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The Impact of Passage Categorization on Comprehension Among Students in Kenya

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Abstract

The study focused on categories of reading passages in Kenyan high school English textbooks and their impact on comprehension. The main objective was to find out if passage categorization influenced comprehension. The sample was drawn from students and teachers from a boy's only school in the eastern part of Kenya. Stratified random sampling was used to select the students while purposive sampling was used to select the teachers and the reading passages. Questionnaires, interview guide and tests were used in data collection. Data were analyzed descriptively and also by use of frequencies. A key finding was that attitude plays a major role in comprehension. Again, passage content in terms of vocabulary, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, is a major determinant of comprehension but not the passage category. Still, the internal school environment plays a key role in enhancing comprehension among learners. One implication of this study is that there are not just individual student differences based on passage category but also structural differences dependent on the background of the student. Since some students are exposed to reading earlier than others, they may be familiar with the different passage types and they may perform better. The teachers' pedagogy in relation to the teaching of reading comprehension is also a matter of importance. Because the teachers teach the subject depending on their knowledge, they have a direct influence on learner comprehension and performance.

Introduction

The Four Language Skills

In Kenya, English is the medium of instruction in all subjects except Swahili which is a language. In addition, it is the official language of communication. Therefore, proficiency in English is mandatory if a student is to successfully go through the education system. For a learner to be proficient, the four skills of language, that is, reading, writing, listening and speaking must be mastered. One must also master the vocabulary, spellings of words, meanings and also the meanings of longer structures like phrases and clauses. In the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE), only reading and writing have been tested and this focus has continued, to a large extent, even in the syllabus. The ability to read and understand excerpts from novels, informational passages and grammar are tested in English Paper Two, which is Comprehension, Literary appreciation and Grammar while Paper One, which is Functional Skills, tests the functional skills in English which include pronunciation, stress and intonation and different types of formal and informal communication among others. This is done through different methods, such as poetry and cloze tests. Paper Three, which is Imaginative Writing and Essays on the Set Texts, tests the imaginative ability of learner as the learner is required to write imaginative compositions and essays on the set texts. Reading ability remains crucial to the learning process, not only as a skill that is tested, but also as a vehicle for interpreting English and other subjects. When a learner gets the information semantically and pragmatically right, then the questions from the reading passage may not pose a big challenge.

Reading and Comprehension

Language is the main transmitter of identity and culture (Ebersohn, 2015). Students in reading classes in Kenya are faced with the dilemma of reading a language with different culture from the languages they acquire in the process of growing up. However, since reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body, it acquaints readers with good models of language use by helping them to master specific reading skills which include the ability to identify the main idea,

facts recall, recognition of vocabulary sequence, inference and capacity to draw conclusions. These connections help the students to project themselves into the situations described in the passages (Deshpande, 2016). Reading is a very crucial part of the learning context not only because it affords readers independent access to information in an increasingly information-driven society, but more importantly because it is a powerful learning tool, a means of constructing meaning and acquiring new knowledge in different subjects.

Reading comprehension is difficult to define because it is a complex process that has been understood and explained in different ways (Pardo, 2004). In fact, no one has yet been able to identify the components of reading comprehension. All the explanations show that comprehension includes:

- Association of meaning with word symbols.
- Selecting the correct meaning as suggested by the context.
- Organizing and retaining meanings
- Reasoning through smaller idea segments
- Grasping the meaning of a larger unitary idea.

Comprehension is mainly a thinking process. It is thinking through writing, and so it is dependent upon the learners' basic cognitive and intellectual skills and upon their ground experience and vocabulary knowledge. Seven general strategies that can be used to improve reading comprehension have been identified by Moore (2010). They are; plan and monitor, determine importance, ask questions, make inferences, make connections, synthesize, and visualize. The strategies can be used by readers regularly and across a wide variety of texts. Plan and monitor involves controlling the mental activities and the reader learns how to preview texts and how to set a purpose for reading and make some predictions. The reader can identify the vocabulary, word clusters and the context of the text. In determine importance, the reader can identify the most important ideas and information. The student can pick out the main ideas, summarize texts, and note the personal relevance of ideas and information they read. When they ask questions, readers should interrogate the texts they read in a bid to enhance understanding. They should be able to set questions and answer them as they read the text. The reader makes

inferences by linking the parts of texts that authors do not show explicitly. They derive meaning from connecting information that they read. When they make connections, readers can connect what they read with the world's activities and experiences. The reader assigns meanings based on what they know. In synthesize, the reader puts together ideas from different sources. They decide the relationships between the different parts of the information and use generalizations to assign meanings. Lastly, the reader visualizes, which involves the formation of sensory and emotional images of the contents of a text and includes visual images. It is also the strategy of recognizing that one is having an emotional response while reading the text.

Literature Review

Introduction

A reader's comprehension depends on their ability to relate the information that they get from the text with their pre-existing background knowledge (Gilakjani, & Ahmadi, 2011). Reading is best considered as an interactive process that takes place between the reader and the text to create an understanding. Learners should comprehend what they read. Furthermore, reading enhances acquisition of language and enables learners to construct new meanings with what they know about language. Many factors that affect readers' selection of reading strategies have been put forward (Kang, 2014). Reading involves a two-way action that involves both the printed material and the person who is reading. Successful reading takes place when the author and the reader communicate clearly. Reading is unsuccessful when the writer's meaning is poorly understood.

Reading is an interaction between reader and text where the reader has to get the meaning (Zoghi, Mustapha, Rizan, & Maasum, 2010). The learner should begin by a survey of the general content. They should then read fairly slowly, ask himself questions to check his understanding and re-read significant sections. They will need to extract as much information as possible. Frequently reading for close understanding will be accompanied by making relevant notes.

Reasons for Poor Comprehension

The ability to understand a text is based not only on the reader's linguistic knowledge, but also on general knowledge of the world and the extent to which that knowledge

is activated during processing (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Reading is more than just matching the phoneme and grapheme. The most important aspect of reading is decoding, and this occurs only when meaning is associated with the written symbol and only when it is the meaning that the writer intended to share with the reader. Several reasons have been put forward by Pardo (2004) regarding poor comprehension. One of these is that poor comprehenders have inadequate vocabulary. They may also be able to decode many words whose meanings they do not know. This may include the various uses of the word and other related words. A second factor is that many poor comprehenders may not effectively use words from one context to another. Third, poor comprehenders' word recognition, though accurate is not automatic. Sometimes they may recognize the words that carry meaning in a text and other times they may simply not differentiate between words that carry meaning and those which do not.

Comprehension problems arise at a higher level of text processing because children are unable to transfer comprehension skills (Piper, Schroeder, & Trudell, 2016). This may be at syntactic or semantic level where meaning may have to be associated with structures larger than words. A fourth reason is that rather than using the syntactic and semantic cues in a text to integrate the meanings of the individual words, poor comprehenders seem to treat each word separately. Lack of familiarity with certain types of writing and misreading the written words is a setback to comprehension. Learners have trouble with passages that they are not familiar with or those, which use language or symbols that are unfamiliar. If learners are not exposed to fiction for example, they may not understand the theme, plot and characterization of a text, hence experience inability to answer questions accurately. The same will happen if they are not familiar with biographies and even narratives. Some learners may also misread words, especially those that are similar in spelling. The learner may think that he has seen one word when in it is a different word printed in the text.

Attitude to Reading

A study by Mberia (2002) identified attitude as one of the factors that leads to poor comprehension of texts. Learners may perform better in comprehension passages that are extracted from categories of reading passages that they like which may be attributed to attitude. On the same

note, the study concluded that learners may have a negative attitude towards reading in general depending on the teaching methodology of the teacher and the level of motivation. Students who have a positive attitude towards reading in general are good in comprehension, irrespective of the passage category (Mugambi, 2015). When teachers motivate them, they could perform better in reading comprehension as a whole.

Factors Promoting Good Comprehension

Good readers concentrate most of the processing ability on the extraction of meanings using both semantic and syntactic contexts in reading and seem to employ an analysis by synthesis strategy of reading for meaning (Moore, 2010). The good reader must be able to understand the denotative and connotative meaning of lexical items in the text that is, he must understand what the items refers to and the emotional and attitudinal suggestions of items. The good reader should also be able to deduce meanings of new words from the text that is, inference. The learner should finally comprehend the passage holistically by getting to know the speakers intention as a whole by observing the content of the sentences and paragraphs. A study by Maarof and Yaacob (2011) found that strategies such taking notes on the content of the text, creating mental images when reading, using reference materials to help understand the text, and summarizing the text after reading were not employed in reading.

Reading Comprehension Theories

Researchers have attempted to provide a model that explains what people do when they read but to date, no group of scholars has been successful in describing the reading act completely (Pardo, 2004). The psycholinguistic theory draws heavily on the role played by language ability when the reader's eye meets the printed page. If a reader is to be successful at discovering the authors' meaning, they are likely to apply more strategies and work harder at building meaning. In the reading process, the proficient reader decodes directly from graphic surface structure into deep structure, with no decoding into the surface structure. It seems to be imperative that the language of the reader and the language of the author be closely matched during comprehension. Pardede (2006) has expounded on the psycholinguistic process through

which a reader reconstructs, as best as they can, a message which has been encoded in writing as a graphic display. Many cognitive processing mechanisms assist the reader to understand written language. Azari and Abdullah (2012) conclude that the reading process makes use of some combination of perceptual and linguistic information. The process of reading incorporates not only what the reader can see, but also the ideas that the reader has about certain linguistic units. This is because the linguistic information guides the reader to understand what he or she perceives according to context.

The feature analysis theory, advocated for by Morgan (2003) holds that as linguistic input enters the processing system, syntactic and semantic contrasts operate to aid in predicting and then testing possible meanings. In the act of reading, a person samples just enough visual information to categorize units of language. According to the model, reading involves recognizing words and understanding them. The model shows that reading is a process that consists of both recognizing skills and understanding words with various sub-processes building upon each other. The top-down, bottom-up model by holds the view that meaning is not gained from individual words but also from the surrounding context (Abraham, 2002). The reader-response theory argues that there is no one correct meaning to a work of art. Reader-response theories, together with post structuralist and postcolonial theories help to understand the reader-text exchange in rather different terms than earlier perspectives offered, or allowed. Reader-response critics argue that there is no text that can be understood without its psychological or emotional effect (Schlender, 2002). This theory postulates that in interpreting literary works there is a critical procedure that has to be followed which has three rules: The first rule is the rule of significance, which explains how significant some of the words are. Under the first rule, the reader has to find out which issues are stressed and those which are not and find the reasons why. The second rule is the metaphorical coherence rule which explains how metaphors help in building meaning. The third is the thematic unity where the reader should look at the themes, the symbols and the characters used to carry the themes. Reading of literary works provides a rich context in which learners can acquire new vocabulary, metaphors and knowledge of other rich possibilities of language use (Schlender, 2001).

Literary works include science, folklore, fiction, plays or short stories. Literature is about life, that is, values, conflict and human nature and it is a good avenue to providing suggestions on how to resolve some of the challenges people face. Literary works also help to develop the learners' critical thinking which is a crucial element in intellectual development. Reader response proponents argue that though good readers may find symbols and elegant patterns in texts, they have to re-examine patterns so as to come out with, their own meaning (Tucker, 2000). These theories show the importance of linguistic ability, the differentiation between denotative and connotative meanings, predictions and testing of meanings, word recognition and context in reading comprehension. Since the emphasis in the English syllabus is on integrated teaching of English in secondary schools, learners are exposed to a variety of reading passages in their textbooks. These types of passages broaden the learners' cognitive skills, not only for examination purposes but also for knowledge empowerment and social development.

Types of Passages in Kenyan High School Textbooks

Different categories of passages are found in the English textbooks used by students in Kenyan high schools and Head Start Secondary English has all the passages required (Bukenya, Njeng'ere, Kioko, &Mutei, 2015).

Science

These factual passages that are meant to inform the learner of the contemporary issues in society. They are meant to help in problem solving and providing information or presenting new ideas. They include passages on H.I.V and AIDS, corruption, morality, child abuse and careers among others etc.

Folklore

Narratives are part of oral literature. Oral literature is a product of the society and so these narratives have their setting in a particular society. When learners read these narratives, they are able to learn and appreciate a society's values, beliefs and aspirations. It gives them an

opportunity to shift their mental faculty to a different physical region and a different culture and appreciate that, which may not necessarily be their own.

Fiction

Fiction is a story of conflict in human motives. It traces the conflict from its inception to its conclusion. Fictional characters are created to help the author to develop characters in the prose. A section of a fictional work of art can be presented as a reading passage for the learners to critically analyze it. These excerpts are mostly from the primary texts covered in class. Fiction here embraces prose, drama and poetry. To understand fiction, the learners must have knowledge of analyzing the elements of plot, characterization style and theme. **Biographies**

A biography is the history of a person written by somebody else. It enlists his achievements, weaknesses and strengths. Biographies of great achievers in history are part of the passages that learners have to read and comprehend. To understand fiction, learners must have knowledge of analyzing the elements of plot, characterization style and theme.

Excerpts from Novels/Plays/Short Stories

A passage can be extracted from a novel, a play or a short story text. The texts are read in class and students are supposed to expect questions from them in paper two and three. In paper two, the questions are from the passage while in paper three the questions are based on applying the content of the texts.

Answering Comprehension Questions

The most important principle to follow when tackling any comprehension test is to read the whole passage through quickly in order to get an overall idea of what it is all about (Moore, 2010). After completing, then read a second time, this time slowly and try to get involved in some aspects of the material and to be aware of its overall structure and the main idea or topic. The second principle is answering questions relevantly. In case one gets stuck in any question, then one should go back to the text and look for clues that can give guidance.

Textual glosses assist learners to understand the reading texts and know the exact meaning of the new vocabulary (Azari, & Abdullah, 2012). Second, language instructors should therefore consider producing some interesting reading texts with different textual glosses to increase learners' reading comprehension. In answering questions from narratives, the leaner

should look out for questions testing; organization, pace of the narrative, details of argument, authors or narrators' points of view, characters' point of view, style. All or some of the above are likely to be incorporated in the questions and the reader is expected to respond to them approximately. Dent and Goodman (2015) studied reading in Uganda and found that both reading frequency and certain types of reading materials read for recreational purposes are correlated with higher overall reading grade.

Methods and Materials

To obtain sufficient and reliable data, the researcher opted for the mixed method design. The current study specifically utilized the explanatory design with the purpose of using the qualitative data to help explain and support the quantitative data collected. Thus, an explanatory sequential data collection process was adopted. The study was actualized in two phases, a quantitative followed by a qualitative phase. The first phase comprised of a questionnaire for students on the impact of the different types of passages that they encounter in class. The students also read each of the sampled passages and answered comprehension questions. The second phase was an interview schedule with the English teachers to get a more complete picture of the teaching and learning of different categories of comprehension passages. The total sample for the study was three teachers and twelve students. For the students, systematic random sampling was used and every 10th student according to the class register were selected. So, the students who were number 10, 20, 30 in each of the two forms two and three class lists were selected. Only form two and three students were selected to participate in the study. Form one and four were technically left out of the study because they were too new or finalizing their studies respectively. Purposive sampling was used to select those teachers who teach form two and three English. To get the required passages purposive sampling was also used in selecting the required passages from Head start English Form Two and Three. The sampled passages were science passages and folklore from the Form Two textbook, and Fiction and Biography from the Form Three textbook. For collection of appropriate data, the researcher used a self-developed questionnaire, an interview guide and researcher developed tests.

Quantitative data was analyzed using measures of central tendency and measures of variability. Tables were also used to present the responses given by the learners according to the

levels of the cognitive domain. The data obtained from the interviews, was analyzed using narrative descriptions.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

General Factors Influencing Reading

The first section of the questionnaire aimed at establishing the general factors that may influence reading in general and reading comprehension particularly. Information obtained from this section showed that majority of the students preferred to read note books and textbooks. Only one student out of twelve acknowledged reading novels during his free time. Thus, reading is viewed as an activity undertaken in class and to pass examinations. Three quarters of the students admitted that they read books for the sake of passing examinations and most of the students preferred to use Kiswahili when conversing with their peers. Negative attitude towards English was portrayed in the second question of part one which required learners to state their favorite subjects. None of the learners considered English to be their favorite subject. Most of the learners like the science oriented subjects like Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Mathematics.

Majority of the learners were also considered as being of average ability by their teachers and were encouraged to work harder. Two students commented that their teachers think of them as ignorant and incapable of doing well. This can affect their comprehension because they may lack the personal drive to work harder so as to improve on their comprehension. Indeed, according to Krashen (1981), when the affective filter is up, linguistic input is blocked. Learners need positive attitudes and motivation to learn. He explains that a learner may be in class, but no linguistic input enters the mental faculty.

The above findings show that generally, learners' comprehension of a reading passage may prove difficult if the learner does not put language into practice by reading written works that are not used in class (Abraham, 2002). The learner's reasons for reading also may hinder comprehension because basically, they seem to read so as to pass examinations. Comprehension is a practice that may take some time to be achieved and so learners who do not practice may not find any particular category of passage easy to handle especially in examinations. Putting language into practice also gives learners added information, this may assist in comprehending different categories of reading passages.

Effects of Passage Type on Learner Response

From the tests administered, it was clear that learners were able to perform better in one passage type and not another. Their performance is summarized using the table below;

Table 4.1

Learner scores in different categories of passages

Passage type	Correct responses	Percentage
Folklore	18	50
Biography	21	58
Fiction	22	61
Science	20	56
Excerpt	31	86

Table 4.1shows that learners scored better in comprehension questions based on factual passages and fiction as compared to narratives and biographies. They scored lower points in biographies and narratives. The fact that they got fewer questions correct in these categories of reading passages in an indication that they did not comprehend some aspects of the passage. Since the testing was done under similar conditions and the question types were grouped according to the various cognitive levels, then this is indicative of lack of good comprehension of particular content in certain categories of passages.

Learners were asked to show the passage types that they preferred for examinations. This is because they would mostly prefer the passage category that they feel more comfortable with and are thus able to answer questions correctly. Preference of passage types in the examination is presented in the table below

Table 4.2

Learners passage preference

Passage Type	Number	Percentage

Folklore	4	42
Biography	4	42
Fiction	5	18
Science	3	27
Excerpt	1	9

Table 4.2 shows that a good number preferred science passages while an equal number preferred folklore. For examinations it is easier to get information from folklore because they often refer to characters that are familiar. Preference for folklore may also be due to familiarity with the contemporary issues. Science passages are also preferred by an equal number of learners. Learners could because they deal with issues that are well known. Biographies were less preferred. This could be due to the referents who may not be well known to the learners as well as lack of familiarity/exposure to this kind of writing. From the two tables, it is clear that preference is not reflected in performance because even though the learners preferred folklore and science to the other passage types, the actual performance in folklore shows a different trend. There are however other factors that may influence performance. Over half of the learners were not able to tell what biographies are; still a similar proportion could not state some types of narratives and it seemed that they could not give a clear cut distinction between the genre of narratives, proverbs and riddles. On the aspects of passages that posed problems, most learners had problems with words; however there were fewer problems with scientific facts. They also had limited problems with sentences and the subject matter.

Reading Comprehension Activities

When reading a passage, some of the learners explained that they first of all looked at the questions, others began by scanning and going through the passage. The majority (70%)explained that they would do well in English paper two if they engaged more in reading literary and none literary materials. Still some (30%) felt that they would improve if they spoke English more for practice.

While most of the learners were able to explain the meaning of recall, almost all of them did not know the meaning of inference, analysis and comparison. This presents a challenge to the

teachers, who may be teaching the learners without letting them know the major terms that may enhance comprehension, and/or consciously developing these skills in the learners.

Attitude and Comprehension

Learners were asked to give titles of the passages they had covered in their English textbook. 65% of the learners were able to remember factual passages that they had read in class. 20% were able to remember narratives while the rest could not remember any.94% of the students could not give the titles of passages yet to be covered in class. This showed that they did not bother to read ahead and discover the contents of the other passages. 68% of the learners who responded were not able to give a list of topics that interest them while reading. The impression here is that to the learners, reading of the passages in their texts is simply a class activity and not something they would do out of interest. This meant that they just read passively and could also indicate that they did not internalize the passages that they read. Learner's attitude towards English as a subject that could be mostly affected by external factors also showed that might have a negative attitude towards English as a subject. This attitude may be derived from the emphasis on science subjects in some schools and also could arise from the teacher and his/her approach on the subject

The table below presents the extent of the difficulty caused by different aspects of comprehension to learners expressed in percentage.

Table 4.3

Areas of comprehension difficulty

Content Area	Not at all %	A little %	Much %	Very Much %

Words	16	20	16	48
Sentences	34	8	26	32
Paragraphs	22	30	25	23
Subject matter	31	28	33	18
Scientific facts	10	22	48	20
Idiomatic expressions	19	17	22	42
Characterization	33	16	32	19
Proverbs	18	26	26	30

Sentences and idiomatic expressions were more challenging to learners as shown in table 4.3. However, proverbs and scientific facts presented the least problems. This could be due to the fact that learners are exposed to these factors often or they encounter them in other subjects.

Other Influencing Comprehension

Learners stated some leisure activities that they engage in which may improve comprehension. To some extent if learners make use of these activities they may assist in building up vocabulary, syntactic structures and even add to the way they use language, both spoken and written. The activities that learners are involved in are presented in the given table

Table 4. 4

Other factors influencing comprehension

Activity	Number	Percentage
Reading novels or storybooks	6	50
Debating		
Crossword or code word puzzles	2	16
Reading magazines and newspapers	1	8
Discussion		
	3	25

Table 4.4 shows that learners prefer reading storybooks and novels, followed by magazines and newspapers in a bid to enhance comprehension of passages other than other activities. They recognize that this is a way of improving their comprehension skills. Coupled with debate and discussion learners are likely to develop good skills of interpretation. Learners were also asked to describe any factors within the school or outside that could improve their understanding of a passage. Their answers varied; Some stated that one of the factors within the school was looking for past papers and answering the questions and also asking for help from the teachers, others said that they could improve their understanding by reading of novels and having oral discussions in class. Another answer was that they could improve if they used English when communicating, still some learners also gave debating with members from different schools as an external factor

that could help improve their understanding. One of the learners stated that they could improve

their understanding if they could make use of resource persons apart from their regular teachers.

Learners were supposed to pick out the factors which assist them as individuals to understand a reading passage when it is presented to them: The findings are illustrated in table 4.5 below;

Table 4.5

Factors contributing to passage comprehension

Activity	Number	Percentage
Previous knowledge	7	58
Teaching method	8	67
Leisure reading	7	58
Reading widely	8	67
Consultation	3	25
Club activities	3	25
Guidance from guardians	4	33
Prompt corrections	9	75
Relation to life experience	8	66
Good reading background	2	17

From Table 4.5, the factors that apply to most students were six and those that applied to fewer students were also four. It was evident that good background did not contribute greatly to the comprehension of passages among many learners. This showed that many learners have a poor background of reading in general and comprehension in particular.

Blooms Taxonomy and Comprehension

Learners' responses to questions was marked against the level of the cognitive domain which was tested. The levels of knowledge (recall) and comprehension challenged learners on average because learners scored low percentages on average, 26% and 33%. The levels of synthesis evaluation had higher scores than the others on average categories that is 42% and 50%. It also emerged that folklore seemed to challenge learners most because the performance was lower than the other passage types. No learner got the knowledge question on folklore right. This indicates that although the lower cognitive levels are considered simpler, learners have

problems in understanding the questions and the teachers do not give enough guidance on reading

and comprehension.

Table 4.6

Learner response according to the levels of the cognitive domain

Domain	Correct Responses	Percentage
Knowledge	13	26
Comprehension	16	33
Application	18	37
Analysis	17	35
Synthesis	20	42
Evaluation	19	39

From Table 4.6, learners scored better in questions that tested higher order skills. This was irrespective of the passage preference or not. Because learners study the literature texts in class, they may have knowledge of the passages beforehand, familiarity with the passage therefore can lead to better understanding of the passage, hence correct responses to the questions.

The questioning technique may be a contributing factor to the comprehension of passages. Although knowledge and comprehension belong to the lower levels of the domain, the learners seem not to fare well in these questions. Learners may perform poorly in these question types because of several factors. One of the factors may be over assumption that the questions are easy for example where they were supposed to state what-frog was concerned about and the learners answered the question wrongly because they gave answers from what they thought and not what was written in the passage.

In synthesizing the narrative, learners were supposed to use previous knowledge about narratives to expound on what they read from the given narrative. Most of them were not able to approach the question synthetically. This may have been caused by learner factors such as lack of enough vocabulary, lack of inferencing skills and teaching methodology.

Teacher's Attitudes towards Different Categories of Reading Passages

The researcher interviewed three teachers; one of the aims was to establish their attitude towards different categories of passages. One of the teachers preferred excerpts from literature texts, another factual passages and the third preferred narratives. The one who preferred excerpts gave the reason that learners are easily drawn to the passage due to its familiarity. This is

because learners have already found the passage in the literature texts and so will familiar with the story character's language and the themes in the book. The second teacher, who had preference for factual passages, argued that learners are aware of the contemporary issues and so they can understand them better because they are passages that they can apply in real life. The third, who preferred narratives explained that narratives have a chronology, have simple language and are easy to understand.

Another aim was to establish passage preference among teachers. Two teachers found science passages easy to teach than the other passage categories. Another preferred to teach folklore. The two explained that science has ideas that are related to what they already know and also, they easily expound on difficult topics as perceived by learners. The fact that the teachers prefer some categories of passages to others may imply that these are the types that they put more effort in teaching at the expense of the other types whereas in the examination, there are no choices for learners to make between one passage and another. Learners may have poor comprehension because of following the teachers' preferences.

Table 4.7

Teacher's responses

Respondent	Discusses about passage types	Passage preferences	Ease of teaching	Difficulty in teaching
1	Yes	Excerpts	Folklore	Science
2	Yes	Science	Excerpts	Science
3	No	Folklore	Science	Folklore

Two teachers stated that they do not make learners aware of the different categories of passages that they come across in class. They admitted that the learners were made aware of the passage category depending on the information in the guidebook. Learners cannot therefore, differentiate the different passage types and have no deeper information relating to passage categories. Two teachers found it difficult to teach scientific passages while one found it difficult to teach biography. If the teachers prefer some passages to others, this may

mean that in the textbook they make selections and cover only what they prefer and leave out the rest which may have implications on comprehension because learners will not comprehend these passage categories if they come across them m the examination.

Effect of Teaching Methods on Comprehension

The three teachers enabled students to understand passages by bringing in related issues, by involving resource persons and also using the media. Different methods were used as applicable to the passage type. The use of different methods brought the passage into context and also gave the learners a vivid idea of the issue being communicated. The teachers, however, lamented that the media was only suitable for scientific passages. Mainly, the media presents contemporary issues that are affecting society and is therefore not a learning platform for all comprehension passages. The fact that time allocated to teach passages in class was not enough was raised and the teachers explained that there should be more time for languages because they had a lot of content to be covered.

Teachers understand that learners have understood a passage if they answer questions or ask questions regarding the passage correctly. They also tell that learners have not understood if the learners score lowly or keep quiet when a question is posed in class. However, teachers explained that if there is more time, they read the passage twice and if the time does not allow, they ask learners to read on their own. The implication is that the learners who have not understood a passage may not have a chance of understanding it. Teachers also use a variety of methods to teach comprehension. These methods include discussion demonstration, questions and answers description and also group work. The credibility of the method, however, depends on the teacher. If the teacher sets objectives about the particular passage and makes them known to the learners, then learners have a higher chance of getting questions right.

Passage Categorization and Comprehension

Passages that are provided in the KCSE examination vary from science to folklore, biographies and excerpts from novels. Any passage category may be presented to the learners but the excerpt from the novel is mandatory. The researcher analyzed the passages in Head start

English in terms of vocabulary, syntax, content and appropriateness. From the interview, the teachers felt that passages in Head start English were suitable in terms of vocabulary, syntax and content. However, they felt that Head start English grammar is sketchy and oversimplified and one exemplified the teaching of case pronouns in Form Three. They also noted some wrong concepts in the book for example the poem that is supposed to teach rhyme instead uses repetition and so felt that the book needed to be reviewed.

Two of the teachers argued that learners enjoy factual passages most because they relate to them and they can at times relate with the characters. They felt that narratives and biographies were detached from them since they found it difficult to identify with the characters.

The teachers agreed unanimously that passage type has an impact on comprehension because they correctly answer questions from the passages they like and also, they are the ones they are likely to read ahead of the teacher.

In the school, learners may have factors that may hinder them from comprehending passages. These may range from lack of enough forums for practice to lack of reinforcement and inappropriate monitoring of the learner's performance. In the school, learners are given factual information from lectures talks and even guidance and counseling. This may be the cause of preference for factual passages. There is no emphasis on oral literature hence narratology may not be developed. Also, due to the study of literary texts, there may be better comprehension of excerpts from novels than biography on narratives Biographies are historical and so because the school emphasizes on the learning of science subjects, arts are not taken seriously.

Students are encouraged to read science oriented subjects during the time for study and so they have minimal time for languages and arts. Due to this science-oriented focus propagated by the administration, they may consider it a waste of time trying to read and comprehend passages while they should be doing 'useful' subjects.

The teachers gave several other factors that may hinder the comprehension of passages in general. If the language is complex and uses difficult vocabulary and syntax, learners may not comprehend. Again, if the passage is long and involving a large number of teachers who have big

workloads, they cannot correct learners work in time and also cannot give personal attention to the learners. They also cited negative attitude as another hindrance to comprehension.

Comprehension Testing in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Examination

The three teachers felt that although questions were not set according to all the levels, as teachers, they did not include all the levels when testing learners in class. They also expressed their concern about the text because the text which they thought contained enough information seemed to be inadequate and so given the opportunity, they would go back to the drawing table and make a fresh selection after thorough scrutiny of all the recommended texts. From the interview, the teachers felt that learners performed well in reading comprehension while one felt that some learners found this part of English testing to be too difficult to understand. Teachers could not tell exactly the level of the cognitive domain, which posed a challenge to learners. This is because in most exams, they do not moderate to find out if the questions cover all the domains. They however, explained that summary, thinking and inferencing were not easy for learners. The K.C.S.E examination English paper Two, that is comprehension, literary appreciation and grammar is relevant and good because the aim of English as an integrated subject is achieved. It not however give a clear picture does of the candidate's knowledge of language because some skills are over tested while others are not tested at all.

Although it is not easy for all the skills to be tested in one sitting, the paper emphasizes more on writing and so only a few aspects of grammar are tested. It therefore, lacks balance and cannot be used as a measure of comprehension. The learners acquire many grammatical aspects during the course of learning. The question of what learners will gain at the end of the day is not clear from the examination testing. This is because only a few areas are tested while there is so much covered. Out of the four categories covered, only two that is reading and writing will be tested and also not all the domains will be tested. Listening and speaking are not tested at all and they are important skills in the study of language.

Implications of Findings

From the analysis, it is evident that passage type does not have influence on comprehension but what may lead to comprehension or lack of it, is the attitude, the linguistic level and the interpretation of the passage according to context. The study found out that learners had varying attitudes towards different categories of reading passages. Some learners liked excerpts from novels, others science passages, and others folklore. Majority of learners preferred science passages. The fact that they considered information from biographies as abstract and detached themselves from the personalities mentioned could also bring about difficulty in comprehension. The teachers' attitudes towards the passage types also matters in the comprehension of those passages because a teacher will spent more time teaching the category that he or she likes and so may make the students comprehend that particular category better than the others. Sometimes they may ignore the passages they do not like.

Learners face problems at the word level because, from the data, most of the learners had problems with the vocabulary tested. They could not explain the meanings of the words used in the passages meaning that they have poor inferencing skills. Another factor leading to comprehension difficulty may be the environment in which learning takes place whereby the emphasis may be on other subjects while English as a language is ignored hence learners may have no chances of extensive reading.

Question type influences comprehension. This may be due to some assumptions that they may have about the questions being easy and so they end up giving the wrong answers. It could also have something to do with teaching methodology. There are many factors, which may lead to good performance in reading comprehension, which may be brought about, by the learners and teachers and also the environment. The measure of comprehension being performance in examination is not reliable. This is because comprehension involves the ability to re-tell the information, to give a paraphrase or to connect with what one already knows.

Conclusion

Leisure reading and involvement in co-curricular activities, like drama, may help to improve students' comprehension of passages. Teachers should take time to explain to learners about passage categorization in the process of teaching the content in the passages. Exposure to English, attitude, teaching methodology and environmental factors contribute to good or poor comprehension. It

has emerged that the learners in Kenya follow what the teachers inform them about the marketable

subjects like STEM and do not spend much time in languages and humanities. This is a drawback and

an issue to be addressed by the education Ministry of Education because learners should be all rounded.

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