Sub-county had already occurred and were thus not manipulable. Data was solicited from teachers and pupils in upper primary by use of an attitude scale in which the participants indicated on a scale of 1 to 5 the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with given statements. The sample was drawn using stratified technique ensuring that the sample was as representative as possible. Validity was established by ascertaining the extent to which the items measured the construct in question, the predilections of pupils and teachers towards textbooks used in the primary schools in public schools in Murang’a Sub-county. Reliability was established by using the split- half technique.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The study sought some information on the availability of textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education. This is in line with one of the objectives of the National government which seeks to make primary school education accessible to a majority of Kenyans in tandem with the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal on Education. Thus access to textbooks was a timely strategy for poverty reduction in the area of study as well as equipping the pupils with desirable attitudes for the 21st century community. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1: Distribution of Teachers’ and Pupils’ Responses Concerning Availability of a Variety of textbooks in public primary school Muranga’ South Sub-County

| Response | Teachers | | Pupils | |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | Frequency | % | Freq | % |
| Adequate | 59 | 92.2 | 412 | 83.23 |
| Not adequate | 5 | 7.8 | 83 | 16.77 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 | 495 | 100.0 |

Table 1 reveals that 92.2% of teachers and 83.23 of learners expressed the view that textbooks were adequate which was consistent with the poverty reduction strategies adopted by the government to inculcate the 21st century skills of communication and creativity. These findings corroborate a study by Ball and Cohen (1996) cited in Nicol and Crespo (2006) that “textbooks contribute to teaching and learning and are quite useful to teachers...particularly in the wake of the revised curriculum” and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (p.340). Senior education officers and head teachers expressed satisfaction with the availability of textbooks. One head teacher commented, “though the some textbooks and supplementary readers are inadequate, at least we have many different types”. The study also sought to establish the changes in academic achievement in public primary schools in Muranga South Sub-county. Table 2 summarizes the results.

Table 2: Distribution of Teachers’ Responses on Whether Academic Performance had Improved following provision of textbooks to pupils in Public primary schools in Muranga South Sub-County

| Response | Frequency | % |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes | 51 | 83.6 |
| Not sure | 7 | 11.5 |
| No | 3 | 4.9 |
| Total | 61 | 100.0 |

As evidenced by Table 2, teachers were of the view that the academic achievement had improved. This was one of the expected outcomes of the strategies adopted by the national government to reduce poverty and prepare the learner to take their rightful place in the 21st century society. This is consistent with studies done by several researchers. Fuller & Clarke (1994), Fuller & Heynemann (1989) and Levin & Lockheed (1993) argue that textbooks have a positive effect on student achievement if used appropriately. These researchers also found that they played a critical role in teaching and learning since “the textbook makes the course as often as the course makes the book...thus are of greater significance in improving school performance”(Fuller & Clarke, 1994). Most teachers observed that though textbooks had boosted academic achievement in Murang’a South Sub-county these effects were yet to be felt in the public primary schools since the private academies seemed to be mushrooming and these often “poached” their bright students. Establishing the status of reading skills among primary school pupils in upper primary in Muranga South Sub-county was also a concern of the study. Reading skills entails five aspects: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: Distribution of Ratings of pupils reading skills in public primary schools in Muranga South Sub-County

| Reading Skill | Very Good | | Good | | Poor | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Recognition of words | 108 | 21.0 | 245 | 47.85 | 159 | 31.05 |
| Comprehending given phrases | 88 | 17.19 | 192 | 37.5 | 232 | 45.31 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|
| Reacting to phrases | 80 | 15.63 | 160 | 31.25 | 272 | 53.13 |
| Making logical decisions based on what was read | 84 | 16.4 | 154 | 30.08 | 274 | 53.52 |

From Table 3 it is evident that most of the participant pupils were able to recognize words given while the trend changed in relation to reacting to phrases and making logical decision based on what had been read. Comprehending what was read was critical since it influenced the decisions made about the text presented to the pupils. This implied that pupil responses to tasks following reading a specified text fell below the expectations despite the provision of textbooks to teachers and pupils in Muranga South sub-County. This might have accounted for the depressed academic achievement and perhaps the attrition of learners in public primary schools in the sub-county. This trend if not checked could have far-reaching implications on the success of poverty reduction strategies for the 21st century society.

Test of Hypotheses

Attitudes of teachers and learners to textbooks are key concerns to effective inculcation of the reading skills for poverty reduction and social transformation. Attitudes influence to a large extent what they feel and act towards it which in turn may affect the achievement of the reading skills for the 21st century society and the Sustainable Millenium Development Goals. It was therefore necessary to infer the characteristics of the population by using those from the sample with regard to the utilization of textbooks in Murang'a South Sub-county. The independent samples t-test was used to compare the differences between male and female teachers. The study hypothesized that there was no significant difference in selected attitude items of male and female teachers to textbooks that were made available in public primary schools to inculcate reading skills for the 21st century society.

The item "I like the textbooks provided to the teachers and pupils in Muranga South sub-county" the F-stat was 2.630 with a p-value of .417. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected meaning that there was no significant difference in attitudes of pupils and teachers to the textbooks. On the usefulness of books that were made available to teachers, and pupils the study found no significant difference in the attitudes of pupils and teachers ($F=.080$, $t =.217$, $p =.829$).

Table 4: Comparing Teachers' Attitudes to textbooks Between Different Gender on Some Selected items.**ANOVA Summary Table**

| Levene's Test for | | t-test for equality of means Equality of Variances | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|------|-------|--------|-----------------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| I like the Textbooks procured through programme | Equal variances assumed | 2.630 | .110 | -.817 | 56 | .417 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.824 | 51.048 | .414 |
| Textbooks procured through programme are useful | Equal variances assumed | .080 | .778 | .217 | 56 | .829 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | .217 | 49.427 | .829 |
| I like the Cash method | Equal variances assumed | .877 | .353 | -.498 | 56 | .620 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.472 | 39.690 | .639 |
| The programme is a waste of tax payers money | Equal variances assumed | .003 | .959 | -.747 | 55 | .458 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.744 | 46.788 | .461 |
| I like the way teachers are involved in the procurement | Equal variances assumed | 2.322 | .133 | .193 | 55 | .848 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | .184 | 40.019 | .855 |

Levene's test for equality for equality of variances tests the hypotheses that, the variances of the two groups are equal. None of the items showed a significant relationship between the attitudes of male and female teachers to the textbooks. The study also determined the total scores of teachers on all attitude items according to education zones. The study also determined the total scores of teachers on all attitude items

according to education zones in Muranga Sub-county. These were analysed by gender by calculating the means and standard deviation and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Analysis of Teachers' Attitude to Textbooks by Gender

| | Gender of respondent | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|----------------------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Scores | Male | 25 | 30.24 | 3.677 | .735 |
| | Female | 35 | 31.49 | 3.100 | .524 |

Table 5 reveals that the mean attitude scores of male teachers (30.24) was different from that of the female teachers (31.49). The independent sample t-test was used to find out if this difference was statistically significant and table 6 presents the results.

Table 6 Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | Mean Difference | |
|--------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | | F | Sig. | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Scores | Equal variances assumed | .214 | .646 | -1.420 | 58 | .161 | -1.25 | .878 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.379 | 46.154 | .174 | -1.25 | .903 |

Using the t-test for independent samples, the study found no significant difference in attitudes of male and female teachers towards textbooks ($t = -1.420$, $df = 58$, $p > 0.05$). The study also analysed the attitudes of teachers as categorized by type of school. The study found that the mean attitude scores of teachers in well performing schools were higher than those in poorly performing public primary schools and Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7 Mean attitude scores of teachers by type of school

| | Category of school | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|--------------------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Scores | well performing | 27 | 32.04 | 3.458 | .666 |
| | poorly performing | 33 | 30.09 | 3.096 | .539 |

According to Table 7, the mean attitude scores of teachers towards textbooks in well performing and poorly performing public primary schools was different. Teachers in well performing schools had a mean of 32.04 (SD = 3.458) while those in poorly performing schools had a mean of 30.09 (SD =3.096).

The independent t-test was used to find out whether this difference was statistically significant. Table 8 presents the results.

Using the t-test for independent samples, the study found there was a significant difference between attitudes of teachers in well performing and poorly performing public primary schools with regard to the processes in the implementation ($t = 2.298$, $df = 58$, $p < 0.05$). This implied that the difference in teachers' attitudes to textbooks perhaps influenced how they were utilized and by extension the reading proficiency of the pupils in the sub-county. The t-test was used to analyse the mean differences of attitude scores in the various education zones. The study found that there was no significant difference in the attitudes of teachers in the various education zones.

Conclusion

This paper has assessed teachers and pupils predilections to textbooks among primary school pupils in Muranga South Sub-county. There were differences in the predilections of teachers according to school type and gender. Reading skills among the pupils were way below the expected threshold to empower the pupils to use the same to communicate and apply these in a variety of contexts. Thus if nothing is done about the situation, poverty levels may increase and effectively thwarting the learners from reaping the benefits of the 21st century society.

Recommendations

The study recommends that attitude change be incorporated in the in-service teacher programmes in public primary schools in Muranga Sub-county as part of capacity building for poverty reduction and social transformation. Mentorship programmes may be considered as a strategy to improve reading skills and prepare the learner to take their place in society as income generators. The study also recommends that appropriate motivational strategies be adopted by teachers to ensure that the learners interact with textbooks so that they can improve their reading proficiency and drive the county economy. Using smaller class sizes may also be considered as an empowerment strategy by primary school management to facilitate actualization of their individual potentials for the 21st century society.

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