



IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHER PLANNING ON THE COMPETENCY OF UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN COMPOSITION WRITING IN BOMET COUNTY IN KENYA

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Abstract:

In Kenya, English language is a compulsory subject from primary school level of education. It is also a medium of instruction from upper primary school and beyond and an official language in the country. However, despite the position that English language (EL) holds, reports from the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) from the year 2014 to 2018 indicate that the performance in composition writing in Kenya's Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), has been deteriorating. Teacher planning for instruction contributes to learner competency in language learning. This paper is a report of a study that examined the implications of teacher planning for instruction on competencies of upper primary school learners in composition writing in English language. The study was conducted in Bomet County, Kenya, in the year 2019 and was guided by Communicative Language Theory (CLT) advanced by Hymes and Wilkins. A mixed-methods approach was utilised and adopted a sequential mixed-method design. The respondents of the study consisted of teachers of English in upper primary classes in public schools. Data were collected using questionnaires, document analyses, and teachers' interviews. The findings revealed that teacher planning for instruction had great influence and statistical significance in contributing to learner competencies in composition writing ($B = -.585$, $p < 0.05$). Teachers prepared schemes of work frequently but did not frequently prepare lesson plans, and hardly prepared lesson notes. The study recommends that teachers of English should immediately allocate lessons to teach composition writing every week. They should also be consistent in the preparation and

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the effective use of professional documents for instruction. This study makes a significant contribution to the teaching of composition writing for learner competency in upper primary school nationally and globally.

Keywords: competency; English language; teacher planning; composition writing

1. Introduction

Internationally, English language (EL) is accepted as a language of communication, which is also used in business, science, information technology, and entertainment (Crystal, 2010). Studies have shown that the use of English language skills is related to social and economic indicators, such as income and other factors (Mertens, 2014). These accolades, attributed to English, have made it an essential language in Kenya that is used in all government documents and other organisational, personal, and official transactions (Ong'ondo, 2017; Syomwene, 2016).

Good knowledge of English remains among the essential requirements in many professions, especially writing skills (ibid). The ability to achieve communicative competence, specifically in writing, is a significant aspect of language development and academic success for students at all levels in the education system (Opoola & Fatiloro, 2014). Besides, as Ong'ondo (2017) emphasises, "*we require citizens who are competent communicators in English language as it will provide a medium of communication among the Kenyan linguistic communities and neighbouring counties... and the wider international communities*" (p. 152). It explains why, in many countries, Kenya included, English was adopted as an official language and is taught as a compulsory subject in schools. Therefore, it plays a vital role in every aspect of the primary school curriculum and beyond (Syomwene, Barasa & Kindiki, 2015).

Writing at whatever level is one of the trickiest skills (Maolida & Mustika, 2018) to grasp due to: the cognitive demands it has on the writer's long-term memory which stores knowledge; the task environment which manages the specifics of the assignment; and the actual writing process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2013). Therefore, the teaching of writing is a complex domain as it requires more specificity in addressing an 'absent' audience as opposed to oral communication whose verbal and nonverbal feedback is immediate as it provides contextual clues. It calls for teachers of English to pay more attention to writing skills (Nosratinia & Razavi, 2016) to address learner incompetence in good time.

In Kenya, one of the primary school English course objectives is that all pupils are expected to have acquired sufficient command of English, both in verbal and written forms, to facilitate communicative competence (KIE, 2002). Unfortunately, despite the importance of writing, performance in composition writing in KCPE from the year 2014 to 2018 reveals a consistent drop in mean scores. In 2014, for instance, performance dropped from a mean score of 41.45 to 39.40 in 2018. The low performance has led to a continued outcry from the education fraternity and members of the public alike (Daily

Nation, March 3, 2020; KNEC. 2018; Oduor, 2017). In contrast, performance in the English language paper, which tests comprehension, grammar, and other language elements recorded upward trends, rose from a mean score of 47.54 to 54.68 during the same period. Table 1 below is a summary of learner performance in English language at KCPE during the period under study.

Table 1: General Performance in English for Five Consecutive Years

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Paper	Obj	Comp								
% Mean	47.64	41.45	49.98	41.38	47.62	40.25	47.62	39.60	54.68	39.40

Key: **Obj.**- Objective; **Comp.**- Composition

Source: KNEC, 2018

The poor performance in composition writing in Kenya, and specifically in Bomet County where the study was conducted, can partly be attributed to poor planning of lessons on the part of teachers. Planning is a critical component in the teaching of writing (Mwangi & Syomwene, 2018). This paper is a report of a study that examined the implications of teacher planning for instruction on competencies of upper primary school learners in composition writing in English language in Bomet County in Kenya.

2. Problem Statement

The problem that prompted this study can be expressed socially and academically. Socially, the concern is that the country needs to have a communicatively competent citizenry in EL, especially in writing skills even at the end of the primary level where (previously), a lot of pupils would drop out of school (Lucas & Mbiti, 2012; Zuilkowski, Jukes, & Dubeck, 2016). Many learners still show massive incompetence (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013), yet it is a skill they will need throughout their lives.

Academically, the concern is that a lot of investment goes towards developing teachers' pedagogical strategies at college, and in Teachers Continuing Professional Development, CTPD (Bett, 2016; TSC, 2015b). Teachers are relied upon to make the difference in learners' competencies in writing in EL (Chege, 2015). However, there is minimal empirical evidence that teachers' pedagogical strategies (more so, teacher planning) imply better learner competencies in writing in EL. Also, what the challenges are in using this pedagogical strategy. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the implications of planning in enhancing the desired competencies in EL composition writing in upper primary public schools in Bomet County in Kenya.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) theory, preponed by Hymes & Wilkins (1972). The theory advances that language is a vehicle that transmits meaning. At the same time, knowledge is conveyed through

communication that engages two parts, including the speakers, listeners, and writers and readers. In other terms, CLT views learners as active players in the learning process (Desai, 2015). The approach is concerned with the uniqueness of every learner who acquires the desired skills rapidly and agreeably since language is made relevant to the world and not the classroom (Thamarana, 2015). Besides, the emphasis is laid on developing communicative functions and expressiveness of the language.

On teaching approaches, CLT has moved towards an emphasis on the use of group work, task-work, information-gap activities as well as projects as part and parcel of the processes. Syomwene et al. (2015) assert that it promotes cooperative learning, which allows working together to solve problems. Teacher roles have changed from instructors to being facilitators of learners' language learning and monitoring of learner performance (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This is achieved, for instance, by assigning learners with writing tasks after providing guidelines, allowing organised discussions, and tracking performance periodically. The teacher intervenes as the need arises. Learner roles have also deviated from being passive listeners of instructions to a negotiator between self, the group, the class procedure, and the assigned group activities (Maryslessor, Barasa & Omulando, 2014).

The implication of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for this study is that the development of learner competency in composition writing depends on teacher planning. Teacher planning for instruction serves as a guide for quality instruction for competency development in the learners in writing skills.

4. Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching got popularised as a consequence of Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual methods not being able to equip learners in the use of language to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning in reading and writing activities (Savignon, 2010). With the significant paradigm shifts brought about by CLT, the planning stage for instruction should consider some of the changes aptly advanced by Jacobs and Farrell (2003, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These include learner autonomy in selecting topics to write, promoting the social nature of learning by organising lessons to suit group work, accommodate and account for learner diversity, and propel learners to engage their thinking skills in situations beyond the classroom. CLT contributes to the development of writing skills to enhance what has been popularly referred to by some scholars (Berns, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 2010) as Communicative Competence (CC). Canale and Swain's (1980) model regards CC as the achievement of language learning in four areas: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic appropriateness (Savignon, 2010). **Grammatically**, it is the effective use of grammar, vocabulary, and writing conventions to enhance meaningful communication. In **sociolinguistic** competence, it is the appropriateness of language used to suit a given situation, purpose, and functions. It includes the use of written language for official or non-official communication such as letter writing. **Discourse**

competence entails mastery of understanding and production of varying types of texts that are of relevance, clear, coherent, and cohesive. Finally, **strategic competence** is the appropriate use of communicative strategies, despite the limitation in one's language knowledge in overcoming imperfections, challenges and difficulties that may lead to a breakdown in communication (Maryslessor et al., 2014; Ong'ondo & Barasa, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Savignon, 2010; Thamarana, 2015). Therefore, learners' communicative competence in composition writing contemplates achievement in language use in the four aspects.

For learners to specifically achieve competence in writing skills in composition writing, teachers need to plan lessons. Planning in the Kenyan context entails the preparation of two primary documents (among others); the schemes of work and the lesson plan. These documents draw content from an approved syllabus for each educational category and class level (KIE, 2002). Another vital requirement before teachers attend to their lessons is the preparation of lesson notes. The Teachers Service Commission's (2015b) Code of Regulation for Teachers, explicitly accords the heads of institutions, mandate to ascertain professional documents' maintenance as cited in the legal notice No. 196, Regulation 71(h). It entails 'ensuring maintenance of teaching standards and professional records, maintained by a teacher including schemes of work, lesson notes, records of work, and pupils' exercise books' (p.34). The three vital documents are briefly discussed next.

4.1 Schemes of work

Schemes of work are commonly prepared beforehand by subject teachers to cover a school term (Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011). It is a plan of action to facilitate the organisation of teaching ahead of time and a forecast of what the instructor considers appropriate for the class to cover within the given period based on the topics already provided in the syllabus (KIE, 2002; Wanjiku, 2013).

The main components of a scheme of work include subject, class level, term, and year. Other elements recorded in columns are week, lesson number, topic, sub-topic, objectives, content, teacher's and learners' activities, teaching/ learning aids, resources, and remarks (KIE, 2002). For every lesson per week, information is recorded in rows and columns until termly content requirements are exhausted.

Preparation and use of the scheme of work (Mwamuye, Mulambe, Mrope & Cherutich, 2012) have been associated with sequential teaching and resulted in improved achievement in primary schools' academic performance (Mbugua, Reche, & Riungu 2012). On the contrary, a lack of preparation of the schemes of work and lesson plans or when not up to date (Nyagah & Irungu, 2013) contributes to adverse negative effects on learners' academic performance. Therefore, schemes of work enable teachers to organise instructional activities and to structure the content of a subject. Other advantages of preparing a scheme of work advanced by Kwach include understanding the syllabus, knowing the prerequisites of each topic, checking for existing guides, and allocation of

adequate time (<https://www.tuko.co.ke/289019-schemes-work-kenyan-secondary-schools.html>). Another essential document prepared by a teacher is the lesson plan.

4.2 Lesson plan

A lesson plan is a teacher's description of the learning trajectory or course of instruction of a given lesson (Mbugua, Reche, & Riungu, 2012). The lesson plan is done daily to guide class learning (Wanjiku, 2013) and to attain the set objectives. It is developed from the scheme of work with content sourced from reference materials. The details vary based on the subject, class level, content, methodology, and learners' needs. Before lesson planning, a teacher needs to outline the desired learning outcomes to guide in the maintenance of a standard teaching pattern and to deter a deviation from the subject matter. Pre-planning also aids in equipping the teacher (Mwamuye, Mulambe, Mrope & Cherutich, 2012) in readiness for potential questions from pupils and thus avoid the embarrassment of unpreparedness.

Well-designed lesson plans help to meet learner needs from the onset of instruction (Courey, Tappe, Siker & LePage, 2012). It also makes it possible for teachers to attend to learners with vast differences in writing abilities. It facilitates learners' participation and inclusivity. Besides, lesson planning helps teachers meet the challenges of diverse learner populations through the incorporation of "... *flexible instructional materials, techniques, and strategies*" (Courey et al., 2012:11).

An effective lesson plan has three essential components (Setyawan, 2014). One is the aims and objectives of the lesson. It regards what the learners should be able to 'take away' by the end of the class. Next are the choice of teaching and learning activities to ascertain that learners understand the desired content. The third one is on assessment, which serves to check learner understanding and could be in the form of oral or written questions towards the end of the lesson (Richards & Renadya, 2002; Reed & Mauchad, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014).

In the Kenyan context, lesson plans have varying formats suited to each subject but generally adopt a given design. KICD (2017) provides guidelines on the stages of an ideal lesson plan: it begins with a learning organisation, which indicates where learning will occur. Next is the introduction to arouse learner curiosity followed by the lesson development, which forms the actual teaching of the content area. The conclusion stage is a summary where the primary points and concepts are consolidated. The final stage is the lesson reflection which is a critical analysis of learning where the teacher makes an honest assessment of his or her performance and that of learners (Mbugua, Reche, & Riungu, 2012; Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011). Key questions to ask at the assessment stage are: *how successful was the lesson?* and *what could I have done to make it better?* (KICD, 2017, p. 30).

From the preceding, lesson planning has various benefits. It helps the teachers prepare the teaching and learning materials in advance since it is possible to identify relevant teaching aids to the lesson (Wahyuni, 2018). Early preparation inspires learners who are young and dependant on the teacher and therefore set a good example for them

to emulate in other disciplines later (Jensen, 2001). A well planned and executed lesson allows saving of time to attend to learners who may require additional assistance (Ashcraft, 2014). A sense of control and direction is established when teaching, as well as equipping the teacher with self-confidence (Jensen, 2001). Planning also enables the teacher to create a conducive learning environment in the classroom, which encourages learner participation and thus remove invisible communication obstacles (Syomwene, 2016).

Next is a brief review of lesson notes.

4.3 Lesson Notes

Available literature indicates that lesson notes are a detailed explanation of the steps/actions the teachers expect to take and serves as a reminder of what he or she should do at each stage of the lesson (<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-a-lesson-plan-and-a-lesson-note>). It is a full account of all the scheduled learning activities, not like a lesson plan, which is a mere outline of the lesson. Therefore, a lesson note documents expected content, while a lesson plan is an organisation of the teaching of the content in the lesson note (Anderson, 2015). In essence, they are 'detailed notes' the instructor writes about the lesson plan (Sibanda, Mutopa & Maphosa, 2011).

Like a fountain of information, lesson notes are essential since they serve as a link between teachers and pupils to stay connected. It is the best tool for documenting the flow of a lesson and its impact on learners and provides room to jot down main highlights/ points to emphasise. Therefore, the inability to prepare lesson notes may lead to teaching while unprepared, thus potentially affecting pupils' performances (Wanjiku, 2013).

In conclusion, it is considered unprofessional for a teacher to conduct lessons without these vital documents that guide the entire instructional process (Hattie, 2012). This study delved on finding out whether teachers of English prepared these documents for use in composition writing lessons. If they did, the study was to find out whether they were put into use, or were just for 'cosmetic' purposes in fulfilling the demands of the authorities.

5. Materials and Methods

This study was underpinned by the pragmatic philosophical paradigm and consequently utilised the mixed methods approach. Besides, the study adopted the sequential mixed-methods design for data collection and analysis using the QUANT→ qual model.

5.1 Research Population and Sample

The study population comprised upper primary school teachers of English in classes five, six, and seven in public schools with more than one stream per class. For the first quantitative phase, stratified sampling was used to categorise schools per five sub-counties. From each sub-county, a sample of 30% was used to obtain a total of 196 Schools.

Simple random sampling with the help of a statistical computer program (randomiser) was used to select the schools. One stream per class was selected randomly to obtain three teachers per school, making 588 teachers. For the qualitative phase, a few of the schools used during the first phase were sampled for the second phase. Convenient sampling, according to teachers' availability, was used to select ten schools from class five, ten schools from class six, and nine schools from class seven that formed the sample of 29 schools. One class per school was selected. From these schools, the stream that had not participated in the first phase was purposively sampled. A total of 18 female and 11 male teachers participated in the second phase.

5.2 Instrumentation and Data Analysis

During the first phase, data were collected using questionnaires administered to teachers of English. The data was then processed through SPSS and analysed through descriptive and inferential procedures. In the second phase, data collection was done using document analysis of teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans, and lesson notes. Structured interviews were conducted for the same teachers. Data were analysed qualitatively as per emerging themes. Finally, both databases were merged in a discussion to explain quantitative findings using qualitative results.

Before administering these data generation tools, a test of the questionnaire's reliability obtained a Cronbach alpha r-value of planning (0.825) from piloting. At the same time, experts in the School of Education validated the qualitative tools. The researcher's collection of qualitative data in person enhanced credibility. Interpretation of data was firmly grounded on the events in the study and was not influenced by any other forces.

6. Results and Discussion

The research objective was to establish the extent to which teacher planning influenced upper primary school learners' competencies in composition writing in English language. The study revealed that teacher planning has a significant effect and statistical significance in contributing to learner competency in composition writing ($B = -.585$, $p < 0.05$). It was established that the approved syllabus and KICD books were used to prepare professional records. However, supplementary materials were minimal. Schemes of work were prepared frequently, whereas the preparation of lesson plans was not frequently done. On the other hand, lesson notes were hardly prepared or used.

Teachers barely allocated composition writing lessons every week, while sequencing to develop specific constructs for learner competency in composition writing was not apparent. The use of group activities, discussions, and assignments was not recorded as part of the documents' learning activities, yet they are useful in learner engagement. Learner involvement in planning was limited to the prior reading of storybooks in isolated cases. There was no evidence too that learner interests were taken into consideration as teachers planned for the lessons. It was also noted that lack of

reference books, shortage of time due to needing to rush for syllabus completion, and lack of subject specialisation affected effective planning, which negated teacher efficacy in the classroom. Findings also revealed that teachers did not refer to the prepared documents during lessons and thus failed to serve the intended instructional purposes.

The findings are consistent to a study by Teygong (2018), who established that schemes of work were prepared by 67.4% and lesson plans by 47.8% of teachers therefore confirming that these documents were done more frequently compared to lesson notes. Additionally, Onsare (2013) revealed that most teachers of English relied on schemes of work with very minimal use of lesson plans in teaching. He attributed poor performance in English to the lack of adequate preparation of professional documents. However, according to Anyiendah (2017), teachers in primary schools in Kenya have numerous challenges that include being overloaded with many subjects to teach, coupled with pressure from education officers to complete each syllabus by May of every year. This, she reported, makes the preparation of professional documents an additional task that teachers could want to avoid. As a consequence, learner communicative competence advanced by CLT tenets is thus compromised.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

It was concluded that though teacher preparation of schemes of work and lesson plans was done frequently, and using the approved KICD syllabus and textbooks, it is basically for administrative purposes. It affirmed that teacher preparation of professional documents does not serve the expected instructional purposes. Also, the weekly allocation of composition writing was not regular. Therefore, it was recommended that teachers of English should immediately allocate lessons to teach well-sequenced constructs in composition writing every week and be consistent in the preparation and use of professional documents for instruction, having in mind, learner interests. Additionally, teachers should include in their planning, the use of learner-involving activities such as group work, discussions, and group assignments to develop learner competencies in composition writing.

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