

## **CHAPTER FOUR: The Place of Primary and Secondary School English Curriculum in National Cohesion and Integration**

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### **Introduction**

The English curriculum is crucial because it is through language that images of ethnic identity are carried; and it is through images that stereo-types are created, popularized and entrenched. Secondly, since English is learnt as a second language in Kenya, its teaching and use in official and informal situations may cause offence even when the users never meant to annoy or offend. This necessitates that efforts are made and mechanisms established to standardize the use of the English language as a Kenyan legal code of official business and for acculturation of children through the education system and at home.

### **Review of the Primary School English Syllabus (2002)**

#### *Introduction*

The Primary school English syllabus has incorporated vital emerging issues such as industrial transformation of the country, environmental education, health issues like drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, gender issues, human rights, child's rights, moral values and social responsibility. However, other issues such as national cohesion and integration, problem solving, arbitration, reconciliation, mediation, peace education, etc. are not directly covered in the syllabus. It is useful to note that this syllabus was published in 2002 while some of these issues emerged after the 2007/2008 post-election violence.

#### *Objectives of Primary Education in Kenya*

Two objectives of primary education were found to touch on the mandate of NCIC. These are to:

1. Develop aesthetic values and appreciate own and other people's cultures; and
2. Instill respect and love for own country and the need for harmonious co-existence.

These two objectives are highly critical in the achievement of requisite attitudes envisaged in the NCI Act and the Constitutional provisions on non-discrimination and equality of persons and groups. However, it is important to note that objectives in any curriculum are only as good as the materials used for instruction and the teaching techniques employed by instructors. For example, a good story illustrating how mediation between two warring clans or families brings peace may escape children's attention if the teacher does not make the lesson 'live' and participatory to bring out the power of negotiation through careful choice of language and discourse techniques. This is where listening skills and respect for others' opinions and needs play an important role in inter-personal and inter-cultural communication.

#### *Syllabus Content*

To a large extent, the content presented by the primary education syllabus appears to accommodate some of the core areas of concern of the NCIC e.g. gender issues, human rights, child's rights, moral values and social responsibility.

### **Review of the Secondary School English Syllabus (2002)**

### *General Introduction*

The revised secondary school syllabus responds to the emerging issues in the society including health, environmental and civic education, gender, as well as, the anticipated industrial transformation of the nation. However, other pertinent contemporary issues such as national cohesion and integration, problem solving, arbitration, reconciliation, mediation, peace education, etc. are not directly covered in the syllabus.

### *Objectives of Secondary Education*

The objectives as stated in the syllabus, clearly address the areas of interest of the NCIC and in particular objectives:

1. Acquire necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the development of self and the nation;
2. Promote love for and loyalty to the nation; Promote harmonious co-existence among the people of Kenya;
3. Enhance understanding and respect for own and other people's cultures and their place in contemporary society;
4. Develop into a responsible and socially well-adjusted person; and
5. Promote acceptance of and respect for all persons.

### *Introduction to the Secondary English Syllabus*

In the introduction, the role of the English language as the official language of communication in Kenya, as well as, the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities is emphasized. Following the integrated approach (English and Literature being taught as one subject), Literature deals with issues of life such as values, conflicts, and human nature and it is a good avenue to providing suggestions on how to resolve some of the challenges people face in society.

On the other hand, language is not learnt in a vacuum. It revolves around issues and concerns that affect us on daily basis. These include civic education, good governance, HIV/AIDS pandemic, the need to conserve our environment, the fight against corruption, the struggle to preserve our moral and spiritual values, and technological advancement. The language teacher is, therefore, required to expose the learner to these issues and concerns, through all the language skills.

It is observed that emerging issues such as arbitration, reconciliation, mediation, peace education, as well as, equitable access and distribution of resources are not expressly addressed in the syllabus. The description of the general objectives of the English syllabus and the language skills (listening & speaking, grammar, reading and writing skills) is generally well done.

### *Syllabus Content*

The syllabus content, as presented, seems to be in line with the core mandate of NCIC. However, there is need to review the syllabus to give more emphasis to important emerging issues such as cohesion and integration, national reconciliation, problem solving, arbitration, mediation, and peace education.

### **Review of the Secondary English Teacher's Handbook**

The Secondary English Teachers' handbook provides useful guidelines on how the secondary teacher of English can integrate and teach contemporary issues in the subject. However, the handbook has not

openly dealt with other important and current issues such as cohesion and integration, problem solving, national reconciliation, arbitration, mediation, and peace education.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to review the handbook to incorporate these issues. The handbook should stress the need for teachers to make deliberate efforts to change the learners' attitudes towards each other - in the spirit of national cohesion, integration, and reconciliation.

### **Review of Selected Primary School Textbooks**

#### *Class One - Let's Learn English by Kenya Literature Bureau (1995)*

This book is a good example, reflecting the core areas of interest in the attainment of national cohesion and integration. A few examples include:

- i. Settings are constructed that authentically sustain names, cultures and experiences from different ethnic groups. This reflects national diversity and this can positively influence learners.
- ii. The book also presents situations in which boys and girls are playing, walking to school, and learning in the same class together. These situations point to gender parity, respect for each other, and cohesion.
- iii. There is an instance of reconciliation when one boy shoots a ball and hits another's head. The two boys belong to two different ethnic communities. The boy who shoots the ball apologizes to the aggrieved one.
- iv. Sharing is demonstrated where a boy, Juma, has two bananas and offers one to Abdi who has none. This sharing virtue is a pointer to equal distribution of resources.
- v. Respect for each other is demonstrated where a teacher is extending her hand to greet a pupil; a pupil politely seeking permission to enter the class, etc.
- vi. Peace is hinted at when a school is referred to as *Amani Primary*.

#### *Class Two - Let's Learn English by Kenya Literature Bureau (1997)*

The good aspects of the book in line with the mandate of NCIC include:

- i. An illustration showing teachers shaking hands with their pupils - a demonstration of respect for one another.
- ii. The presence of both genders in almost all illustrations demonstrates equality of gender.
- iii. There is a passage illustrating the need to share what one has (page 44). In the end, this reflects sharing of resources equitably.

#### *Class Three - New Primary English by Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (2008)*

Some positive highlights in the book include:

- i. Illustrations in the book display gender balance and ethnic diversity. The illustrations are in terms of activities involving both genders; boys and girls sharing desks; and inclusion of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- ii. A story is told castigating child labour. Class two dropout girls are employed and subjected to hard labour and mistreatment (pages 22-25).

The illustration on “Common Diseases” displays a man suffering from AIDS. This is discriminatory against men because it gives an impression to class three children that the disease only affects men (page 79).

*Class Six - New Progressive Primary English by Oxford University Press (1999)*

A positive feature stands out in this book: Local safari rally drivers (Patrick Njiru, Jonathan Toroitich and Ian Duncan) are portrayed as national heroes. This fosters a sense of national patriotism and integration. A crowd cheers them; hence demonstrating diversity (page 49).

### **Review of Selected Secondary School Textbooks**

*Form One - New Integrated English Students' Book 1 by Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (1987)*

Some of the positive aspects of this book are:

- i. A picture on Page 1 shows a girl and a boy being congratulated on their joining Form One. This picture demonstrates gender balance/equality.
- ii. A passage on pages 174-175 discourages discrimination against the old by the young. Instead, the young are encouraged to seek their wise counsel always.
- iii. On pages 181-188, an extract deals with issues of women rights, freedom and justice, equality between men and women and democratic marriage; and respect for each other in marriage.
- iv. A disadvantaged girl, whose eleven year old sister had been married off, refuses to be married and runs away from her home to the chief's camp, and is now (13years later) in her final year at the University of Nairobi, studying dentistry (pages 214-217)
- v. On pages 255-256, a reading comprehension on “What is Freedom?” explores issues of rights and restraints, and peaceful co-existence by individuals. This is in line with NCIC's mandate.
- vi. The authors, on Page 270, present a poem that admonishes a greedy chief who calls his people fools and doesn't listen to them. The “We” of the poem do not like personal abuse and violence.

On the other hand, some of the negative aspects of the book include:

- i. A boy by the name Okeke is discriminated against [by being made to carry a pad on his head] based on being placed last in the previous year's annual examination (page 2). This discrimination may negatively influence students against others who are late achievers.
- ii. The poem entitled “You” on page 95 contains insults, which students are likely to carry over from class and use negatively to describe each other or even other people in the wider society.

It is proposed that poems and passages should send messages of national cohesion, integration and reconciliation. Further, passages should not contain messages with negative connotations about a particular gender, community or generation.

*Form Two - Excelling in English: An Integrated Approach Book 2 by Kenya Literature Bureau (2004)*

The following are some positive aspects of the book:

- i. A passage on “A Worthy Prefect” on pages 4-6 illustrates issues of honesty, integrity and respect for others through a school student by the name Jasho.
- ii. On pages 14-17, a passage deals with Achiel (a victim of child abuse); and with the issue of community policing. The passage encourages people to uphold unity – by acting together in everything in society.

- iii. In the passage, “Celebrating our Gender” on pages 34-36, gender parity and equal opportunities are emphasised. A woman mechanic is seen in a picture working with her male colleagues. Men and women are encouraged to celebrate their differences and complement one another instead of fighting.
- iv. On pages 116-117, a passage on “Human Rights” stresses on the importance of respecting human rights, good governance, children’s rights and freedom, as well as, security.

*New Integrated English Students’ Book 2 by Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (2004)*

The book contains the following positive aspects:

- i. Sentences:
  - Kimathi, a patriot, died fighting for Kenya’s freedom. (Rewriting Page 42)
  - Corruption is usually perpetrated by people of weak morals. (Adverbs Page 57)
  - The school performance improved tremendously because there has been good co-operation between students and teachers. (Prefixes P.85)
- ii. On pages 107-108, a poem entitled “Africa’s Plea” advocates for tolerance, understanding and acceptance of diversity.
- iii. A passage on page 119 presents new leaders who are eager to lead an imaginary country, Nyakera, of corruption. The new leadership sweeps through the civil service, and Wosu, a greedy and arrogant leader, is the first to go.
- iv. On page 159, an extract castigates the traditional concept of gender roles in which laundry, dishes, cleaning and cooking were considered women’s work. An African man/husband who only eats, sleeps, talks and watches television is painted negatively.
- v. The passage on pages 160-161, deals with women’s rights to land, equal access to resources for men and women, equality before the law for men and women, and boys and girls, as well, without discrimination based on gender.
- vi. An extract on pages 204-206, presents a judge who is of high integrity and honesty. He detests bribery and corruption. The judge believes in justice, fairness and respect of all regardless of their stations of life.
- vii. The passage on pages 245-246 deals with issues of justice, human dignity, the well-being of all people; and with conflict prevention and resolution.

*Form Three - Excelling in English: An Integrated Approach Book 3 by Kenya Literature Bureau (2004)*

Positive aspects of the book are:

- i. On pages 22-23, a speech explores issues of statehood, integrity, orderly conduct of life in society, patriotism, values, transparency and accountability.
- ii. A passage on “Citizens’ Role in Good Governance” brings it out that where there is good governance, people live in harmony, poverty is alleviated; and inequalities and injustices are addressed. In addition, issues of insecurity and corruption are sorted out.
- iii. The passage on “HIV – the Emotional Journey” on pages 55-56, encourages readers to help the infected to remember that they are surrounded by people who care and that their worth has not diminished. The readers are encouraged to reinforce the infected people’s hope and love, understand and offer emotional support and avoid social stigmatization.
- iv. On page 65, the passage advocates for the rights of disabled children to life, education, protection, self expression, free association, and right to give and receive affection from the family.

- v. A poem “YES SIR, I’M FINE” on pages 197-198 castigates corruption and mistreatment of people by those in high positions.

*New Integrated English Students’ Book 3 by Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (2004)*

The book has the following positive aspects:

- i. Damon, who is a haemophiliac and had contracted AIDS through infected blood, is not discriminated against at all. His girlfriend, Celeste, father, mother, siblings, friends, classmates and his doctors love him very much until his death (pages 31-33).
- ii. A lady with brain damage is loved by Derek who proceeds to marry her despite both sets of their parents getting surprised; and other men turning away from her (pages 31-33).
- iii. Sentence: Had it not been for Mutisya, Mogaka would have drowned. (page 162)
- iv. On page 164, it is pointed out, in the passage, that every child has a right to an education, and that no obstacle should prevent any child from receiving an education.
- v. The passage on pages 237-239 deals with the issue of child labour. It presents children who are mistreated by their employers before being rescued by good Samaritans.
- vi. On page 305, the passage “Showers of Blessings” presents the hoisting of the Kenyan flag to the sound of Kenya’s national anthem. The ululating crowd drowns the sound of the anthem. This shows patriotism and nationalism/unity.
- vii. The passage on page 312-313 discusses the issue of democracy with its principle of co-operation and the principle of majority rule in order to protect minority rights.

The book’s negative aspects include:

- i. All the pictures on page 2 showing people’s occupations have only men. This is discriminatory against women.
- ii. On Page 52, a lady who has brain damage is discriminated against by Derek’s mother who asks: “Why do you want to marry her?” She is in a wheelchair!” Even her father wanted them to be engaged but not married.
- iii. On page 62, a picture shows a girl being traded off, just like an object, by her father and other men to the likely future husband.

*Form Four - New Horizons in English: A Course for Secondary Schools Book 4 by East African Educational Publishers (2005)*

This book has the following positive aspects:

- i. The passage on pages 175-176 illustrates a ceremony where women are a source of unity to all in society.
- ii. On page 181-184, a topic on “Negotiation Skills” is covered. It exposes students to necessary negotiation skills needed to find a solution whenever there are conflicting interests in society.
- iii. In a CV on Page 198, the authors present a person who is fluent and literate in English, Kiswahili, Maragoli and Kikamba.

The text has the following negative aspects:

- i. A street urchin (on page 14) is presented as being “skinny, with stick-like arms and legs”. This negative language is used to discriminate against street children.

- ii. On pages 218-219, in the passage “The supermarket of the poor”, a sweaty man violently shoves Jane onto the pile of clothes. She picks herself up from the pile and hurls a barrage of insults at the unapologetic man. This incident has potential to influence students to lack courtesy and to use violent/insulting language.

*New Integrated English Students' Book 4 by Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (2005)*

This text has these positive aspects:

- i. Sentences:
  - Our national museums are a source of great pride to us (Nouns and noun phrases P.11).
  - The Kenya team easily won all the Olympic medals in the 3,000m steeplechase (Rewriting P. 104).
- ii. On page 45, learners are exposed to ways of interrupting and disagreeing politely. This can result in harmony and peace.
- iii. Tribal animosity/conflict is described in the passage on Page 192. Students get to know how to deal with conflicts.
- iv. A picture with the message, “we must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools!” [E'mile Coue 1857-1926] sends a positive message to the students. Further, the picture has people from different religious backgrounds (page 248).

The negative aspects are:

- i. Sentence: Girls who are educated get married to educated men (Rewriting page 69).
- ii. On pages 251-252, discrimination/mistreatment of women is illustrated. Male police officers are seen mistreating a female refugee.
- iii. A picture with the message, “We must learn to live together as **brothers** or perish together as fools!” [E'mile Coue 1857-1926] sends a negative message to the students as it features only men.

## Recommendations for Curriculum Improvement/Reform

### *a) Syllabi and the Teachers' Handbooks*

1. The primary and secondary syllabi and the Teachers' Handbooks should be reviewed to expressly and adequately address contemporary issues such as national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, peace education, arbitration, mediation, as well as, equitable access to and distribution of resources.
2. There is need for the inclusion of a general educational objective touching on national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, arbitration, and mediation.
3. The NCIC should work closely with KICD (and other agencies and organizations) in conceptualization and improvement of curriculum.

### *b) Textbook Content*

1. Primary and secondary textbook content should be reviewed to openly and adequately address contemporary issues such as national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, peace education, arbitration, mediation; and equitable access to and distribution of resources.
2. Authors should use varied ethnic names in context-less sentences, and also construct settings that can authentically sustain names, cultures and experiences from different ethnic groups

e.g. at a construction site or a public workplace where we expect multi-ethnic composition. This will reflect national cohesion and integration, and positively influence the learners.

3. All textbooks should present situations where gender parity, respect for each other, sharing of resources, cohesion, reconciliation, arbitration, and mediation are upheld.

*c) Teaching and Learning Activities*

1. Primary and secondary teachers should adopt teaching/learning activities that focus on contemporary issues such as national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, peace education, arbitration, mediation, as well as, equitable access to and distribution of resources.
2. Materials designed or selected for teaching/learning purposes by the teachers should reflect and respect national cohesion, integration and reconciliation.
3. There is need for teachers to make deliberate efforts, in their teaching, to change the learners' attitudes towards each other and others in the country - in the spirit of national cohesion, integration, and reconciliation.

*d) Assessment/Examination*

- Assessment/examination should be based on contemporary issues such as national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, arbitration, mediation, peace education; and equitable access to and distribution of resources.

*e) Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development*

1. Teacher training colleges and universities should train teachers on how to handle and teach such contemporary issues as national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, peace education, arbitration, mediation; and equitable access to and distribution of resources.
2. There is need for continuing professional development opportunities (e.g. seminars, conferences, and workshops) for the teachers in such areas as national cohesion, integration and reconciliation, arbitration, mediation, peace education, gender parity, and equal distribution of resources.

*f) Role of NCIC in Curriculum Development*

NCIC should work closely with KICD (and other agencies and organizations) in the curriculum development process.

**Conclusion**

The teaching/learning resources used in both primary and secondary schools largely incorporate features that foster national cohesion and integration. However, events following the post-election violence of 2007/2008 have brought forth emerging issues such as national reconciliation, arbitration, mediation, and peace education that need to be anchored in the school curriculum. In fact, the school curriculum, if effectively used, can socialize the learners well and foster national cohesion and integration.

Additionally, KICD should work closely with NCIC [in the process of curriculum development] with a view to producing curricula that also address the issues and concerns of the Commission.

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