

Influence of Selection of Literature in English Guidebooks on Academic Performance of Learners in Secondary Schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

The development and selection of English literature guidebooks has gained prominence in the last decade in Kenya. Literature guidebooks are integral tools in enhancing learners and teachers understanding of specific literature set text with aim of improving grades of students in literature. The current study examined influence of selection of literature guidebooks in learning and teaching of English. It was guided by the following objective: to evaluate factors influencing selection of guidebooks as learning and teaching resources, student academic performance in Literature. Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory guided this study. The study employed descriptive research survey design with 714 target population comprising 700 students and 14 teachers. The study was delimited to secondary schools in Bumula Sub County within Bungoma County. The Sub-County was sampled purposively due to consistently registered poor mean scores in English as a subject. The schools were then stratified with consideration of the seven wards, gender, day and boarding schools as well as mixed or single gender schools. In addition, a sample size of 119 respondents was finally based on 10%-30% of targeted population by use of simple random sampling. Data was acquired by use of questionnaires and structured interviews. The commonly used literature guidebooks for *The River and the Source* set book were highlighted as *Guide to The River and the Source* by Richard Oketch et al, Moran Publishers, *Guide to The River and the Source* by Margaret Roche, Focus Publishers, *National Institute of Education Guidebooks for The River and the Source*. The selection of literature English guidebooks was determined by cost of the guidebook, year of publication, language used in the guidebook, logical explanations used in the book, vocabulary used, the readers attitude towards literature, interpretation of words, language unbarrenness, availability, etiquette portrayed, layout of book and illustrations used, recommendation from the head of department, color of the cover and appropriate font size. In terms of analysis the findings revealed that format and structure of most of the above guidebooks are relevant to the literary needs of secondary school learners as evident through a well outlined table of contents. It was further found out that consistency and logical arrangement of the layout influence the selection and use of Guide books. The study concluded that indeed selection and use of guidebooks in learning and teaching of literature in English influence performance of English as a subject in secondary schools. The study recommends that there should be an improvement by authors of the literature guidebooks to better English as a subject through appropriate activities for practice, give a critical detail of the set books being reviewed, and enhance appropriate language that is affordable to the learners.

Keywords: selection of English literature guidebooks, Academic Performance, appropriate language

1. Background to the Study

Globally, quality education has stimulated passionate discussions among numerous countries and in Bolivia for example, education has become main issue of the public agenda. It has been debatable issue over the last two decades since conceptualization of Educational Reform Agenda (Contreras & Talavera, 2003). In Kenya, the Kamunge Report (1988) highlighted education and training as social investment for national development. It is a medium that prepares the youth with necessary elements for future life in the society. Education also develops the individual talents, personality, attitudes towards work and prepares them for further formal education, training and employment. The report further states that there will be need to lay greater emphasis on quality and relevant education and training. It will also be necessary to intensify research as well as to develop science and technology, creative and performing arts and languages.

Furthermore, the Koech Report (1999) highlighted challenges and opportunities of enhancing high quality education to Kenyan students. The Government was overwhelmed in provision of adequate resources for quality education. It is an opportunity as this type of education provides the market labour force with prerequisite skills for economic development of the county. The key main elements of quality education as emphasized by this report are investment and expansion of resources, effective and efficient use of available resources, and establishing sources of funds.

The Kenyan nation, a former British colony is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation. Two major official languages form the main pillar of communication since independence in Kenya (Lewis, 2009). These are Kiswahili, a lingua franca within the Eastern Africa region, and English. In schools, English is the main medium of instruction from Class 4 (about age 9), following mother-tongue instruction in the formative years. Muthili (2002) reported that language policy has been interpreted by stakeholders in view of their own understanding, the resources at their disposal, and their beliefs about what is best for their learners within the wider socio-educational context.

Nation heterogeneity and policy implementation makes it difficult to distribute resources towards development of English language materials, and inequity. But this is also observed in children in urban areas who have more access to English in a variety of ways compared to other children in rural areas. Needless to say, English remain a pillar in education, for communication and as a mode for general upward growth. In secondary schools, KICD (2002) described English as a model language of international communication

According to Chakava (2012) reported that the 8.4.4 education system inculcated the culture of textbooks development and supply procedures that were skewed in favor of parastatal publishing houses. It further influenced the curriculum development body, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), to form subject panels with mandate of producing materials and publish them through parastatal publishing houses for supply to public schools, leaving little room for local private and multinational publishers. In the last decade or so, Were (2012) asserted that market liberalization has resulted in new opportunities and challenges in textbook procurement and supply in Kenya.

According to McGrath (2012), Teachers' Guides in professional development is generally undisputed fact in education system today and numerous researchers have had their say on this aspect. Early proponents postulate the important role enhanced by Instructors' Guides in the

education system. They are medium of change in raising awareness of new teaching methodology and strengthen knowledge base of the Guides users. However, Coleman (1985) pointed out attitudinal factors influencing the selection and use of Guides especially with non-native speaker teachers of English. Rotich and Musakali (2005) reported that Teachers' Guides should be to Provide additional content for the teacher, clear methodology and support for learners with special learning difficulties, diagnostic assessment exercise, activities that support multi-ability learning, suggestions to use low-cost or no-cost materials, clarity of writing and presentation of text, and clear cross-referencing to the textbook. These elements form the major consideration in selection and use of teachers' guides in learning and teaching of English as a subject.

The use of Teachers' Guide usually undergoes through critical evaluation and scrutiny in accompanying the textbook produced by various publishers. However, some fail the test at initial stages and regulations force publishers to meet the minimum set standards of Guides publication. Moreover, textbooks that score highest are recommended to the Ministerial Textbook Vetting Committee (MTVC) for the award of approved status at KICD. A great deal of publishing occurred in the four-year period following the 2002 curriculum review. However, it is important to note that English literature guidebooks are not under obligation or rather are not regulated by the policy. This is the reason why the current study sought to conduct both internal and external evaluation to the literature guidebooks.

According to KNEC Report (2015), there was consequential decline in the mean grades/scores of English among form 4 graduates in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) National Examinations. It has also classified English among the core subjects in the curriculum. This means that for one to obtain a better grade in national examinations and therefore gain admission to a public University, he/she must pass in English. Acquiring university education is critical for individual career development because it is at the university that one acquires higher education. Specialized skills acquired at this level are vital in securing gainful employment and improve one's living standards. This enables individuals to effectively contribute to the national economic development.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research was anchored on Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory of (1896 - 1934). It postulates social learning components as basic process of acquiring knowledge in any learning development. In his view, child development is a teacher-learner collaboration in which the later imitates from what the former does or says. This collaboration offers students and instructors hands on instruction methodology which has greatest potential of efficiency for transfer of relevant knowledge, skills and work ethics for their respective specialization. The adult in sense of literature guide books is the author of the guide book who has undergone intellectual maturation in literature. The guide book therefore should help the learners in the process of language maturation. To expand child's limits in development and intellectual possibilities, the learner has to be guided. In literature therefore, to enhance the understanding of the work of art, the learner is guided through reading of the literature guidebooks. Through the language used in the literature guidebooks, the learner should be able to move towards language proficiency in

writing and reading. Guidebooks therefore function as the mediation tool; an artifact that helps learners to internalize the content. This shows that apart from the teachers' role in a literature class, there are other important tools such as guidebooks that help the child through language maturation.

Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory was later improved by Bandura (1969) and Rotter (1982) to Social Learning Theory (SLT). SLT outlines that learning is a process of skill observation, storage and essential motivation. This process helps the learner to acquire significant problem-solving skills, practical competence in specific situations, appropriate attitude and social skill towards learning and appropriate work ethics and culture. Therefore, all these attributes form behavior that is an outcome of learning as postulated by Rotter (1954). This is also influenced by environment and changes in stimuli (Rotter, 1982).

This theoretical framework emphasizes the fact that the decision to select and use a literature guide book is not just informed by individuals using them but by the experiences and environments around them involving people and expectations. In general, the selection and use are also motivated by instructors in the students' life. Therefore, this theory is in line with the current study that sought to investigate influence of selection and use of set book guidebooks in learning and teaching of literature in English in Secondary schools in Bumula South Sub-County, Kenya.

2.2 Literature review

The selection decision for literature guidebooks is influenced by several issues some of which are personal and might not be captured in this study. A study Sheldon (2008) reported that important decisions have to be made concerning selection of guidebooks. This is because they involve aspect of resources such as funds, political and professional investment. On the other hand, Jenks (2011) found out that selection of literature guidebooks involves wide knowledge, up skilling and patience. Moreover, Kelly (2009) affirms that adequate decisions should be based on highlighted events in the literature guidebook. Tomlinson (2010) investigated influence of guidebook selection and demographically that 85% of the decisions over guide selection were made by management, only 15% was contribution from instructors while learners were completely left out. It was found out that contextual and purposes of assessment were major determinants of guidebook selection. In some instances, teachers play a critical role in the selection because they are part of users of guidebooks. On the other hand, McDonough and Shaw (2013) reported that teachers may have little contribution in the selection of their guidebooks as the materials are produced. Consequently, three forces play a particularly important part in sustaining guidebook selection: selection practices, the actions of top management, and socialization methods.

Broughton (2013) established that teaching English subject requires adequate preparation of teaching materials on what content to be learned by the students. Therefore, learning and teaching materials should be made in consideration of learners' situation. According to Gakkai (2009), adequate criteria of selecting learning materials should be put in place considering the real-life situations of the students. Therefore, guidebooks should be able to help learners to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and work ethics for their respective specialization. Adequate

in-service training on the use of learning and teaching materials are important in teaching English and Literature.

A study conducted by Were (2010) comparatively established institutional factors influence the selection of literature guidebooks in schools where teachers have significant contribution in guidebook selection. The study also found out that learning scenarios influence of socio-culture, material organization, the content of the textbook, suggested learning events, other reference materials, quality and real concerns of textbooks are determinants of guidebooks selection. Therefore, an institution's current beliefs, traditions, and general way of selecting and use of English literature guidebooks are largely due to what it has done before and how successful it was in doing it. Masuhara (2009) indicated that institutional support for materials selection and evaluation. Furthermore, Johnson et al., (2008) found that experience had a negative influence on the choice and selection of guidebooks where more experienced teachers use their own way of learning and teaching. The current study examined how guidebook selection process, performance evaluation criteria, training and development activities, and promotion procedures influence academic performance of learners in literature in English.

2.3 Goal of the study

To examine how guidebook selection process, performance evaluation criteria, training and development activities, and promotion procedures influence academic performance of learners in literature in English.

3. Research Design

Descriptive research survey design was employed in this study. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), this type of design establishes constructs that have not been influenced in any way by the researcher. It is a classical way of collecting information using primary methods such as surveys on the current status of phenomena under considerations (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, Lind, Marchal and Wathen (2008) asserted that descriptive research design is an organized method where the researcher has little control over variables. In line with the current study, information gathered entails how selection and use of guidebooks influence learning and teaching of literature in English in secondary schools

3.1 The Study Participants

The study targeted 700 students and 14 teachers who use the guidebooks to derive a list of commonly used guidebooks as well as factors influencing choice of guidebooks. The target was the number of students and teachers who use guidebooks of the novel *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola used in Kenyan secondary schools since the research conducted a content analysis on the commonly used guidebooks. The researcher used one school from each of the seven wards in Bumula Sub County and target teachers and students from each according to the proportionate of population.

3.2 Research instruments

3.2.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis was conducted on the literature guidebooks to determine objectives of assessment on use of guidebooks. At the external level evaluation included diagnostic assessment of activities, events inclusion that assist learning activities, addition of extra content for the instructor, text presentation in a clearer way, assistance given to learners with specific learning challenges as propounded by Rotich and Musakali (2005).

3.2.2 Interview

Teachers were interviewed and this assisted the investigator clarify information or data collected in the questionnaires.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Pre-survey was carried out to establish validity and reliability of research tools. Thereafter, formal request was made to school principals and application of research permit through online mechanism from the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researcher administered questionnaires and analyzed them before conducting content analysis of identified set book guidebooks

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

After data collection process, information was checked, coded, arranged per each research construct and then processed using descriptive methods. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 aided analysis for subsequent objectives and themes. Correlation analysis which involved examining relationships between two sets of intervals or ratio level variables was used to test the significance of variables (Lind, Marchal, & Wathen, 2008). This involved the use of Pearson's correlation. Findings were later put in form mean, frequencies, and percentages.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Determinants of Selection of Literature English Guidebooks

The views of respondents concerning content of the literature guidebooks were sought. The respondents' opinions are presented in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics on Content of Literature Guidebooks

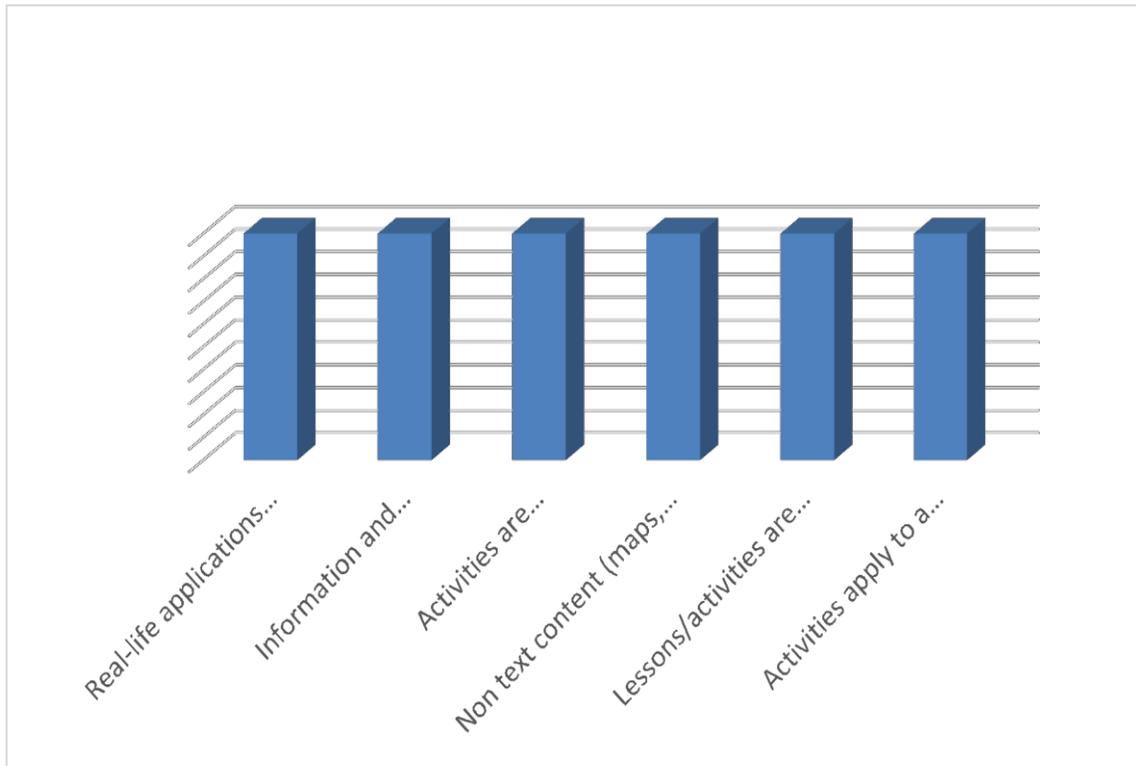
Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std
There are real-life applications in the guidebook that are usually given in set book guidebook for the users	14	1	5	3.52	1.000
Guidebook information and directions are clearly highlighted and explained well	14	1	5	3.44	1.018
Guidebook activities are developed appropriately	14	1	5	3.08	1.064

Guidebook presents non text contents such as maps, graphs, pictures which are accurate and well-integrated into the text	14	1	5	3.87	1.138
Guidebook lessons and activities compliments each other	14	1	5	3.81	1.085
Guidebook events are applicable to a diversity of learners' abilities, interests and learning styles	14	1	5	2.83	1.133
Guidebook activities include guiding questions which promote analytical and problem-solving skills	14	1	5	2.34	1.122

Researcher's data, (2019)

The findings above are also presented in the following bar graph.

Figure 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Content of Literature Guidebooks



It was noted that there are real-life applications in the guidebook that are usually given in set book guidebook for the users, activities are developmentally appropriate, guidebook presents non text contents such as maps, graphs, pictures which are accurate and well-integrated into the text, guidebook lessons and activities compliments each other, guidebook activities include guiding questions which promote analytical and problem-solving skills. Descriptive results indicate that the respondents were neutral in all the issues raised concerning the content of the Literature guidebook.

It was further outlined through the interviews that the factors that determine the choice of the literature English guidebooks were language simplicity, layout of book and illustrations used recommendation from the head of department, color of the cover and appropriate font. One of the respondents said the following”

“When I want to buy a literature guidebook or when am recommending to my students the one to buy, I consider how simplified it is, book layout and visibility. My students also tell me that they choose guidebooks based on its market price and availability (Teacher of English 1)”.

Though people have unique expectancies and supportive values in similar instances, however, current findings shows those teachers’ remarks and suggestions to students’ acquisition of set book guidebooks has greater bearing in the type of guidebook use by students in the learning environment. This ultimately influences their reading and retention in the application of events of guidebooks that foster their academic scores in literature in English as a subject. Thus, Rotter (1982) asserted that “it is people's subjective interpretation of the environment, rather than an objective array of stimuli, that is meaningful to them and that determines how they behave.”

In addition, the correlation relationship between selection of a literature guidebook and academic performance of English as a subject was analyzed. The correlation results are as indicated in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Correlation between Selection of Set Book Guidebooks and Students' Academic Performance

Selection of Literature Set Book Guidebooks			Academic Performance of English as a Subject
Selection of Guidebooks	Literature Pearson Correlation		.581**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		102

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
Researcher's own data, (2019)

The relationship between selection of a literature guidebook and academic performance of English as a subject was established to be positive, moderately strong and statistically significant ($r = 0.581$; $p = 0.000$) at 0.01 significance level. The choice of guidebooks largely depends on cost of the materials, and the language used in the guidebook. On the same vein, Sheldon (2008) suggested that literature guidebook selection is a critical educational and management decision has cost implications, professional and even political investment. Similar findings were reported by Jenks (2011) who asserted that literature guidebook selection requires experience, patience and training while Kelly (2009) found out that proper decisions require basic understanding of well suggested learning activities.

These results are similar to Broughton's (2013) who postulated that teaching English subject requires adequate preparation of teaching materials on what content to be learned by the students. Therefore, learning and teaching materials should be made in consideration of learners' situation. Similar findings were reported by Gakkai (2009) said that adequate criteria of selecting learning materials should be put in place considering the real-life situations of the students. Therefore, guidebooks should be able to help learners to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and work ethics for their respective specialization. Adequate in-service training on the use of learning and teaching materials are important in teaching English and Literature.

5. Concluding remarks

The study concludes that:

The selection of the literature English guidebooks was found to be determined by the following factors; Cost of the guidebook, Year of publishing, Language used in the guidebook, Logical explanations used in the book, Vocabulary used, The readers attitude towards literature, Interpretation of words, Language un barrenness, Interest in literature, Availability, Etiquette portrayed, layout of book and illustrations used, Recommendation from the head of department, colour of the cover and appropriate fond size.

The mostly used guidebook was the *Guide to The River and the Source* by Richard Oketch et al, Moran Publishers at 93% responses and the least used being the *National Institute of Education Guidebooks for The River and the Source*, Ness at 60% responses. This is because of the organizational features like format which was visually appealing and interesting, there was consistent layout and guidebook chapters were arranged systematically. In addition, the content had information and directions that were clearly written and explained. Furthermore, the activities were developmentally appropriate; activities applied to a diversity of student abilities, interests and learning styles.

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