



Coverage of English syllabus in secondary schools in Kenya: A comparative study in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

Education delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income, and is the most important factor to ensure equality of opportunities. Having education in an area helps people think, feel, and behave in a way that contributes to their success, and improves not only their personal satisfaction but also their community. Worldwide, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG4 calls for access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. A Syllabus is an important tool in a bid to acquire quality education. Firstly, it delineates the responsibilities of students and the instructors. It offers information about what should be discussed, what students are supposed to do, and how these results are evaluated. In the Kenyan Education system, all the learning processes depends crucially upon the mastery of the fundamental skills of English Language, which is vital not only for educational purpose but also for economic competitiveness. The government of Kenya has come up with policies that ensure that at the end of secondary school, students are able to communicate competitively using the English language. However, there has been a worrying concern from both employers and educationists that the employees and graduates, respectively, have poor English language skills. The aim of this study was to establish the existing gaps between stated government policies on the syllabus coverage in teaching of English in secondary schools in Kenya on one hand and on the other the actual school practices during the implementation of these policies. This study was based on structural functionalism theory by Durkheim. It adopted descriptive research design which was carried out in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. The study had a target population of 480 from 60 Schools which included: the heads of English

department and teachers of English. The study employed purposive sampling where the schools' Heads of English Department (HODs) and teachers of English were purposively sampled into 62 respondents composed of 8 HODs and 56 teachers. Questionnaires and observation checklists were used to collect data. The qualitative data was grouped into different categories depending on the responses given by the respondents. Those categories helped in establishing themes. Through the use of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) program, quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics percentages, frequencies, and tables where appropriate. The Key finding in this study was that all the government policies on coverage of syllabus during teaching of English were not being fully implemented as required. The study recommended that teachers of English access regular professional development programs to enhance their teaching and acquire skills to enable them overcome some of the challenges they were facing during the coverage of the English syllabus during teaching; The Kenya National Examination council (KNEC) is to come up with an oral exam and a listening exam to help students achieve communication competence in English.

Key words: English, syllabus coverage, teaching of English, policies, secondary school

Introduction

Education delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income, and is the most important factor to ensure equality of opportunities (World bank 2021). It is also an important issue in one's life. Having education in an area helps people think, feel, and behave in a way that contributes to their success, and improves not only their personal satisfaction but also their community. Worldwide, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG4 calls for access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. In Africa, the African union 2063 goals on education states that the society would have well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by Science, Technology and Innovation.

It is from this back ground that the Kenya government in its constitution, the Kenyan constitution article 43(1)(f),53(1)(b) and 55(a)of chapter 4 states that both the state and parents have to facilitate quality basic education for all children in Kenya. It goes on to affirm in article 53 1(b) that 'every child has the right to free and compulsory basic education. This article further states that 'Every person has a right to education. In article 55(a) the government declares that it shall take measures including affirmative action programmes to ensure that the youth access relevant education and training. Hence the Ministry of education through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has come up with syllabi for different levels and subjects in education. In education, the syllabus is an outline of what will be covered in the course; a test date schedule and the due dates for assignments; the course grading policy and basic learning system which is very crucial for learning to take place (Bett Kipkorir, 2020). The syllabus is described as an outline of topics that are supposed to be covered in a subject for a given level. In addition, as part of the curriculum, it involves learning objectives, material content and series, layout, and assessment. Moreover, Standardized objectives and materials to be learned in a certain framework are described in it. The emphasis of the Syllabus is on selected and particular contents. Thus, syllabus is subordinated to curriculum. Syllabus is important in an educational setting. Firstly, it delineates the responsibilities of students and the instructors. It offers information about what was discussed, what students were supposed

to do, and how these results were evaluated (Okoth & Ndaloh, 2013). In striving to assess both individual teachers and whole systems, Syllabi can be very valuable. In addition, a properly-planned syllabus will offer information to help learners become more active students (Okoth & Ndaloh, 2013). According to Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2017) effective syllabus coverage refers to adequate completion of topics in the syllabus as per the time allocated. Similarly, Wiles and Bondi (2014) affirm that effective syllabus coverage includes how teachers provide guidance and evaluation using unique tools in a curriculum. Generally, the syllabus presents instructional ideas, number of lessons, scripts, and evaluation choices relevant to a set of goals. These prototypes concentrate on continuity to help teachers better incorporate and sustain the curricular structure to achieve different goals.

In the Kenyan Education system, all the learning process depends crucially upon the mastery of the fundamental skills of English Language, which is vital not only for educational purpose as language of instruction, but also for economic competitiveness (Barasa, 2005). This is because majority of the subjects are taught using the English language apart from subjects like Kiswahili, French, German and Arabic. In Kenya, the English Language is the medium of instruction from primary to tertiary level. Moreover, in order to reap many academic, social and professional benefits one should master the English Language (KIE, 2002). Although the importance of English and its justification for use in schools has been clearly brought out, there are challenges when it comes to teaching it in secondary schools. Despite there being global campaigns for Education for all (EFA) the quality of teaching the English curriculum is still not as it should be. English as a tool to communicate is the dominant international language. It is widely used in all sectors such as communications, science, information technology, business, entertainment and diplomacy. Therefore, the acquisition of English serves as the primarily skill to enhance the competence development (Ghassani Mandasari 2020). Therefore, it is paramount that at the end of secondary school the student should have acquired communication competence in the English language (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2002).

However, employers and educationists have raised concerns that the candidates at the end of secondary schools have poor English language skills. It is common to come across professionals, who cannot express themselves using the English language. Also, there have been concerns about students who complete secondary school having passed well in their written examination but being unable to express themselves in spoken English (Osondo, 2014).

These concerns have been expressed in various forums; at the policy level, in the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) and at school management boards such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The government has set up policies on the teaching of the English Language in secondary schools. This was to ensure that students achieve communicative competence at the end of the course. These policies are; One of the national curriculum policy 'to improve the quality of education at all levels through competency based curricula, the government will ensure that an interdisciplinary and holistic learning is embedded in the curricular (MOE 2015). The KICD stated that English should be taught as integrated- the syllabus adopts an integrated approach to the teaching of English. Integration means merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both. On yet another scale, "Integration means that no language skill

should be taught in isolation where listening; speaking, reading and writing should complement each other”. English as a subject should be taught as integrated with literature (KIE 2012, p.3).

In addressing the need to construct a balanced education curriculum aligned to delivering the aspiration of vision 2030, the government shall focus on core education outcomes, independent of subjects being taught and on developing a repertoire of skills and competences required by all learners and teachers. These include the teaching of communication skills the ability to communicate verbally and in writing, to talk, listen and act on directions (MOE 2012). The KICD stated that the government shall review the percentages time within the curriculum allocated to the development of the skills and assessment, a guideline shall be developed to operationalize this approach in planning and timetabling (MOE 2012). It was stated that “English should be taught using the syllabus recommended by KICD and covered within a period of one year per class”. The time allocated for the teaching of this syllabus is 6 lessons a week for form 1 and 2 and 8 lessons a week for form 3 and 4 (KIE 2012, p.5).

Despite the government putting in place policies to guide the teaching of English in 2002, the standards of English performance have continued to deteriorate. In the 2013 KCSE results, English were among the subjects poorly performed (Oduor, 2014). Moreover recently on national television there was an embarrassing situation where university students from one of the local universities were unable to express themselves in coherent English. For most undergraduates forming and delivering questions to the panelists in organized English proved to be a daunting task (Kihuria, 2015). In any given classroom setting students attitude will most likely affect the ability of the instructor to motivate the student. Some of the things that may interfere with the teaching and learning process include student’s attitude towards the composition of the teaching staff, including their educational qualification, work experience, gender, preparation of the teacher of English to teach, and attendance of in service training. It is on this background that results in differences on how teachers implement the government policies on the teaching of English curriculum in secondary schools in Nairobi City County (Muyaka, 2012).

For the teaching of the English syllabus to be successful, it largely depends on several factors including the coverage of the English syllabus, the teaching of English as an integrated Subject and Teaching English for achievement of communicative competence. These will in turn depend on the implementation of the government policies given by the government for effective teaching of the English syllabus. The levels at which the stated government policies are implemented in the actual classroom practice differ from one school to another and from one individual teacher to another. Thus, this study sought to carry out a comparative analysis of the different schools and how they implement the government policies on the teaching of English in secondary schools in Nairobi City County.

1.3. Statement of the problem

Despite the government making policies on teaching of English in secondary schools, the quality of English is still falling. There has been concern from university lecturers that the term papers written by first year undergraduates are full of grammatical mistakes and the students can hardly

express themselves in fluent English (Osondo, 2014). Moreover, language analysts are looking at the peculiar ways Kenyans use English and they have established a variety of English called 'Black Kenyan English' (Gekonde, 2017). It is clear if English as a subject was to be taught as prescribed by the government we would not have citizens who have gone through secondary education have peculiar ways of using English rather we would all use the standard British English taught in our secondary schools. Thus there was need to examine the implementation of government policies on syllabus coverage in teaching of English in Secondary schools in Nairobi City County in Kenya.

Objective

- i. To assess the extent of content coverage of English syllabus is in line with the stipulated government policies of one year per class.

Research Question

- ii. How far in practice is the English syllabus covered within one year per class as stipulated by the government policies?

Review of related literature

Coverage of subject content and teaching of English in secondary schools

Worldwide there have been debates on timely coverage of the syllabus. In an article 'The Tyranny of Content: "Content Coverage" as a Barrier to Evidence-Based Teaching Approaches and Ways to Overcome It', teachers find themselves conflicted between finishing the syllabus and achieving learning outcomes for each student. When time is limited, it can be difficult to focus on the latter. However, with the advancement in technology and pedagogical techniques, a need to provide quality education has been recognized. This quality of education can only be attained by making sure the learning outcomes of students are achieved. But at the same time, finishing the syllabus in an academic year is also mandatory for teachers (Mark, 2023).

Instructors have inherited a model for conscientious instruction that suggests they must cover all the material outlined in their syllabus, and yet this model frequently diverts time away from allowing students to engage meaningfully with the content during class. The article outlined the historical forces that may have conditioned this teacher-centered model as well as the disciplinary pressures that inadvertently reward it. As a way to guide course revision and move to a learner-centered teaching approach, the research proposed three evidence-based strategies that instructors can adopt: First, identify the core concepts and competencies for your course; secondly, create an organizing framework for the core concepts and competencies; and lastly, teach students how to learn in your discipline. The research further outlines examples of actions that instructors can incorporate to implement each of these strategies. It proposed that moving from a content-coverage approach to these learner-centered strategies will help students better learn and retain information and apply it to new situations (Wingert et al 2020). This study assessed the syllabus coverage versus quality learning in general. In the current study it assessed syllabus coverage in English as a subject specifically in Secondary schools in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

In Africa, a case of South Africa, there has been an increasing state monitoring of curriculum

coverage. This is a response both to classroom research which shows that teachers do not always cover the official curriculum in the specified year and to learners' poor achievement in international tests. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal from 2013 to 2016, the Provincial Department of Education embarked on a systemic reform programme called *Jika iMfundo* in 1200 schools, which focused on improving curriculum management and coverage. It interviewed 29 Heads of Department (who are also teachers) in fifteen schools who had participated in the *Jika iMfundo* programme for three years, asking them about their experiences. The findings indicated that teachers experience tension between the fast pace required by the curriculum trackers and slow pace of learners and they believe that increasing pacing to cover the curriculum hampers the quality of the learning. Teachers also said that the curriculum coverage trackers do not account for different school contexts. It was argued that while the programme has provided clear curriculum guidance to teachers who need it and has not sufficiently acknowledged the huge variation in learners' competence. Nor has it yet enabled teachers to develop the content knowledge and the pedagogical content knowledge necessary to teach learners who are not at the same grade level (although they are in the same classroom). Curriculum coverage is a necessary, but not sufficient intervention, unless there is also a focus on pedagogy and teaching at the right level. It was recommended that an intervention that enables teachers to identify individual learner's existing learning gaps, and equips them to teach at the right level in order to provide learners with opportunities to develop foundational knowledge and skills to succeed in further education, rather than one whose primary focus is only curriculum coverage (Carol Anne Bertram et al, 2021). The study covered the coverage of syllabus in South Africa, the current study endeavored to research on the English syllabus coverage in secondary schools in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Timely syllabus coverage in schools is one of the major performance indicators as it has a direct influence on performance in both formative and summative examinations. Timely coverage of syllabus affords both students and teachers enough revision time for term end, year-end, and course end exams set by KNEC. When syllabuses are covered in a timely manner, ability of students to understand both theoretical and practical concepts is boosted and hence prospects of good performance in especially final/national exams (Mbalaka, 2016)

In Kenya, a syllabus is usually developed by the KICD and evaluated by KNEC. A syllabus mostly contains specific information about the course, such as information on how, where and when to contact the teacher; an outline of what was covered in the course; a schedule of test dates and the due dates for assignments; the grading policy for the course; specific classroom rules.

There exists an examination-driven curriculum in contrast to the desire by the country to provide an education that can equip the learner with skills at the end of every level of the system so that learning is not terminal at these points (Barasa 2005:46). Moreover, a solution must be found to the problem of huge classes and many lessons.

When teachers are in short supply such situations cannot encourage good results. The integration and wide curriculum has left both the teachers and students stretched beyond limits in their attempts to cope. When teachers are over loaded they tend to move at a pace determined by bright students in class and they cannot help the weak students. Barasa (2005) seems to point out that generally

there is a problem with the coverage of the syllabus in the education system. However, he does not specify government efforts in formulating policies that guide the teaching of English in Secondary schools in Kenya.

This study attempted to fill in this gap by identifying and describing the stated government policy on using English as a medium of instruction and its implementation. The English syllabus retains the variety of English acceptable in the Commonwealth which is derived from the British Standard English (KIE, 2012). In the teaching of English, the emphasis should be on the acquisition of communicative competence and not simply on the passing of examinations. In fact, becoming proficient in the language is a desirable life-long goal.

The time allocated for the teaching of this syllabus is 6 lessons a week in Form I and 2 and 8 lessons a week in Form 3 and 4. The use of the integrated approach helped to maximize the utilization of this time and ensure effective coverage of the syllabus.

Research Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive research design to answer the research questions concerning the current status of the implementation of government policies on the coverage of English syllabus in secondary schools in Nairobi County. Descriptive research design demonstrates relationships and described the world as it exists. The design allowed the researcher to demonstrate and described the implementation of the policies on teaching English in secondary schools as set by the government and their level of implementation as exposed by the actual practice.

Descriptive design helps to determine the current status of a population with respect to one or more variables (Mugenda, 2003). The study independent variables included; the teaching of English as an integrated subject, achievement of communication competence using the English language in secondary school students and the coverage of English syllabus in selected secondary schools. The intervening variable included patterns of mental states (attitudes of teachers, students and schools towards English as a subject), institutional patterns (lingua franca, medium of instruction and school rules) and patterns of physical environmental (economic and human resources) The dependent variables of the study were the acquisition of English language skills and the performance in the English subject by candidates at the end of their secondary course.

The study site was Nairobi City County. Due to time and cost constraint, the researcher decided to carry out the research in one county, due to it being cosmopolitan and being the county housing the headquarters of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development(KICD) which is charged with the responsibility of ensuring quality education is given to students country wide. It included all teachers of English in public secondary schools in Nairobi City County the teachers of English are the actual implementers of the set government policies by the government on teaching of English. The County has 60 public secondary schools. The target population was 180 respondents.

Under normal conditions this inquiry should have involved all the 60 secondary schools in the

Nairobi City County approved by and registered with MOE. However, the number of these schools was large and wide spread throughout the County. Application of instruments in all of them was likely to pose administrative and financial problems. Therefore, this researcher targeted a sample from the 60 schools.

The researcher adopted the view held by Orodho (2008), that 10% and above of the total institutions or population understudy would be appropriate for investigation. Therefore, out of 60 schools the researcher took 13%. Nairobi City County is divided in to four sub counties that is; West lands, Nairobi West, Nairobi East and Nairobi North. The researcher took 2 schools from each zone making a total of 8 schools.

The researcher purposively sampled one head of English department from each school and purposively sampled any seven teachers of English per school selected. Questionnaires and observation schedules were the two instruments administered to the respondents used in this study to enhance reliability of the research findings.

Research Findings and Discussion

According to the K.I.C.D the English syllabus should be covered within one year per class. The study sought to find out how far in practice is the English syllabus covered within one year per class as stipulated by the government policy. The researcher was therefore interested in establishing the patterns of English syllabus coverage in the sample schools.

The study used questionnaires administered to the heads of English departments in the sample schools. The questionnaire sought to find out how many lessons of English each form had per week. They also inquired if the sample schools had a syllabus coverage policy and if they understand, what the policy stated. According to the finding all the sample schools followed the policy on the number of lessons per class, as seen in table 4.5. They all had 6 lessons per week for form 1 and 2 and 8 lessons per week for form 3 and 4.

Table 4.7: Number of lessons per week in every class.

Name of school	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4 lessons
A	6	6	8	8
B	6	6	8	8
C	6	6	8	8
D	6	6	8	8
E	6	6	8	8
F	6	6	8	8
G	6	6	8	8
H	6	6	8	8

From the table it was quite commendable that all schools were fully implementing the policy on number of lessons allocation per class. However, when it came to the syllabus coverage, there were

quite a lot of disparities, in majority of the schools in the study; the general trend observed in schools was that syllabus coverage in form 1 and 2 teachers tends to comply by the policy even more hurried in Form Three. In some schools the policy was that Form Three syllabus to be covered by June so that Form Four syllabus starts in July. The form Four syllabus was expected to be covered by March in Form 4. The explanation given for this rush was that schools wanted the Form Fours to have ample time for thorough revision. This is well presented on table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Syllabus completion per class

Class	Month of syllabus completion
Form 1	October
Form 2	October
Form 3	June
Form 4	March

What clearly came out from the document analysis of some students exercise books was that teachers did not teach as per the content given in the course books but they tended to concentrate on the areas that were being examined in the final KCSE examination, hence as much as there were speaking skill exercises and exercises on listening skills in the course book the teachers ignored them so that they could complete the syllabus within ‘their’ stipulated time line. Some practice exercise like role play, debates and public speaking which were done in Form One and Two were completely ignored in Form Three and Four. For comprehension passages, teachers gave students as homework and most of the time they ended up unmarked. In Form Three and Four teachers concentrated on the set books and ensuring students did as many past papers as possible in preparation of the final exam.

Hence, due to the drilling that is why one can find high school leavers who scored a grade ‘A’ in English, that is 80 % and above but can barely express themselves fluently in English. In some cases teachers ignored areas in the syllabus they did not feel confident enough teaching due to lack of professional development courses. This led to students having gaps in their knowledge. Similar sentiments are echoed by Gathumbi and Masembe, 2005, who mentions that speaking is an integral part of listening since speaking involves responding to what has been heard. This interaction presents the learners with a lot of difficulties. The teachers of English should aim at helping learners attain fluency and accuracy in speech. When learners fail to listen and speak fluently and accurately the fail to communicate, leading to a breakdown in communication. Consequently, poor performance in exams is witnessed as learners cannot express themselves. In addition, Kenya Institute of Education encourage learners to read critically, observing how language is used. Writing tasks should be based on the learner’s interests and experiences. Group discussions and other pre-writing activities may be used to demystify writing (KIE 2002). It is quite evident that on the coverage of the syllabus policy, it was not being implemented as stipulated by the government policy.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

English syllabus coverage

The study showed that in Form One and Two the English syllabus was covered within the prescribed period of one year per class. However, in Form Three the syllabus was hurried along and covered by end of term two. The Form Four syllabuses in most school was started in third term of Form Three and finished by end of term one in Form Four. As from term two in Form Four intensive revisions started for the KCSE examinations. The study revealed that although, there was content on speaking and listening skills in the form 3&4 syllabus, many teachers tended to ignore it as they found it rather time consuming when they clearly knew it was not being examined.

The policy on coverage of the syllabus is not implemented fully as in Form Three and Four tend to hurry it along thus missing some content. The Form Three and Form Four syllabus was not covered within the prescribed period of time by the government. More over teachers deliberately decided not to teach some areas of the syllabus as they knew those areas would not be examined in the summative examination of KCSE.

On implementing the government policies, teachers of English are facing many challenges including the syllabus being too wide and schools lacking teaching and learning materials & aids necessary for the implementation of government policies on teaching English. Majority of schools lack facilities like libraries which are necessary for the full implementation of the government policies on teaching English in secondary schools in Nairobi City County.

Recommendations

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development should review the English syllabus on teaching oral literature and come up with content that the 21st Century students can be able to relate with and comprehend. In addition, the schools' administration and heads of English department should be strict on the timely coverage of the syllabus within the prescribed period by the government. Moreover, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development should review the English syllabus to ensure it is not very wide but it is manageable for quality teaching and learning.

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