

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Interrogation of Teacher Use of Instructional Resources in the Attainment of Learner Academic Engagement in Social Studies in Primary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract:

Attainment of learner academic engagement in the instructional process remains a vital issue in education systems the world over. Consequently, there is an urgent need to put in place well tested measures to ensure this is realized during instruction. The Kenyan government through the Ministry of Education encourages teachers to guide learners into achieving academic engagement through the adoption of interactive pedagogical approaches. "One cog in this wheel" is instructional resources. However, the extent to which teachers have put in place learner-instructional resource interaction to ensure academic engagement is attained in the country is still a dark alley in the research world. This paper endeavours to shed some light in this area. The study examined teacher use of instructional resources to attain academic engagement in social studies classes in Kenyan primary schools. It examined whether teachers encourage learner instructional resource interaction so as to achieve academic engagement. Data was generated from teachers and learners through interviews, observation and focused group discussion. The results of data analysis revealed that the quality of learner-instructional resource was low hence hampering the attainment of academic engagement.

Keywords: *Academic engagement, instructional resources, media resources, interactive approaches, planning for instruction, teaching and learning methods, inclusion and differentiation.*

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning resources hold an integral part in the instructional process. These materials are indispensable in learning in Social studies in the classroom. Sebazungu, Okoth and Ndaloh (2016) observe that the resources should be carefully planned and integrated in the instructional process to enable learners derive the benefits inherent in their use. The importance of the instructional resources has been underscored by various scholars. Agumba, Mwola, Mbiere & Akinyi (2015:144) provides the following:

- Provision of depth, efficiency and variety to the instructional process hence making it interesting,
- Helping in clarification of ideas and concepts to the learner,
- Helping capture learner attention to content;
- Promoting motivation and retention of knowledge in a learner,
- Offering a link between what obtains in real situation with what is learned in the classroom;
- Stimulating creativity, observation, reasoning and imagination in the learner,
- Encouraging active learner involvement in the lesson,
- Promoting skill-development in the learner e.g. observation, communication, cooperation, etc.
- Helping reinforce the concepts learned thus promoting accuracy.

Similar positions have been supported by other scholars (Sebazungu, Okoth & Ndaloh, 2016, Wallace 2007, Muvango 2013). Teacher quality may partly be judged against use or lack of use of the teaching and learning resources. Ito, Mizoue, Moriwake & Nagai (1981) are of the view that those who employ as many materials of learning during instruction tend to achieve their specific objectives as opposed to the reverse. They contend that teacher use of the resources is influenced by their knowledge, creativity, energy and devotion.

Choice of instructional resources is based upon a set of criteria. This is what should inform teacher choice of the resources. Okoth & Ndaloh (2008) aver that they should be evaluated on the basis of: relevance, cost, aesthetics, durability, availability and adequacy, friendliness to learner socio-cultural background, variety, safety during use, age appropriateness, versatility, accessibility, size, simplicity and storage.

It is in the light of the above criteria that Ho, Mizone, Moriwake & Nagai (1981: 232) observe that in making judgement about instructional resources, a teacher poses the following questions:

- Is the material consistent with agreed-upon educational goals and instructional objectives?
- Did the material contribute to students' cognitive growth and affective development?
- Did the material arouse student interest in the topic?
- Did it promote the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities of the pupils?
- Did the material present varying points of view on issues, especially on controversial questions? Did the treatment seem largely free of error and bias?
- Is the material appropriate for the pupils' age?
- Is the material accurate, up to date and related to the course content?
- Is the material easy to obtain?

In Africa, the teaching of social studies has been greatly informed by a conference held in Mombasa, Kenya in 1968. This conference was organized by the African Social Studies Programme. It provided the blueprint upon which the teaching of the subject is based. It gave directions on among others, the aims of teaching the subject as an integrated course, the methodology, assessment and the instructional resources which were deemed relevant in facilitating the attainment of the aims of introducing the course in the school curriculum.

On the aims of teaching social studies, the conference provided the following:

- Creation of awareness and understanding of the evolving social and physical environment as a whole and rational use of the resources therein for development.
- Development in the learner of the capacity to learn and acquire a variety of essential skills to facilitate formation of sound judgment,
- Acquisition of relevant knowledge for personal development and societal betterment,
- Development of a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and inter-dependence of all members of the local community, and of the wider national and international community.

These aims demand lessons rich in a variety of resources. As I have already pointed out, the Kenyan social studies curriculum has since independence been greatly influenced by the philosophy of social studies expoused during the Mombasa conference. In vouching for integration, the conference thus observed.

1.1. Extract Quote from P.9 of Thesis

From the above quotation, it is explicit that the social studies curriculum across the continent vouches for encouragement active learner involvement in the instructional process. This, among others calls for the use of a variety of instructional resources.

Kenya's social studies curriculum advocates for use of a plethora of teaching and learning resources. Generally, the resources may be categorized under printed materials, non-print resources, audio and audio-visual resources (Okoth & Ndaloh, 2008). Further categorization given is that by Sebazungu, Okoth & Ndaloh (2016) which provides another categorization which mentions the following: printed materials, graphic materials, three dimensional materials, electronic visual materials, audio materials, audio visual resources, tactile materials, display boards and community resources. From the foregoing, there is a wide range of instructional resources from which a teacher can draw from.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD, 2008) provides a variety of teaching and learning resources which a teacher may incorporate in social studies lessons. They include: books, maps, charts, photographs, pictures, diagrams, realia, specimen, local environment, audio resources and audio-visual resources.

The government of Kenya advocates for use of variety of resources in the school curriculum at various levels to improve the quality of learning. This is informed by the understanding that instructional resources provide enriched opportunities for learners to acquire concepts, values and skills (HO et al., 1981).

2. Objectives of the Study

Based on the background presented in the preceding section, the objectives of the study were:

- To establish whether teachers encourage learner-instructional resource interaction during the teaching and learning of social studies in Kenyan primary schools.
- To determine whether through the establishment of learner-instructional resource interaction by the teacher in social studies instruction, learner academic engagement was attained.

3. Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Are teachers of social studies encouraging learner-instructional resource interaction in their lessons?
- Do teachers of social studies in encouraging learner-instructional resource interaction in their lessons contribute to academic engagement?

4. Methodology

The study was conducted in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. This county had for over a period of five years prior to the study registered an average performance in the subject in the Kenya Primary Certificate of Education examinations at the end of the primary school system (Uasin Gishu County Director of Education office 2013).

The study adopted the relativist interpretivist philosophical paradigm besides taking the qualitative multiple case study design (Cresswell, 2009). Its ontological and epistemological underpinnings was normalist and interpretive- anti positivist, respectively (Maree & Westhuizen, 2014).

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting 16 schools. A total of 656 participants drawn from across the gender divide comprising of 16 teachers and 640 learners were chosen. The respondents were drawn from urban, peri-urban and rural schools. Learner performance in these schools was markedly varied. All the teachers had undergone through the primary teacher certificate education. This was the lowest professional qualifications. Some had a Bachelor of Education in Primary Education degree.

Data was generated through in-depth interviews, observation and focused group discussions. Interviews were conducted with teachers, while learners were exposed to focus group discussions. A total of 16 lessons were observed. In the focused group discussions, learners were allowed to use both English and Kiswahili languages. Code switching helped in enabling those with a poor grasp of English to express themselves in Kiswahili which is the national language while English is the language of instruction.

Trustworthiness of the data was achieved through a four-step criterion: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Triangulation was further used to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

Ethical standards were achieved through seeking the respondents' informed consent and assent. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants was also observed. In addition, the researcher negotiated access with gate keepers. He also sought permission from the relevant authorities to undertake the study. The data was coded, transcribed and analysed qualitatively.

4.1. Findings

In Kenya, sourcing of teaching and learning resources mainly take two forms. These are commercially produced and teacher/learner made resources. The latter are also known as improvised teaching and learning resources. They are usually made from locally available materials through a teachers' or learners' creativity, innovativeness and ingenuity, (Ndaloh et al. 2009). The current policy of the Kenya government is in favour of improvisation of instructional resources. This is informed by the advantages inherent in good production and use of the resources. These resources do not involve higher production costs although they are usually of low quality compared to commercially produced resources. Further, these resources are preferred in the face of dwindling funding for education. HO et al (1981) avers that improvised resources enable the learner to acquire additional skills, interests and enthusiasm in the learning process. Aside from commercially and improvised teacher/learner resources, schools may also borrow resources from each other or ask teachers and/or learners to collect those readily occurring in their immediate environment. This however is not common in most Kenyan primary schools. Regardless of the type of resource, the teacher should ensure there is proper care and maintenance of the material. Where inclusive learning is recommended, the resources should also be adapted to suit the learner's special needs in the classroom. The media resources should encourage interaction in the classroom (Kafu, 1976). Patel and Mukwa (1993) add that instructional resources should have an in-built way through which they allow for ample interaction among the learners and between the teacher and learner. This demands that the resources be adequate and relevant to the content of interest to the teacher. Otunga et al (2011) further add that effective use of the resources hinges on teacher knowledge and skills. It is for this reason that Barasa (2005) opines that the availability of the resources and teacher dexterity in their use enhance learner performance. While Arends (2007) suggests that use of pictures and illustrations during the instructional process focuses learner attention and encourage their engagement on tasks. Kigotho (2013) on the other hand, reports that education stakeholders have attributed the slow learner achievement in Kenya to among others lack of textbooks. However, the use of these resources in schools is threatened by many factors. Kafu (2010) note that the teachers' traditional fear of innovations in instructional technology has exacerbated the challenge posed by use of especially, the digital resources in teaching. He adds that this occurs in the background of considerable changes or shifts made in the process of designing the technological resources for use in teaching.

The area of instructional resources has attracted a plethora of studies. The studies have approached the issue from different perspectives. However, very few have focused on availability and use vis-à-vis learner interaction and academic engagement. An examination of a few will suffice.

Many studies have established the lack of instructional resources in schools. Kunje, Lewin and Stuart (2003) in a study conducted in Malawi found that many schools lacked adequate teaching and learning resources. This forced teachers to fail to use them during the teaching and learning exercise. Little attempts were also directed to improvisation. The study revealed the in-existence of basic materials like textbooks, charts and models in most schools. Kagunda (2010), Kimani (2010) and Moro (2013) have also established the lack of resources. Kafu (1976) had found out the inexistence of relevant resources and lack of teacher preference for innovation in resource production. The present study focused on instructional resources and whether teachers encourage active learner interaction in their use in social studies and their relationship to academic

engagement. This is an area that partly covers the issues of availability and use that have been mentioned in the previous studies.

Inadequate resources and lack of teacher innovation in resource production, is worrying considering the fact that the resources are vital in promotion of learning. To this end, Kigotho (2013) observed that school quality and learning materials have an impact on pupil learning achievement. This demands that the issue of the instructional resources be provided due attention. Tabalia (2012) and Cherotich (2013) linked the lack of resources to poor performance. Due to its direct relationship to performance, resource use veers into academic engagement. This is what majorly informed the present study. In another study conducted by Kupolati et al (1980) and reported in ASSP (1990) it was established that one of the major problems facing the implementation of social studies curriculum in post-primary institutions in Lagos state of Nigeria was lack of instructional resources such as textbooks, maps and other resources. Similar findings were also found by Oshungbohun in a study conducted in 1984 and reported in ASSP (1990). The study focused on the teaching of social studies in Lagos state, Nigeria. It revealed the lack of both print and non-print materials. The study further established teacher preference of the few print materials over their non-print counterparts.

Other studies have found that where the resources are available, they are in most cases inadequate. Examples of such studies are Nabwire (1998), Ngota (2011), Tuimur (2011), Agufana (2009), Mutwiri (2012), Undie, Mugisha, Epari and Ezech (2008), Lendo (2012), Muvango (2011), Chepsiror (2011) and Mwonga (2013). Abutho (2012) on the other hand found the resources were available and were behind the good performance in the schools visited. Buluma (2013) equally established a link between performance and the instructional resources. This makes the use of the resources to be directly related to academic engagement. In addition, the studies cited above did not focus on social studies instruction in primary schools. It is also possible that where the resources are inadequate, teachers seldomly use them hence negating use of interactive pedagogical approaches.

Innovation is critical in the use of teaching and learning resources. Kafu (1976) found that teachers were performing poorly in this area. Other studies have equally brought out the fact that teachers were not making any attempts to improvise the teaching and learning resources to ameliorate the issue of shortage yet this is a major policy requirement of Kenya's ministry of education. Contradictory findings were however made by Agufana (2009) who found that teachers improvised teaching and learning resources in Kiswahili lessons at the secondary school level. They also encouraged learners to develop some of the resources. This is encouraging as most studies have pointed to a lack of improvisation in teachers and learners. But even in Agufana's study the resources were mainly realia and models. Little use was made of the other resources. When probed, teachers gave various reasons for use or lack of use of the resources. Nabwire (1998) found that the determinants of teacher use of the resources were availability, competence and familiarity. While lack of the resources, inadequate time, lack of skills by teachers to prepare and use the resources coupled with lack of professional managerial support all mitigated against teacher use of the materials.

Instructional resources should be varied. This is however seldom the case with most teachers. Many studies have found that nearly the same resources are used by teachers from time to time. Muvango (2011) found the use of posters, models, charts and textbooks to be the common resources used in most classrooms. Agufana (2009) found models and realia while Tuimur (2011) found textbooks and atlases. Lendo (2012) established skewedness towards charts, pictures, textbooks and printed materials. Unfortunately, the problem may not surely be in the realm of teachers. In their report, the Nyanza Province Quality Assurance team from the Ministry of Education in Kenya found an interesting connection (Provincial Director of Education – PDE 2014). It established that headteachers in Gem district utilized more time and money on physical facilities construction and improvement at the expense of instructional resources. This revelation partly puts the blame on lack of professional managerial support. This may be the reason why most studies done in the area have found that there is a preference to teacher use of printed materials. The problem may also issue from teacher preparation in the teacher education institutions. Such studies include Rotumoi (2006); Molenye (2012); Makokha (2009), Lewin and Stuart (2008); Nyaoga (2005), Obondo (2012); Ogula (1986), Locho (2008); and Sumbwa, (2008). Interestingly, Kagunda (2010) found the resources to be adequate. While Oloo (2010) for example, found that teachers were only using two textbooks yet the market is flooded with many of these materials. This runs counter to the professional position which provides that social studies content due to its nature of demanding interpretation from several viewpoints, involve exposure of learners to a variety of textbooks so as to enable them get alternative explanations and interpretations. This is more urgent now as teachers rush to guide learners in the acquisition of the 21st century skills.

All the same, use of the resources lies squarely with the teachers. Too and Kafu (2009) found out that teachers did not use the resources in the recommended manner. They specifically pointed out the timing and duration taken in displaying the resources as wanting. Nonetheless, this should be seen in the light of the design of the learning rooms. This notwithstanding, the study revealed that the teachers tended to remove the resources before learners had observed them well or displayed them longer than recommended. Lewin & Stuart (2008) on their part observe that even when resources were available, the overloaded curriculum and transmission mode of teaching mitigated against the use of their use. Bett (2008) however found that the resources were expensive, too involving to improvise and time consuming when used. All these arguments notwithstanding, Makokha (2009) and Rotumoi, (2006) found that teachers held a positive attitude towards the use of resources. This may lead to problems partly being attributed to teacher training. Ololobou (1990) found that teachers were not using the "right materials" in social studies instruction. This supports Ogula (1986) who found that lack of training made

teachers of social studies to recommend that in-service courses be organized to cover among other areas preparation or improvisation of instructional resources. Makokha (2009) corroborated the findings of these studies. He found out that lack of knowledge to handle preparation hampered teacher use of the materials.

All these studies cited, none has examined whether learner-resource interaction is encouraged during the instructional process. This study mainly focused on the issue to try to relate it to academic engagement.

5. Findings

The study was interested on whether the teacher engaged the learners actively in interpretation of the content in teaching and learning resources. This was checked during the observations, sought during interviews with teachers and in the focused group interviews with the learners. Apart from whether the learners were actively involved, the researcher also tried to establish whether there was a contribution to learner academic engagement where they were actively engaged in the teaching and learning exercise when resources were being used.

Through lesson observations, the teachers used a variety of resources although they were mainly graphic materials. A few used textbooks. However, there were little attempts made by the teachers at using the learners to interpret the content of the instructional resources. Teachers tended to be in a hurry when displaying the materials. When their opinion was sought for this during the interviews, they argued that the classes were large that if this was allowed, they would not achieve their specific lesson objectives.

On their part, the learners observed that they would have wished that their teachers gave them a chance to explain what was contained in the teaching and learning resources but this was never done. A Member of one of the focused groups (LF4) had this to say "tungelewa sana walimu wangeturuhusu piya, tuchangie juu ya vitu kwenye cheti au mchoro ubaoni, hii ingetufanya tuelewe zaidi but walimu wenyewe huongea tu bila ya kutupa hiyo nafasi". (We could have understood more if teachers would let us contribute to things that are on charts or drawings on the blackboard, this could have made us to understand more but teachers just talk without giving us that opportunity). Similar views were shared by other groups. For example, a member of another group agreed that they really understood concepts in social studies whenever the teacher used the resources and allowed them to participate in their interpretation "sisi huenjoy sana social studies, walimu wakitumia vitu mbalimbali darasani. Infact mi huelewa sana na hufanya nifanye juhudi kufanya vyema kwa social studies" (we normally enjoy social studies so much when teachers use different instructional resources in class. Infact I normally understand more and it makes me put more effort in social studies) a member remarked.

From the foregoing observations, learner engagement issued from teacher promotion of learner-instructional resource interaction. Teacher active engagement of the learner in the instructional material, enabled the former to enjoy and master concepts in social studies curriculum.

5.1. Discussion of Findings

5.1.1. Interactive Pedagogical Approaches and Instructional Resources

Whenever learners are actively engaged in the interpretation of the content in a teaching and learning resource, they tend to benefit more as they understand the content better than where they are not allowed to interpret the contents. This study found that learner active involvement in the interpretation of the contents does contribute to academic engagement. The study's findings resonate well with those of Abutho (2012) and Buluma (2013) who equally established a relationship between performance and use of instructional resources.

There were however situations where teachers never used the learning resources. They either lacked, were inadequate or available but were not being subjected to use. Teachers probably do not see their relevance or due to limited time, want to cover the syllabus hence viewing the use of learning resources to be an impediment towards the same.

The limiting of the resources to mainly graphic materials goes against the recommendation that instructional resources from various categories be used (Kafu, 1983). This has the potential of denying the learner the benefits found in all the categories of instructional resources thus limiting the advantages that may be borne from the resources. It also makes the instructional process boring. Use of a variety of learning resources have the potential of making learning interesting (Kafu, 1988, Petty, 2004 and Wallace, 2007).

On the one hand, this study was consistent with the previous studies in revealing the categories of resources used, and their adequacy. On the other hand, the findings of the study have identified the relationship between learner involvement in the interpretation of the contents of the used learning resources and academic engagement. Learners want to be involved in the interpretation of the contents. They also enjoy the teaching of social studies when the teacher incorporates a variety of learning resources (Kafu, 1988 and Muvango, 2012).

Consequently, the findings are consistent with other studies on inadequacy and type of the learning resources. Examples of the studies are: Shishiwa (2013), Lewin and Stuart (2003), Kagunda (2010), Kimani (2010) and Moro (2013). Others are Oshungbohun (1984), Tuimur (2011), Lendo (2012), Chepsiror (2011) and Undie, Mugisha, Epari and Ezeh (2008). These studies found that the learning resources were inadequate and that most teachers used the graphic materials. However, they contradicted the finding of Abutho (2012) which established that the resources used in schools were adequate and were behind the good performance.

Few studies have explicitly established a link between performance and use of instructional resources. From the literature review, only Tabalia (2012) and Cherotich (2013) have linked the use of resources to performance. However, they did not say anything about learner academic engagement. This study established a nexus between learner active involvement in the interpretation of contents of the instructional resources and academic engagement. It found that where there was interaction, learner academic engagement was attained. While in lessons where interaction lacked, learner academic engagement was absent.

5.1.2. Instructional Resources and Learner Academic Engagement

The second research question dealt with learner interaction with the learning resources and their contribution to academic engagement. It was found that teachers mainly used print and graphic materials. They made little attempt at engaging the learners in the interpretation of the contents in the learning resources used in instruction. This indicated lack of interaction between learners and the resources. Consequently, the study concluded that the level of interaction was inadequate. This was despite the fact that interaction between the learner and the materials led to the realization of academic engagement in social studies.

6. Conclusion

The study adopted a qualitative approach. It found that even though teachers of social studies encourage learner-instructional resource interaction, little attempts were made at the attainment of academic engagement due to a low level of interaction between the two integral elements in the instructional process.

6.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made to three set of stakeholders:

6.2. Teachers

Teachers should involve the learners in interpretation of the contents in the learning resources. In addition, they should increase the type of the resources used in social studies. Varying the resources other than the graphic materials that were found to dominate social studies classes during the study should be made. Finally, thought should be put on improvisation of some of the relevant learning resources. This would substantially help to reduce the cost of resources to schools.

6.3. Teacher Education Institutions

Teacher education institutions incorporate in their programmes courses on interactive use of teaching and learning resources between the learner and the resources during the instructional process.

6.4. Policy Makers

Some of the recommendations made above require policy intervention. This demands that policy makers in the Kenyan education sector come in. Consequently, this study recommends that the social studies curriculum at the primary school level be scaled down so as to enable the curriculum implementers use interactive pedagogical approaches hence not rush to cover the syllabus through the use of non-interactive pedagogical approaches as it was noted during the study.

In light of the present syllabus, time allocated for the use of interactive pedagogical approaches in the subject should be increased. More lessons should be added to social studies' instructional time.

There is also an urgent need for introduction of in-service courses for teachers of social studies on use of pedagogical approaches in social studies lessons. The in-service courses should especially touch on learner-instructional resource interaction. Teacher creativity in improvisation of resources should equally be considered during teacher education courses in social studies.

6.5. Suggestions for further research

A number of issues have come out in my study that I would wish to recommend for further investigation. First and foremost, the researcher suggests a replication of this study in other contexts; that is in private primary schools, other classes in public primary school's counties in Kenya and countries in other parts of the world so as to enrich our understanding of the contribution of interactive pedagogical approaches on learner academic engagement in social studies instruction especially in learner-instructional resource interaction. The researcher makes this suggestion in line with the observation of scholars of qualitative research, especially in the case study design, who have argued that, the power of qualitative research rests in multiplicity of findings (e.g. Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2009; Juwan and Ong'ondo, 2011 and Berg & Lune, 2012).

Secondly, the researcher would suggest that studies be done on teacher preparation. These studies should specifically focus on how teacher education programmes address the issue of use of interactive pedagogical approaches in social studies among the student teachers. They should pay more attention to teacher preparation and use with creativity taking a centre stage.

Thirdly, during my study, the researcher encountered a number of interesting issues for which the researcher was unable to make any conclusions due to limited data. For example, the role of management in use of interactive pedagogical approaches among the teachers. Another issue was the role of differentiation and inclusion on learner academic engagement and lastly teacher competence in the use of pedagogical approaches. These issues were outside the scope of my study but are related to the study somewhat. I suggest that they be explored.

Finally, I would suggest a study on the contribution of supervision of teachers to their use of interactive pedagogical approaches in social studies. Such a study might shed light on the effect of visits by Quality Assurance and Standards Officers in improving pedagogy at the primary school level.

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