

TEACHERS' CONTENT LEVEL IN TEACHING *INSHA* WRITING IN SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN WARENG SUB COUNTY

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Abstract

There are strong evidences that teacher quality is a crucial factor in achieving remarkable learning outcomes for students. Teachers' knowledge influences the ability of the teacher to positively teach students. The issue of poor performance in Kiswahili subjects over time at K.C.S.E levels has been a concern to parents, teachers, administrators and curriculum developers. Judging from the candidates' performance, the (2009-2012) results analysed by KNEC, indicate that the mean score for Kiswahili paper 1 was lower in all the years in the country in general and in Wareng Sub-county in particular. The focus of the present study is the impact of teachers' knowledge on students' *Insha* writing. The researcher employed the use of an exploratory research design. The study area covered public secondary schools in Wareng Sub-county in Uasin Gishu County. Wareng Sub-county had 44 public secondary schools at the time of study, of which 4 were County schools and 40 were Sub County schools. This study used questionnaire and observation schedule. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and summarized in statements. The findings show that of teachers teaching *Insha* exhibited lack of knowledge in the teaching of content and the style of writing *Insha*. Majority of the observed teachers lacked knowledge to teach word order, sentence structure and correct use of vocabulary. Besides that, some of the observed teachers exhibited a weakness in handling spelling and tenses. Regular Kiswahili language teaching workshops need to be organized for teachers to equip them with skills of coping with the demands of language teaching.

Key words: *Teachers' Content level, Teaching writing, Insha, Public secondary*

1.0 Introduction

Insha writing is taught in all the primary schools and secondary schools in Kenya. Performance varies between schools and between candidates. What is not known is the impact of teachers' knowledge and skills on students' ability to write well organized and impressive *Insha*. Teacher knowledge is a rich area of investigation (Verloop, Van Drie l& Mijjer, 2002). One of the longest

standing constructs of teacher knowledge is Shulman's (1987) multifaceted model that includes pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), among other categories. Pedagogical knowledge includes the “how of teaching, generally acquired through education coursework and experiences in the schools (Ball, 2000). Content knowledge, on the other hand is the “what” of teaching or the subject-matter knowledge” (Lafayette, 1993).

Teacher education supporters argue that subject matter knowledge is simply not enough to be successful in the classroom Darling-Hammond & Youngs, (2002) and that coursework in pedagogy, as well as the subject matter area, is a necessary part of teacher education. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and William (2004) contend that: a high level of qualification in a subject is less important than a thorough understanding of its fundamental principles, an understanding of the kinds of difficulties that students might have, and the creativity to be able to think up questions that stimulate productive thinking. Furthermore, such pedagogical content knowledge is essential in interpreting student responses. The transformation of subject matter for teaching Shulman, (1986) occurs as the teacher critically reflects on and interprets the subject matter; finds multiple ways to represent the information such as analogies, metaphors, examples, problems, demonstrations, and classroom activities. Proponents of teacher education argue that courses in pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge can foster this sophisticated understanding of teaching. Darling-Hammond (2000) highlights PCK development in teacher education as a way to enhance teachers' abilities to examine teaching from the perspective of learners who bring diverse experiences and frames of reference to the classroom. That ability to see beyond one's own perspective and to put oneself in the shoes of the learner is at the heart of PCK and is cultivated in teacher education coursework.

There are strong evidences that teacher quality is a crucial factor in achieving remarkable learning outcomes for students. Teachers' knowledge influences the ability of the teacher to positively teach students as cited by Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig (2005). Clotfelter (2007), found that the knowledge of teachers in any school forms an important input variable, which can have tremendous impact on how they teach *Insha* writing skills. This means that teachers' formal qualification, experience, motivation, creativity, interaction with learners and their methodology may greatly influence how they teach writing *Insha*.

Insha forms an integral part in KCSE, since it contributes 20% of the total marks awarded to a student in the Kiswahili exam. It is therefore imperative, that the teacher employs skills that will enable the learner perform well in *Insha writing* so as to attain impressive marks. A teacher should have content and pedagogical knowledge. Content knowledge (CK) is the knowledge about the actual subject matters and specific content domains such as grammar, spelling and sentence construction. In addition, the teacher should have pedagogical knowledge (PK): Knowledge about the processes and practices of teaching and learning such as classroom management, lesson plan development, and students' evaluation to achieve overall educational goals. The issue of poor performance in Kiswahili subjects over time at K.C.S.E levels has been a concern to parents, teachers, administrators and curriculum developers. Judging from the candidates' performance, the (2009-2012) results analysed by KNEC, indicate that the mean score for Kiswahili paper 1 was lower in all the years in the country in general and in Wareng Sub-county in particular. The focus of the present study is the impact of teachers' knowledge on students' *Insha* writing.

Statement of the problem

Although students' performance in Kiswahili is notably low, factors leading to the poor performance have not been sufficiently documented. Is it possible that teachers' knowledge and skills in the teaching of *Insha* are below requirements? It is necessary to describe the content and pedagogical knowledge teachers have in Kiswahili. This study set out to investigate the impact of teachers' knowledge on students' *Insha* writing in selected public secondary schools in Wareng Sub County Uasin Gishu County Kenya.

2.0 Literature review

Teacher Knowledge of Teaching Writing Skills

Training is a vital ingredient in teacher preparation. Watkins in the Oxfam Education report (2003) concurs with Garret by stressing that poorly trained teachers are unable to foster a child-centred learning environment. Msanjila (2005) investigated writing problems in Kiswahili in Tanzanian secondary schools. Using data from two schools specifically selected as case studies, Msanjila's study indicated that pedagogically, unlike speaking which is acquired without explicit instructions, writing is a language skill that has to be taught, adding that failure to appreciate this difference leads to communicative writing constrains. The study revealed six glaring writing problems namely:

capitalization and punctuation problems, inexplicitness or fuzziness, poor organization or illogical sequence, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Msanjila (2005) advocated that writing problems could be minimised if students are taught writing as a skill by professional teachers of Kiswahili language. While Msanjila's study looked at secondary schools in Tanzania, the current study was undertaken in Kenya to see whether parallels can be drawn between Kenya and Tanzania in the teaching of *Insha* writing.

Barasa (2005) argues that the problems currently facing the teaching and learning of English in developing English speaking countries are many. The major threats according to Barasa come from lack of professionalism in English as a second language. Barasa (2005) further stresses that the ineffectiveness of English as a second language for teaching and learning activities results from chronic teacher related factors such as shortage of well trained teachers, use of unqualified teachers in language classrooms and lack of in-service training opportunities. The above argument could also apply to Kiswahili teaching and learning in Wareng Sub-county. Just like English, Kiswahili is facing teacher related challenges like the ones mentioned by Barasa (2005).

Teaching methodology is very important in classroom success. Farrant (2000) suggests that a child centred method of teaching for older primary and secondary school students that attempts to break with formal and conventional (traditional) methods of teaching; which is marked with parity and lacks keenness would be an inappropriate method. Chomba (2008) undertook a study on the effect of school language policies on communicative competence among Kiswahili students. He found out that school language policies affect communicative competence in Kiswahili by limiting the learners' opportunities to interact in Kiswahili. Such policies included limited days of the week when learners should communicate in Kiswahili, prohibition from communicating in it, punishment for speaking in it and encouragement of learners to speak in English.

Such language policies affect the learners' spoken Kiswahili and by extension their ability to write *Insha*. It is such pedagogical practices that may inhibit the learner's performance in *Insha* writing. These observations were also made by Ogechi (2003). Luvisia (2003) did a study on using instructional media to teach Kiswahili grammar. He found out that teachers of Kiswahili had a positive attitude towards the use of instructional media in its teaching, though they didn't vary the media used. They mainly depended on the chalkboard and books recommended by KIE. The current study aims at establishing whether the same is true of *Insha* teaching. Koros (2008) investigated the

use of oral language approaches in developing writing skills in English language and concluded that teachers did not have the knowledge of the value of using oral approaches.

3.0 Methodology

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research method. The researcher employed the use of an exploratory research design. Kothari, (2010) postulates that exploratory research design enables the researcher to cover a wide area in collecting data within a short time. This was found useful for the study on the impact teachers' knowledge and skills on students' *Insha* writing in selected public secondary schools in Wareng sub-county, Uasin Gishu County. The researcher also adopted the explorative design because it provided descriptive data on opinions of the respondents and the present facts concerning the knowledge and skills of teachers in teaching *Insha* writing.

Study of Area

The study area covered public secondary schools in Wareng Sub-county in Uasin Gishu County. The study was carried out in 12 public secondary schools. The Sub-county has persistently performed poorly in Kiswahili despite the fact it is a compulsory subject in the 8.4.4 curriculum and that it is a national language in Kenya.

Target population

According to the statistics from the Wareng D.E. O's office, at the time of the study the target population was 44 secondary schools within the Sub County, from which 12 schools were selected for the study based on whether they were County and Sub county schools. From the population, a sample of 12 schools (4 County and 8 Sub County) were selected. There were 82 teachers of Kiswahili and 1670 form three students at the time of study. Simple random sampling was used to select 24 teachers and 60 students. Teachers of Kiswahili were required to provide information that captured the impact if teachers' knowledge and skills in students' *Insha* writing in selected public secondary schools in Wareng Sub County. On the other hand, form three students were required to undertake a writing task.

Sampling procedures

Wareng Sub-county had 44 public secondary schools at the time of study, of which 4 were County schools and 40 were Sub County schools. Owing to the varied nature of the schools, simple random

and stratified sampling was used to select the schools. This was because stratified sampling is used if the population from which a sample is drawn does not constitute a homogeneous group, and stratified sampling technique is used to obtain a representative sample.

Stratification was used to group the schools into strata's that is County and district schools respectively. 100% of the county schools were selected, implying that all the 4 county schools were used during the study. From the 40 Sub County schools, simple random sampling was used to select 8 schools. This was done by assigning the schools respective numbers and the required count picked. This made a total of 12 schools that the researcher visited in the Sub-County.

There were 82 teachers of Kiswahili at the time of study. Simple random sampling was used to select 24 teachers who the researcher observed during the study. This was done by assigning the teachers respective numbers and the required count picked. There were also 1670 form three students at the time of study. Simple random sampling was used to select 60 students who participated in a writing task. This was done by assigning the students respective numbers and the required count pick.

Therefore, 12 schools, 24 teachers, 60 form three students that were selected was a representative of the population in that it was equivalent to 30% of the schools in Wareng Sub-County. Gay (1981) cited by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) argue that at least 30% of the population will enable the researcher source data to warrant valid and informed generalization and conclusions. The technique of 30% was adopted to provide a sample that was representative to get enough data and make informed generalization by ensuring every participant was given equal chance of participating in the study.

Data collection instruments

Research tools are the instruments used to collect data from the sample. This study used questionnaire and observation schedule.

Observation Schedule

Observation was carried out purposely in order to establish actual techniques employed by teachers in the classroom. The researcher sought to determine teachers' content level in the teaching of *Insha* writing. Teacher's tasks and students' activities in the classroom were observed. This was based on what Muijs (2004) says that observation provides a conceptually adequate analysis of classroom life

based on factual recording and descriptions. It was found to be a useful way of looking at many educational research questions. This method can give direct access to social interactions. This is advantageous when we want to find out what actually happens in a setting rather than what is reported by participants. The researcher observed a total of 48 *Insha* writing lessons taught by 24 teachers. Each teacher was observed twice. The lessons were observed at random.

Data analysis

Data from questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were summarized and presented in form of statements.

4.0 Findings

The teachers' content level on students' *Insha* writing

The purpose of this study was to determine the teacher content level in students' *Insha* writing in selected secondary schools in Wareng Sub County. The study sought to explore the content and pedagogical knowledge of teachers of *Insha*. To find out teachers' content level and pedagogical content, the researcher recorded qualifications of the 24 teachers as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Qualifications of Kiswahili Teachers in Wareng Sub County

Qualification	Frequency	%
Bachelors	23	95.65%
Masters graduates	1	4.35%
PhD	0	0
Others	0	0

Findings from Table 1, indicate that all of the teachers (95.65% with bachelors' and 4.35% masters) were qualified to teach secondary school students. This implies that professional qualifications cannot be one of the factors contributing to poor performance in *Insha* in Wareng Sub County.

Teachers' knowledge in terms of professional qualification is an important factor in determining the quality of a teacher as stated by Gathumbi (2010). The ministry of education in Kenya has set Bachelors' degree as the minimum qualification to teach in a secondary school. However, some schools have masters' graduate teachers.

The findings from the observation show that 19(78.26%) of teachers teaching *Insha* exhibited lack of skills in the teaching of content and the style of writing *Insha*. 4(17.39%) of the observed teachers lacked skills to teach word order, sentence structure and correct use of vocabulary. 1(4.35%) of the observed teachers exhibited a weakness in handling spelling and tenses.

The findings from this study conform to those of a study on classroom assessment practices of 246 third preparatory (ninth grade) science teachers in Oman. Alsarimi (2000) found that although teachers completed a substantial amount of pre-service and in service training in educational measurement, they had only a moderate understanding of educational measurement principles. Similarly, Daniel and King (1998) examined testing and measurement literacy of 95 elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States, and found that teachers' knowledge base regarding testing and measurement was somewhat inadequate. Further evidence can be obtained from studies comparing assessment literacy of pre-service and in-service teachers. Specifically, in two studies, Mertler (2003, 2004) found that, despite their recent completion of educational measurement coursework, pre-service teachers demonstrated a lower level of assessment literacy than in service teachers. These studies suggest that the professional preparation of teachers in educational measurement should receive considerable scrutiny. In addition, the aforementioned research points to a conclusion that the inadequate level of assessment competency seems to apply equally to in service and pre-service as well as novice and experienced teachers across a range of contexts and subject domains.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This preliminary study provided a general picture of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and the teachers' content knowledge in *Insha* writing in Wareng Sub County. Its findings helped to inform design guidelines and indicators for future professional development programs; and way forward towards improvement of teachers' knowledge and skills. From the observation carried out by the researcher it came out that most teachers in Wareng Sub County lacked knowledge to teach *Insha* writing. The findings show that of teachers teaching *Insha* exhibited lack of knowledge in the

teaching of content and the style of writing *Insha*. Majority of the observed teachers lacked knowledge to teach word order, sentence structure and correct use of vocabulary. Besides that, some of the observed teachers exhibited a weakness in handling spelling and tenses.

Recommendations

Regular Kiswahili language teaching workshops need to be organized for teachers to equip them with skills of coping with the demands of language teaching. Teachers should be encouraged to prepare lesson plans and lesson notes for *Insha* lessons. This will improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

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