



## **TEACHERS' MAXIMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING; A CHALLENGE IN EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN KENYA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Teachers being thinking human beings and not robots, they do not just implement the curriculum as designed. To improve Language Teacher Education (LTE) and English language teaching (ELT), general research in teaching language and on second language teachers, concerning their mental images, thoughts, and processes that they use while teaching have been carried out. These mental processes provide interpretive frames that teachers use to understand and approach their own teaching. The principles function like rules for good behavior or maxims. These maxims guide the teachers' choice of instructional decisions. Analysis of teachers' accounts of their teaching and lesson protocols reveal the nature of their maxims. The purpose of the study was: to examine the maxims that guide teachers in ELT, and to establish factors that influence the choice of teachers' maxims in ELT for social transformation. It used ethnography research method. The research instruments used were: document analysis, informal interview, and observation. Findings reveal that teachers are guided by the maxim of 'value addition' which significantly affects the implementation of the curriculum. The teachers' maxims are influenced by a number of contextual factors such as: the school administration, external examinations and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Teacher educators should train student teachers and design workshops for practicing teachers to improve their maxims of: planning, accuracy, efficiency and conformity to the designed curriculum.*

**Keywords:** Maxims, English language teaching, Challenge, Education, Contextual factors. Quality assurance, Educators, Interpretive frames, Social transformation.

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### **Contribution/ Originality**

This study contributes to the existing literature on teachers' maxims in English language teaching. The paper's primary contribution is finding that teachers' mental processes that provide interpretive frames which guide their approach to teaching are influenced by contextual factors and the maxim of value addition.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English being a compulsory subject to all secondary school students in Kenya, it can be best used through the instruction of reading to instill national values among students in secondary schools hence using the curriculum or education as a tool for social transformation which is fundamental for the success of vision 2030 in Kenya. Education is meant to bring about desirable behavioral changes in the learner in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes ([Kenya Vision 2030 Research Team, 2007](#)).

Observations and conversations with English language teachers about how they conduct their lessons reveal that teachers develop personal principles that inform their approach to teaching. These principles function like rules for best behavior or maxims. These maxims guide the teachers' choice of instructional decisions. Analysis of teachers' accounts of their teaching and lesson protocols reveals the nature of their maxims. Understanding the maxims teachers give priority to and how they influence their practices helps in establishing the effectiveness of using English Language teaching for social transformation in Kenya.

### 1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was: to examine the maxims that guide teachers in ELT, and to establish factors that influence the choice of teachers' maxims in ELT for social transformation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. English Language Teaching in Kenya

In Kenya, English is taught as a compulsory subject to all secondary school students and is the language of instruction from standard four to university. The integrated approach is used in teaching the subject according to the national policy. The Integrated English syllabus contains: English grammar, oral skills, comprehension, oral literature and literary set books, [Kenya Institute of Education \(2006\)](#). The teaching and learning of English language in Kenya is hampered by lack of proper modalities of integration and inadequate teaching and learning resources. Teachers rely on the use of the lecture method due to heavy workloads. English, in the wide Integrated English curriculum, is not given the attention it deserves. Educationists argue that the content of teaching moral values for social transformation can best be captured in the integrated English curriculum; specifically, in the comprehension passages, oral literature and carefully selected set books. However, the success of using the Integrated English curriculum for social transformation depends on the maxims teachers use in implementing the curriculum.

### 2.2. Teachers' Maxims in English Language Teaching

#### 2.2.1. The Maxim of Planning

It is preparing beforehand what to teach. Planning is important because it ensures that one covers all topics outlined in the syllabus. It makes teaching more effective because it focuses on what the teacher wants students to learn and how the learning objectives can be achieved. It gives

a teacher an opportunity to be creative and allow some time to monitor the learning process. It also reduces the likelihood of problems of control. The teacher of language should be trained on how to prepare annual plans, daily lesson plans, and the organization of the class. The teacher should know how to plan for the use of resources and teaching methods. In cases where projects, visits and field work may be used, teachers ought to prepare appropriately for them (Quist, 2000).

The teacher is expected to start with a plan, handling of external environmental factors should be considered. Attention should be paid to the potential of every learner. Each lesson activity should be designed in a way that it facilitates the achievement of the objectives of the lesson. Rules and procedures should be established. The teacher should provide opportunities for learners to work and research beyond the classroom. The language teacher should be aware of available resources for teaching and learning. Planning ahead is good because it gives a teacher time to prepare teaching and learning resources. The teacher can know beforehand if there are sufficient textbooks, the teaching aids available, and how he or she can use the school library or the teachers' resource centre. They also get ample time to prepare to use a variety of teaching methods and activities.

When preparing schemes of work, a teacher should consider: the individual learner differences, the number of learners in the class, available resources, administering of examinations and possible interruptions due to; half-term breaks, co-curricular activities or holidays.

### **2.2.2. The Maxim of Order**

Teachers are expected to maintain order and discipline throughout the lesson (Richards, 1996). Practicing teachers should bring order in the classrooms. After planning for a term or a year through the preparation of schemes of work, language teachers ought to bring order into their classrooms by preparing a lesson plan for each lesson. A lesson plan guide teachers on how to systematically present the content to learners, using appropriate methodology within the given period of time. A lesson plan's content includes the objectives, methods used to achieve the objective and methods of evaluation.

### **2.2.3. The Maxim of Encouragement**

Teachers need to be aware of a variety of strategies that can help them attain a high standard of motivated students. This can be achieved through praise and reward. *Genuine praise and encouragement instill* self-confidence and achievements. Teachers should make students know that they really value their contributions. Always praise or punish the behavior, not the learner.

Even if a student gives a wrong answer, indicate the part that is correct and suggest how the wrong answer can be corrected. Good work can be pinned up for others to see. Praise can also be used to change behavior by praising learners who behave correctly. Teachers should know the types of punishments that can be used according to the disciplinary code approved by the ministry of education, the school code of conduct decided by the board of governors or the school management committee.

The maxim of encouragement is propelled by motivational factors that make learners want to learn. Richards (1996) besides using reinforcement and tasks that are not too challenging for learners, a teacher should vary teaching methods. It makes learning interesting, motivating hence learners will be encouraged to learn. A teacher can use varied methods to teach parts of speech, such as; situational exercises, dialogue, language games, role plays, using pictures, substitution tables, puns and gap filling exercises.

Learners' reading problems such as moving the head and regression make them to be discouraged to read. Such learners may be victims of ridicule by their fellow students during silent reading (KIE, 2002). The way a teacher will help them overcome such habits largely depends on how well they were trained. Teachers will always be guided by what they know, what they think, what they know about the nature of language, how language is used in different social contexts for communication, and theories of language acquisition and learning.

### **2.3. English Language Teaching for Social Transformation**

Education is supposed to be used as a tool for change and for social reform, according to the reconstructions' philosophy (Myra and David, 2000). Learning is active and concerned with contemporary and future society. Teachers serve as an agent of change and reform. They ought to help students become aware of problems confronting humankind. Emphasis of the curriculum is always on social sciences and social research methods, social, political and economic problems examined. Focus is usually on the present and future trends as well as on national and international issues.

It has always been said that information is power. The language teacher should therefore empower learners with knowledge by 'bringing the world into the classroom'. The teacher should ensure that different reading materials besides the ones in the syllabus are availed to learners to read. Learners should learn to read fluently and efficiently. They should appreciate the importance of reading a wide range of subjects and comprehend literary and non-literary materials. Literary works from within the country, region and internationally should be read to relate the different experiences.

Learners ought to appreciate and respect their own as well as other people's culture and universal human values contained in the literary works. All recommended course books for teaching English language have comprehension passages. It may not be possible for teachers to teach all of them but what guides a teacher to select the ones to be read by learners should be pertinent issues in the society. Some of the pertinent issues could be:

- Good governance
- Human rights
- Child labour
- Poverty eradication
- HIV/AIDS
- Environmental education

- Substance abuse and Gender responsiveness among others.

The general objectives of teaching English in Kenya cover the three domains of learning, i.e. knowledge, skills and attitudes. The objective; “read and comprehend literary and non-literary materials’ emphasizes knowledge. The objective ‘read and distinguish between facts and opinion’ focuses on skills, and the objective, appreciate and respect own as well as other peoples culture, emphasis is on attitudes. Language teachers should empower learners with knowledge. Learners should be taught how to make intelligent decisions distinguishing factual information from subjective or people’s opinions. A teacher should act as a coach or a mentor. Teachers ought to shape learners’ attitudes. They must be very careful in the choice of words. For example, one can talk of male circumcision but for female, the word circumcision is not appropriate. It should be ‘female genital mutilation’ .The word ‘mutilation’ highlights the fact that it is a bad practice that should be stopped. A retrogressive cultural practice that goes against the rights of women.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative research paradigm. It investigates *why* certain things happen and *how* they happen. The study investigated the maxims teachers use in language teaching and why they use them. *Ethnography method* was used during the study. It is a qualitative method in which the researcher describes and interprets shared and learnt patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs and language of a speech community (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). It emphasizes the importance of studying at first-hand what people do and say in particular contexts (Jwan and Ong’ondo, 2010). It involves a researcher participating in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time observing, listening, asking questions through formal and informal interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The method has different time modes. A researcher can choose to use a *compressed time* mode where the researcher inhabit a research site almost permanently for a given period of time, usually up to three months. The second time mode is referred to as a *recurrent time mode*. The researcher visits and observes social issues in phases, usually when the particular social issue occurs. The study used the third type of time mode, which is the *selective intermittent time mode* (Jwan and Ong’ondo, 2010). It calls for a longer time of the researcher’s visits, three to two years.

However, it is a very flexible approach; the frequency of the research site visits is determined by the researcher’s own programs. Qualitative researchers use *non-probability sampling*. The aim is not to make statistical generalization but to create knowledge by understanding the particular in depth (Lichtman, 2006); (Cohen and Morrison, 2007). The researcher used purposive sampling to select thirty trained teachers of English in secondary schools in Kenya with four and more years of experience. Teachers Service Commission return forms were used as the sampling frame.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Maxims that Guide Teachers in English Language Teaching

*The Maxim of Planning* states that plan your work, then implement the plan during classroom practice (Quist, 2000) however, the practice for some teachers was to photocopy instructional plans provided by course book publishers specifically schemes of work for the whole year. Teachers were therefore implementing the plans of course book publishers instead of planning for instruction, then implementing the plan during classroom practice.

Records of work covered were filled according to the schemes of work not what was taught. Even items on the schemes that were not taught were filled because the school administrators examine whether what is filled in the record of work covered is what was schemed for, there was a discrepancy between what was taught and what was recorded to have been taught.

Data generated through informal interviews revealed that teachers record what they may not have taught to avoid questions that may be raised by the school administrators and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers should they visit the school.

*The maxim of conformity* states that teaching should follow the prescribed method. It should also conform to the contents of the curriculum. Most teachers did not fully conform to the curriculum content. They sampled a few comprehension passages to teach leaving many that were dealing with various themes that were meant to enable learners acquire knowledge and positive attitudes for social transformation. Data generated through informal interviews, teachers reported that there was no need to teach all moral issues in different comprehension passages. It would not add any value as value addition, according to QASO is enabling learners to score higher marks than the previous score. Teachers believed that value addition would be achieved through teaching students how to answer comprehension passages as the skill was examined.

*The maxim of order* states that maintain order and discipline throughout the lesson. Lesson plans are prepared to maintain order, but none of the teachers had prepared a lesson plan.

*The maxim of accuracy* recommends accurate student output. Most teachers tried to assist students to ensure accurate output.

### 4.2. Contextual Factors that Affect Teachers' Maxims

Teachers' maxims were influenced by a number of contextual factors such as: the school administration, external examinations and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Quality assurance and Standards Officers in Kenya insist on value addition, when they visit schools. They insist that students' scores should be more than what they scored in the Kenya certificate of primary education (KCPE) or any previous exam for the teacher to have added value. The same maxim of value addition is stressed by head teachers.

The Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KSSHA) has stressed the need for external examinations at the end of each term. In the study area, all schools in the districts that made up the county sat for external examination each term.

The Secondary School Heads Association (SSHA) in the study area formed subject panels which released schemes of work that must be covered by the end of each term by all schools. They also insisted that the syllabus had to be covered by early second term in form four. Besides QUASO and SSHA, such pressures on teachers affect their maxim of planning.

They prepare schemes of work to match the ones given by panels controlling external examination. They fill documents to please the school administration and QUASO but they do not implement the plans.

## 5. CONCLUSION

All participants in the study were experienced teachers of English. They were all trained to teach English and literature. Their teaching experiences ranged from two years to thirty years. Therefore, their views reflect English language teacher education and English language teaching in Kenya.

Teachers were guided by the maxim of 'value addition' meaning, do anything to improve the scores of learners without necessarily being guided by the maxim of planning, order and conformity. Not all moral values that were supposed to be instilled in Learners through ELT were taught, posing a major challenge in using ELT as a vehicle for social transformation.

Both the school administration and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers put a lot of pressure on teachers to ensure students get high scores. This has also contributed to the teachers developing the principle or maxim of 'value addition' that guides their classroom practice.

## 6. IMPLICATION FOR POLICY

English Language Teacher Educators besides the content courses of linguistics and methods of teaching the four language skills should develop a course about ELT for social transformation. It should equip student teachers with content knowledge about pertinent issues in the society such as: Good governance, Human rights, Child labour, Poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, Environmental education, Substance abuse and Gender responsiveness among others. It would assist them in developing the maxim of conformity, to conform to the designed curriculum content of teaching moral values for social transformation.

The Quality Assurance and Standards Officers should redefine 'value addition' to include instilling moral values stipulated in the philosophy of education among students in secondary schools in Kenya. Value addition should not be limited to marks scored.

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