



Proverbs as a Teaching Medium in Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum

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Abstract: The Kenya Government through the Ministry of Education launched a new system of education referred to as Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum (KCBC) in 2017. The new curriculum is designed to develop and apply knowledge and skills in real life situations. Core competencies in KCBC are: communication and collaboration, self-efficacy, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy and learning to learn. It is expected that at the end of the learning period the learners will have these values inculcated in them: love, responsibility, respect, unity, peace, patriotism and integrity. This paper proceeds from the understanding that teaching methodologies play an important role in achieving set objectives. The new curriculum thus provides a unique opportunity to the stakeholders in education to excavate the indigenous African knowledge in the course of imparting the required skills to the learners. This paper utilises one important genre of this knowledge: proverbs. The paper will examine how proverbs can be used in the teaching and learning context to inculcate moral values spelt out in KCBC. The parents, teachers and the community have a role to play in bringing up morally upright citizens and this training should start at an early age. Proverbs can provide learners with a genuine learning context, a focus to communicate, appreciate their cultural heritage, develop emotional intelligence and creativity. Proverbs from some Kenyan communities will be used in this paper to show that indeed if used in the instructional process, students can learn values from an early age and be good at communication.

Keywords: Proverbs, Values, Competencies, Curriculum.

Abbreviations: KCBC- Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum, MOE- Ministry of Education, CBC- Competency Based Curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

The Kenya Government lays emphasis on providing quality education to her citizens at all levels. At the level of basic education, the aim is to teach skills and knowledge that are important in life and to secure a foundation of equal education to everyone. It also aims to support students' humanistic growth so that they come out as ethically responsible members of the society (Akala, 2021). According to the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD, 2017) a new curriculum called Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum (KCBC) was launched by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2017 as a result of extensive stakeholder engagement, national needs assessment study, deliberations from a National Curriculum Reform Conference and several benchmarking studies.

The rationale for Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) is to equip students with skills for the 21st century and capture the country's aspirations. This new system of education allows students to advance based on their abilities to master a skill or competency at their own pace regardless of the environment. Methods used to teach are tailored to meet different learning abilities aimed at a more efficient student outcome (KICD 2017). According to CBC competency is the ability to apply appropriate knowledge and skills to successfully perform a task or function.

Core competencies in CBC are: communication and collaboration, self-efficacy, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy and learning to learn. Hence, the main objective of CBC is to enable students acquire these competencies and apply them in real life

situations. At the end of the learning period students should be molded to have the following values: love, responsibility, respect, peace, unity, patriotism and integrity (Nyakangi,2018). This product will be an all-round citizen.

In order to achieve the set objectives, proper teaching methodologies should be employed. Parents, teachers and the community need to work together to produce this well-rounded citizen who is grounded in the morals and values of the society. In this context values are the standards of behavior set out by a people. They serve as a guide to behavior for all the members of that particular group of people. Values can also be seen as beliefs that motivate one to act in one way or another (Hornby, 2005). Values may not be seen but they are recognized in one's behavior (Ogunbameru & Rotimi, 2006).

This paper examines how proverbs can be used in the teaching and learning context. Proverbs are short sayings with an inner meaning popularly used in many communities to give advice or express truth. The paper advances the view that proverbs can be used by both teachers and parents during communication with students at school and even at home. The figurative language used in proverbs can be captivating, interesting and memorable to young children. They can provide children with a genuine learning context and a focus to communicate, appreciate their cultural heritage and develop emotional intelligence and creativity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Proverbs

These are short sayings that have a deeper meaning. They are popularly used in many communities to advice or express truth. They are an integral part of communication. When used they give the listener an opportunity to reflect on the saying, get the inner meaning and apply it to the situation at hand (Gozpinar,2014). They can be used to illustrate ideas, reinforce arguments and to deliver messages of inspiration, wisdom, consolation, celebration and also to advice. This can be done in just one sentence. Bahaman & Reza (2014) say proverbs are popular sayings commonly heard and understood by a group of people. Often they are metaphorical and carry a deeper meaning than its face value portrays. According to Onyeibe, (2017) proverbs are brief, simple traditional sayings that give advice based on practical experiences often in the form of a metaphor or allegory. They are popular in spoken language and form part of the folklore of a culture, passing down generations. In most communities, the wise, elderly, grey haired people use proverbs to give serious advice to children or youths. Mieder (2004) defines proverbs as sayings intended to assist learning in either formal or informal contexts. In most communities they are an acceptable form of communication in and out of cultural contexts providing meaning and explaining phenomena.

2.2. Uses of Proverbs

Proverbs are part and parcel of speech in many cultures across the globe. Sronce and Li (2011) say that in both American and Chinese cultures proverbs are used to teach cultural dimensions. Aspects of culture are seen in the words used mostly in reference to the environment. The Chinese are known to be very creative, hardworking and conservative about their culture. This could be as a result of use of proverbs and other forms of Oral Literature.

Boktimirov (2012) in his study found out that proverbs were used to teach finance to French speaking students. He gives the example of a proverb,

“When in Paris do as the Parisians do”

This was used to advice these particular students to take up French policies in financial management. The Romans have a similar proverb accustomed to their context,

“When in Rome do as the Romans do,”says Hansen (2008)

In a study done in Eastern Tigray, Asimeng- Boahene (2009) found out that proverbs are an integral part of peoples' lives. It is a credible channel of communication. Respect is accorded those who can eloquently speak their native language and use proverbs in their speech.

2.3. Uses of proverbs in African Communities

A peoples' culture is of value to them. This is seen in all aspects of their life. They can express their ideas, beliefs, values and even communicate in specific language styles. In Africa, proverbs are the most widely and commonly used in the continents' history of oral arts. Proverbs are regarded as repositories of the peoples' collective social, political and cultural wisdom and as analytical tools of thought, (Orwenjo, 2009). This study mentions that transmission of the overwhelming complexity of the peoples' day to day experiences is deeply rooted in the continents' rich cultural artistry.

Proverbs are an integral part of African culture. They have been passed from one generation to another for centuries and today they are used as part of everyday speech. It is believed in African societies that when an elder uses a proverb the youth should be able to interpret its meaning immediately. This is illustrated in the proverb,

“One word is enough for a wise man”

The Igbo of Nigeria use proverbs as part of their communication. They have a popular saying that,

“Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”

This saying reinforces the fact that in every conversation proverbs are included.

The Oromo of Somali say a speech without a proverb is like soup without salt. Just the way salt gives taste to food so does a proverb give taste and flavor to communication.

The Zulu from the Southern part of Africa believe that without proverbs, speech would be like a skeleton without flesh, (Finnegan, 1970:390). This means it is proverbs that help to complete speech. According to Orwenjo, (2009) proverbs are a living tradition in Ghana. They are a source of imagery and expression from which elaborate forms can be drawn. They articulate the aged wisdom of African people. Ghanaians view proverbs as a model of compressed or forceful language full of wisdom.

In Yoruba culture proverbs are a good indicator of a fine speaker of their language. The elderly use proverbs in their daily communication giving youths a chance to inherit a rich culture and language, (Arewa & Dundes 1964). Similarly, Asimeng-Boahene (2009) says that among the Akan of West Africa proverbs are used as a medium of communicating traditional values. Such values have been passed from one generation to another over time. Researches done by Ebenso et al (2012) and Onyeibe (2017) show that in most West African communities proverbs are used in rural areas by people with long standing experience to share thoughts with neighbors, youths and those from their social networks.

A research done by Nigussie (2017) on the use of proverbs in Ethiopian culture concluded that they are key in communication. Proverbs for example are used to communicate food security messages in rural Ethiopia. Omolewa (2007) says proverbs can be used for conflict resolution while Agbaje (2002) points out that proverbs can be used to communicate health issues. These researches posit that the use of proverbs in communication in different African societies cannot be underscored.

In the context of education, proverbs, like other genres of Oral Literature can be used in the instructional process. Lauritzen (1980) did research on the use of Oral Literature to teach reading skills and basic research. He concluded that students can master and remember concepts when they interact with different genres of Oral Literature. Minardi (1994) agrees with this view. From his research he says Oral literature can be used effectively to teach reading to students at different levels. These researches suggest that Oral Literature can provide students with a genuine learning context and a focus to communicate. Genres of Oral Literature including proverbs help students to appreciate their cultural heritage, develop emotional intelligence and creativity and nurture their growth and development. Foreexample, among the Igbo, folk tales were used as a tool to inculcate moral values in the youths (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994). Proverbs have been suggested for teaching Business Ethics (Gichure, 2006), Citizenship Education, Critical Thinking, (Asimeng-Bouhene, 2009) and Social Justice and Global Understanding, (Grant & Asimeng-Bouhene, 2010)

2.4. Rationale for Use of Proverbs in Competency Based Curriculum

The use of proverbs as a medium of instruction in CBC is the concern of this paper. A medium of instruction is a method that a teacher can use to make the teaching and learning process highly

effective for their students. A method is decided on by the teacher based on the set objectives. An effective teaching method enables students to master content and apply it in particular contexts, (Schendel & Rebecca, 2020 and Kimani 2015).

In traditional African societies education was a way of letting people know the norms of their society. According to Omolewa (2007) this was passed on from one generation to another through language, music, dance, oral traditions, proverbs, folklore, culture, religion and elders. Agbemabiese (2014) posits that in Traditional African societies education was integrated in the cultural, social, artistic and recreational life of the people. In his research Omolewa suggests the adoption of some of these methodologies in modern day education practices to improve quality and inculcate cultural values in the youths. Nwakaego (2016) reiterates this by saying that proverbs are a good method to use when teaching children societal values. This method if adopted in CBC can help achieve its objectives.

Proverbs have some unique features that are relevant to KCBC. The poetic form in which they are expressed is interesting and stimulates imagination. For example, this proverb,

“Do not look where you fell, look where you slipped”

The words used here are chosen for their meaning to pass on a message. It stimulates imagination in the listener.

Similarly, a Luhya proverb,

“Sherukha shionyene shilaya.”

In this proverb we can see alliteration and rhythm. This proverb means a person who runs alone thinks he is the fastest. It has a deeper meaning that when you do things alone you always praise yourself thinking you are the best. You need to compete with others to gauge yourself.

Proverbs are short sentences that can be easily remembered. Students can master proverbs and use them in their daily activities. For example,

“Many hands make light work”

Such can be used to inculcate the value of unity.

A Luhya proverb,

“Yuyukhana yayia ameno”

It teaches people to be patient and take their time to do anything. It reiterates the English proverb “Hurry hurry has no blessing.”

Proverbs are mostly used in communication. Many researchers concur that proverbs are used to make communication interesting and memorable. Agbaje (2002) says they are used to communicate health messages, Omolewa (2007) says they can be used for conflict resolution, Asimeng-Boehene (2009) agrees that they are a credible channel of communication. The Akan of West Africa use proverbs as a channel to communicate traditional values, while the Oromo value proverbs in speech so much such that if one does not use them the speech is boring and can only be compared to “soup without salt”.

The present study postulates that proverbs can be used by teachers, parents and even students in their day-to-day communication. In school, teachers can use proverbs to teach subjects like English, Mathematics, Kiswahili, Environment activities, Religion, Hygiene and Nutrition activities. Students can be encouraged to collect proverbs from sources like literature books, libraries, family members, school environment, the larger community; and use this knowledge in their communication whether verbal or written.

In most proverbs there is use of figurative language with a hidden meaning. This can be a good opportunity for students to critically think out the hidden meaning and act accordingly. It also stimulates their imagination. For example,

“Restless feet may walk into a snake pit”

This proverb means if you are idle, you can easily land in trouble. Such a proverb can help students to learn how to make use of their time so that they do not stay idle and land themselves in wrong activities.

The Swahili say,

“Debetupuhaliachikutika“

This means an empty container makes the most noise. Anyone without an agenda is noisy and does not contribute to any development.

In Luhya a proverb like,

“Oluchendoshilubolelaomuchendiinjila ta”

It means when you set out on a journey you do not know what lies ahead of you, but this should not discourage you. Just remain focused on your goal and be ready to face any challenges as they come.

Such proverbs with figurative language can help students to be creative, think and apply the concepts. It also adds to their vocabulary in English or other languages that may be used in communication. How wonderful it would be if many children can speak in their mother tongue! Nelson Mandela the renowned freedom fighter in South Africa once said

“If you want to speak to a man’s heart speak to him in his native language”

The Swahili proverb,

“Fumbomfumbiemjinga,mwerevuataling’amua”

Means a clever person will always think out the meaning of a proverb. In English they say

“One word is enough for a wise man”

Such proverbs can create a chance for students to be sharp thinkers.

Metaphors are phrases used to describe something in a way that is different from its normal use. Proverbs can be used metaphorically to improve student’s vocabulary and thinking skills. They can also be used to correct and advise without directly confronting someone. For example,

“Where there is love there is no darkness”

Such a proverb allows students to think about the qualities of love and the evils associated with darkness. Hence, they should learn to embrace love for them to live in peace and shun any evil activities that can bring disharmony in society.

In Kiswahili there is a proverb,

“Asiyefunzwanamamayehufunzwanaulimwengu”

The proverb means if you don’t listen to advice from your parents, you will be faced with challenges in the world when you grow up. The stress here is on children obeying their parents and seniors so that they do that which is right always. If they follow advice and do what is right the society will be a peaceful place to stay.

Among the Luhya they say,

“Nandachelerwayatsianakoebukhwe”

This mean a person who does not listen to advice landed at the in-law’s place with feaces which is a very shameful act. In Luhya communities in laws are highly respected. Such a proverb is metaphorical; it urges people to always listen to advice so that they do not act shamefully. This can be relevant to students in CBC so that they carry themselves around with decorum and are beyond reproach.

From this discussion, I believe proverbs can play a key role as a medium of instruction in CBC alongside other teaching methodologies. The focus in CBC is not only acquisition and development of skills but more on the ability of students to apply such in real life situations. In matters communication, creativity, imagination, mastery of content, critical thinking, this study suggests use of proverbs in instruction at all levels.

3. PROVERBS AND CBC VALUES

As earlier noted, KCBC aims to produce youths with the following values; love, respect, responsibility, unity, peace, patriotism and integrity. Different teaching methodologies will be used to achieve this. In this section the writer gives examples of proverbs that can be used to teach CBC values. These are drawn from English, Kiswahili and Luhya languages.

a) Love

English: - The way to a man's heart is through the stomach.

-Where there is love there is no darkness.

- Rain does not fall on one roof alone.

- Truth should be in love and love in truth.

Kiswahili: - Ukupigaondiukufunzao, meaning he who corrects you teaches you.

- Akupendayempende,mcheasiyekupenda, meaning those who love you appreciate them and keep off those that do not love you.

Luhya: - Elianiliolekanilikhwikusia, meaning, what you despise is what turns out to be beneficial to you.

Khatubikhachakhakhandi, meaning love breeds love.

b) Unity

English: - If we stand tall it is because we stand on the shoulders of many ancestors.

- A family in harmony will prosper and excel in everything.

- A united family eats from the same plate.

- A family tie is like a tree; it can bend but it cannot break.

- None but a fool denies his family.

- If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together.

- United we stand, divided we fall.

Kiswahili: - Mlanawehafinaweilanzaliwanawe, meaning your relatives will always stand by you no matter the challenges you go through.

Luhya: - Oulalinendeabekhoabetsanganendeabetsa, meaning even if you do not have relatives to assist you your friends will always be there for you.

- Amayonikafwananakapurukhangaalala, meaning birds of a feather will always flock together.

- Enjukhiwapandalasocha ta. This means when you attack one bee all the others will come to attack you.

- Litereelashilirainda, meaning some things you cannot do them alone, you must work together with other people.

c) Respect

English: - Respect yourself and you will be respected.

- A king should be respected.

- If you lose your respect you also lose the respect of others

- Respect for the rights of others is peace.

- Respect old people and be gentle with children.

- A man who pays respect to the great paves way for his own greatness.

- Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle.

Kiswahili: - Heshimasiutumwa, meaning respect is given not forced on people.

- Asiyekujuahakuthamini, meaning those who do not know you do not value you.

Luhya: - Omwamiomuria, meaning you should respect authority.

- Eshiaomukhulundualolaniyekhale, omusianisanyalaokhulolaniyemiretawe. This proverb means the elders should be respected for their wisdom because youths have no such wisdom.
- Olahingananendeomukhongowao ta, meaning do not argue with your superiors.

d) Responsibility

English: - Do not set sail using someone else's star.

- The best way to eat an elephant is by cutting it into small pieces.
- A chick that will grow into a cock is spotted the very day it is hatched.
- If a child washes his hands he can eat with kings.
- You are beautiful but learn to work because you cannot eat beauty.

Kiswahili - Atafutayehachoki, akichokakeshapata, meaning one always works hard to achieve their goal, they only relax when they have succeeded.

- Mfwatamawilimojahunponyoka meaning when you are always undecided you will never achieve anything.
- Mtotoumleavyondivyoakuavyo, meaning a child always takes up the characteristics of the parents.

Luhya: - Amani kaonikakhulisia, meaning you only eat as a result of your hard work.

- Ofunaeshiawaraka, meaning you only harvest what you plant.
- Inyunguyatishilaamuliango, meaning you need to be careful so that you do not mistakes when you are about to complete your task.
- Eshibolanendeashaokholanifikhuyasia. This proverb means you will be judged by what you say and what you do.

e) Peace

English: - A regular fighter who discards peace will be fought by his own anger.

- Peace wins over battle.
- Without war there can never be peace.
- The best bed that a man can sleep on is peace.
- When a king has good counsellors, his reign is peaceful.
- A man who never recognizes his mistakes will never know peace.

Kiswahili - Amani haijiilakwanchayaupanga, meaning after a misunderstanding people will always opt for peace.

- Wagombanaondiowapatanao, meaning those who disagree will finally come to a consensus.

Luhya: - Kamainganokakilalitakholiatikhamo, meaning repeated disagreements will deny you peace. Strive to live in harmony with others.

- Owekanakamaya kora esimbo, meaning if you want peace destroy all the weapons of war.

f) Patriotism

- English:
- A glorious past is the work of a glorious man.
 - No elephant is burdened by the weight of its trunks.
 - The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, the second best time is now.
 - When the elderly ones in a home travel, the younger ones grow in experience.
 - If the owner of a calabash calls it a worthless calabash, others will join him to use it to pack rubbish.
- Kiswahili:
- Mwana wamhunziasiposanahuvuvia, meaning we always take after the ways of our own parents or community otherwise we perish.
 - Mwana wanyokaninyoka, meaning we do as our parents do because we know they teach us and also do that which is right.
 - Mwachamilanimumwa, meaning if one forgets their traditions, he is like a slave just following foreign ideologies.
 - Mchezakwaohutuzwa, meaning your own people will always appreciate your efforts.
 - Kuku havunjiyai lake, meaning your own people will always take care of you because you belong to them.
- Luhya:
- Imwashiirulangawayainiaeshikumbata, meaning we always follow paths which others have followed and succeeded.
 - Imbwasokonyolanganyina, meaning children will always behave like their parents.
 - Ingokohoisakulangelilobakhuberaabana baye, meaning parents should strive to take care of their children because this is their responsibility.
 - Opiliyibulaopili, meaning children always take up the characteristics of their parents and also the communities where they are born and brought up.

g) Integrity

- English:
- Strategy is better than strength.
 - A person's value is not nullified by passing storms.
 - As soon as you question someone's integrity it is a reflection of your own.
 - A lie has many variations, the truth none.
 - A boy may cry but a man must conceal his pain.
 - I would rather be honest than impressive.
 - No matter the economy of the jungle, the lion will never eat grass.
 - One falsehood spoils a thousand truths.
- Kiswahili:
- Heshimu uheshimiwe, meaning if you want to be respected then you must also show respect to others.
 - Chanda chemahuvikwapete, meaning good work will be rewarded.

- Tabia ningoziyamwili, meaning your character is part and parcel of you and it can be seen in all your actions.
- Wema hauozi, meaning good deeds last forever.
- Chemachajiuzakibayachajitembeza, meaning a good person preserves their character while the ill-mannered act in order that they may be seen.
- Usiuharibuunadhariaunapopataunahodha, meaning when you become successful you should not forget those who have assisted you along the way.

Luhya: - Bwoyayabwonakanamususunikumunwa, meaning one who does not settle and concentrate on achieving a set objective will never be successful in their endeavors.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the preceding presentation about proverbs and the authors' long experience in the field of teaching and learning, it is evident that proverbs have a place in the instructional process. The new system of education (CBC) if embraced can ease exam pressure on the students which has been the case with 8 – 4 – 4 system. Students need to be exposed to content using different methodologies so that they interact with it, become creative, think critically and make their own concrete decisions which they can stand by; proverbs are a good method to help them achieve these.

The art of communication can also be improved by use of proverbs. Renowned speakers Like Martin Luther King, Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi and Michael Wamalwa used proverbs and other wise sayings in their speeches which kept the audience interested, convinced and alert throughout the presentations.

This study recommends the use of proverbs in our daily communication to teach children the culture and improve their communication skills. In the instructional process and especially in CBC, the use of proverbs should be integrated to make the learning process interesting and memorable for students. If effectively taught CBC graduates will be all round citizens, self driven, and responsible. These are the people Kenya can depend on to drive the economy and display values to be admired by people across the globe.

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