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Evaluation and Selection of School Textbooks in Kenya: The Role of the Ministerial Textbook Vetting Committee

Daniel Chebutuk Rotich and Joseph Musakali

In pre-independence period and immediately after independence in 1963, textbooks in Kenya were mainly produced by the multinational publishers, and mainly in the United Kingdom where these publishers had their headquarters. This however, changed in 1965 when the government of Kenya established Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF). At that time also, a curriculum centre was established by amalgamation of a number of subject based curriculum centres to form Kenya Institute of Education (KIE).

The formation of these two institutions - KIE and JKF was aimed at producing textbooks locally. There is always a need for a mechanism to review and control the quality of learning materials used in classrooms with regard to relevance, content, educational approach and efficacy, as well as to ensure that the provision of learning materials reflects government policies (Askerud, 1997). The government's intention was to use KIE to write and JKF to publish textbooks that are socially and culturally acceptable to the Kenyan people and reflect government policies. The government therefore used KIE to identify teachers, educationists and lecturers in teacher training colleges to write manuscripts. The major aim was to produce books that conform to the curriculum, but are also culturally and socially relevant to the needs of the Kenyan pupils.

Although the government established JKF to publish textbooks, it could not produce enough textbooks for all Kenyan schools. Multinational publishers were therefore allowed to publish some textbooks that were developed by KIE and also develop others that conform to the curriculum. The multinationals thus continued to dominate the market even after the establishment of JKF. These multinational publishers that dominated the market from early 1950s to late 1980s included Longman, Oxford University Press (OUP), Heinemann and Macmillan (Rotich, 2000). These publishing firms dominated the industry because they had financial resources to attract well-trained personnel.

When Kenya changed her education system in 1985 from 7-4-2-3 (seven years in primary, four years in secondary, two years in high school and at least three years in university) to 8-4-4 (eight years in primary, four years in secondary school and at least four years in university), the two state-owned publishing houses – Kenya Literature Bureau (KLB) and JKF dominated the production and distribution of textbooks for both primary and secondary schools. KLB had been established through an Act of parliament in 1980 to replace East African Literature Bureau (EALB) that stopped its operations after the collapse of East Africa Community. Following this change in education system, the government, through the Ministry of

Education Science and Technology (MoEST) started to categorise textbooks into core and supplementary textbooks. The core textbooks were those authored by KIE and published by JKF and KLB while the supplementary readers were those published by other publishing houses – the local and multinational publishing firms. Ironically the government used KIE to evaluate these books yet by extension, it was an author. There was only one core textbook per subject in a class, which all schools in Kenya were expected to use.

Methodology

Various documents were analysed to come up with this article. These include; the three issues of approved list of textbooks for primary and secondary schools (2003 – 2005), the guidelines on production of textbooks, the actual textbooks and other related documents.

The justification for analysing these materials was three-fold, first, to understand what publishers are required to produce and submit to KIE; secondly to evaluate what publishers produced after the evaluation exercise and finally to compare the number of textbooks that are recommended from the categories of publishers: the local private publishers, the state owned and the multinationals.

Process of Evaluation and Approval

Publishers usually submit proposals for suitable textbooks in accordance with the requirements and timetable established in the procedures by the Ministry and KIE. The textbooks can be existing titles without changes, radically revised textbooks, or entirely new textbooks that conform to the curriculum and syllabus.

Publishers pay a non-refundable Kshs 5,000/= (approx 50 Euros) to KIE for a set of evaluation and approval procedures documents. An additional non-refundable submission fee of Kshs 7,500/= (approx 75 Euros) per subject and class is also paid in a bankers cheque to the Director, KIE. Submissions are only accepted from publishers who are legally incorporated and registered in Kenya. All primary textbooks submitted are accompanied by teachers' guides and they must not include the name of the publisher.

The membership of Ministerial Textbook Vetting Committee (MTVC) is drawn from senior members of MoEST headquarters. This committee, which is the custodian of the requirements for textbook approvals, approves the appointment of subject panel members and one administrator who collate results from subject panels. The administrator's report is used by the MTVC to announce the list of approved textbooks. The MTVC is not however, bound by the recommendations from the subject panels.

Composition of the Evaluation Panels

There are separate evaluation panels for each curriculum subject. The members who are recommended by KIE and approved by the MTVC, are usually seven comprising:

- a non-scoring moderator who also acts as chair,
- a subject specialist representative of the MOEST, Inspectorate,
- a panel secretary who is a specialist in the subject and has knowledge of the curriculum,
- a subject specialist teacher trainer, and
- three experienced teachers.

Evaluation

In the actual evaluation, each panel member marks each submitted textbook or teacher's guide individually, without prior consultation with other panel members. The moderator identifies any significant deviations that may occur in marking between individual evaluators. After scrutiny and moderation, the marks of the individual panel members are totalled and averaged. The best total submissions up to maximum number permitted for each subject and class level are recommended to MTVC for the award of approved status. Marks are awarded according to the following criteria:

- Conformity to the curriculum- syllabus coverage;
- Content- relevance of content to subject specific objectives, accuracy and correctness of the subject matter, appropriateness to the level of the learner, organization of the subject matter and promotion of emerging issues;
- Language- accuracy/correctness of language, appropriateness of the language to the level of the learner;
- Exercises and activities- appropriateness to the level of the learner, adequacy, variety, relevance to the syllabus and clarity of instructions and questions;
- Illustrations and design and layout-relevance, variety, adequacy, clarity, colour, proportion, captioning, numbering and labelling.

The teacher's guide is also assessed separately according to the following criteria:

- Diagnostic assessment exercises;
- Provision of additional content for the teacher;
- Activities to support multi-ability learning;
- Suggestions to use low-cost or no-cost materials;
- Clarity of writing and presentation of text;
- Clear cross referencing to the textbook;
- Clear methodology and support for pupils with special learning difficulties.

When the technical specialist approved by the MTVC is evaluating textbook, they assess the dummies submitted. The dummies must meet the minimum technical specifications provided. There are no marks allocated, unlike other criteria it is

either a pass or fail. Therefore, it shows that even textbooks with good marks on content, language and design but with poor technical specifications may not pass.

MTVC approval requires a summary of the evaluators' marks for each submission, and may also inspect individual evaluator's mark sheets. KIE is expected to maintain a complete set of all evaluation documents for at least one year after completion of formal evaluation and approval processes. The textbooks are recommended and approved by the subject evaluation panels and MTVC respectively without subjecting the actual textbooks to the scrutiny of the market. These textbooks therefore have neither preliminary testing nor are they presented to teachers for piloting. In standard practice, the ministry should stipulate the content matter and may define textbook requirements, and then the private publishers publish and market the produced textbooks (Chatry-Komarek, 1994). In the Kenyan system, however, the ministry, through MTVC vets the textbooks before they are published.

Challenges in Evaluation

Section 16 of the evaluation document requires all panel members to be scrutinized to ensure that there are no conflict of interest, for example members must not be in full-time or part-time employment with a participating publisher, must not be authors of books being evaluated or advisors, consultants, shareholders, board members or be involved in any other way with a participating publisher.

The document is, however, silent on the authors of the approved textbooks who are from KIE. Such members may leak information pertaining to evaluation and/or influence the panellists' decisions. Secondly, since in most cases they evaluate dummies, the final product may differ from the dummy. There is no system of quality control. That is why in our findings, a number of approved textbooks fell short of some of the requirements. In one of the texts for instance, the table of contents does not match the body of the text while in others, illustrations are poorly done. Still in others the paper quality is wanting. Textbooks with mistakes still make their way into the market and enjoy the sales once approved.

In the document, under section 14 (Minimum Physical Specifications and Type Requirements), it is stated that publishers should produce affordable but durable books without compromising quality and that the books should be durable enough to last for at least 3-4 years. It is also stated that all books should be strongly bound and finished to withstand constant handling and environmental conditions that may apply. This is not easy to ascertain since books are presented for evaluation as dummies and not as finished products. The technical specifications are very specific on text paper, cover, binding, types and type sizes and page design layout. The problem is that a publisher may not apply them once the book has been approved.

In the 2004 rigorous evaluation exercise a small, upcoming indigenous publisher, spent more than Kshs 35 million in production plus a non-refundable fee of Kshs 3.5 million evaluation fee and yet none of its 35 submitted titles was approved.

Schools have been spending huge amounts of money to repair poorly bound textbooks by publishers out to make quick profits hence school principals have been having problems convincing school boards to allow them to contract unprofessional binders to mend them (Kareithi, 2005). It is also claimed that some publishers have formed an unholy alliance to fleece schools because they seem to compliment each other by alternately covering certain topics very well and others poorly. Schools are therefore forced to buy two sets of books for a subject.

Local book publishers, especially the indigenous, have blamed three international aid agencies funding the free primary education for imposing stringent printing standards that are impossible to meet. Both printers and publishers say the conditions set jointly by UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) are impossible to meet. This has made the local publishers to opt for offshore printing. However, the quality of some locally produced textbooks is low. Besides poor quality paper, local printers have failed to ensure standard book covers and binding that will make the book last longer.

Macmillan Kenya Publishers which is a multinational publishing firm prints their textbook titles both locally and abroad because it is cheaper and convenient for them, and translates into cheaper book prices for consumers. There is also a claim that some unscrupulous publishers have previously influenced KIE to approve sub-standard books.

In the 2004 evaluation and production exercise, publishers were informed of the successful textbooks in October. They were supposed to print and produce the books between October and November, for schools to place orders with booksellers in November and had a December deadline for orders to each selected booksellers. With this kind of pressure, mistakes are likely to be made especially in production. The publishers had only four months to print their approved texts in sufficient number for the more than 17, 000 primary and 3000 secondary schools, promote and market. Printers cannot cope with this kind of pressure (Muroki, 2004). The current (2005) exercise is operating on the same kind of deadlines. Notification of the successful titles for 2006 was made in mid-October 2005.

Kenya has four major private printers - The English Press, Auto Litho, Kenya Litho and Sun Litho. Apart from the above, the two state-owned publishing houses have their own printing presses. Others have come up but do not have the capacity to handle large volumes of work and may not meet KIE stringent conditions. This is why publishers opt for offshore printing, thus denying the economy the revenue. Furthermore, the printers abroad take time to print the titles because they usually have other works queuing. It also takes about three months to ship books from far distances like Malaysia to Mombasa, not to mention the bureaucracy of clearing consignments at the port of Mombasa.

Offshore printing makes it difficult to maintain competitive standards. In some titles, the paper differs in whiteness and opacity. Some textbooks have very poor opacity

that you can almost read what is on the flip side of a given page. The rustless wires in the saddle stitched textbooks are not evenly spaced in some titles and are not fully closed at centre. The appearing size of typefaces also varies. For instance, Times Roman 16 points looks smaller than Palatino 16. The page layout and design varies in many textbooks because there is no standard way of layout. Quite a number of textbooks do not adhere to the principles of design. Some of them combine symmetrical and asymmetrical layout unsuccessfully. Registration of colours in some textbooks is wanting while others have poor or illustrations.

Approved School Textbooks of New Curriculum

The government through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology introduced new curriculum and/or syllabi when it produced guidelines in 2002. The implementation was to be done in phases as follows:

- 2003: Standard (grade) 1 and 5(primary) and Form 1 (secondary school)
- 2004: Standard (grade) 2 and 6(primary) and Form 2 (secondary school)
- 2005: Standard (grade) 3 and 7(primary) and Form 3 (secondary school)
- 2006: Standard (grade) 4 and 8(primary) and Form 4 (secondary school)

The process of implementation of the new curriculum started in June 2002 when the Ministry officially approved the new syllabi and developed vetting and evaluation criteria, methodology, rules and regulations. The guidelines on textbook evaluation and approval procedures for developing and distribution of textbooks were distributed to interested publishers. This was done when the Ministry put an advertisement in the press in July 2002 requesting publishers to purchase the documents from KIE. The materials that were to be developed by publishers were to be ready for evaluation by November 2002, three months after purchasing the documents. The rules stipulated that the MTVC was to vet and recommend a maximum of six titles per subject per class for primary and secondary schools.

Primary School Textbooks

Since the implementation of the new curriculum in 2003, three phases of new textbooks had been completed by 2005. In the first phase, 26 publishers submitted their textbooks for vetting and evaluation; nine firms managed to get at least one title to the recommended list. In that first phase for the two classes (standard 1 and 5), a total of 63 titles were approved. Due to the short time given to the publishers to prepare the textbook materials, some subjects had less than six titles recommended to schools. Table 1 below shows the publishers and their subject textbooks that were approved.

Table 1. Approved List of Primary School Textbooks 2003

Publishers	Class/Subject								
	English	Kiswahili	Maths	Science	Art & Craft	Social Studies	CRE	Islamic R.E	Physical educ.
KLB	1,5	5				1,5	1,5		
Phoenix Publishers	1		1			1	1,5	1,5	
JKF	1,5	1	1,5	5	1	1,5	1,5		1
OUP	1,5	1,5	1,5	1		1,5	1,5		
EAEP	5	5	1	1		1	5		
Dhillon Publishers	5		1,5						
Macmillan (K) Publishers	5	1		1,5			1,5		
Evans Brothers		1,5							
Longhorn Kenya Publishers		1,1, 5,5	1,5	5		1	1		

Key: 1 – Standard 1

5 – Standard 5

In the second phase, a total of 17 publishers submitted their textbooks for consideration and ten publishing houses had their books on the recommended list. In this phase textbooks for standard 2 and 6 were considered in addition to resubmission for standard 1 and 5. Between them there were 80 new titles recommended. These titles included resubmissions for standard 1 and 5. This confirms that when the first phase was introduced, the time allowed for publishers to prepare the textbook materials was too short. Table 2 below shows the publishers and class subject textbooks that were approved in the second phase.

In the third phase, 31 publishing houses submitted their titles for consideration and 12 publishing firms managed to have at least one title on the recommended list. Between the 12 publishers there were 75 new titles on the recommended list and that includes textbooks for standard 3 and 7 and resubmission for other classes from the first and second phases. Table 3 below shows publishers and their class subject textbooks approved.

Table 2. Approved List of Primary School Textbooks 2004

Publishers	Class/Subject								
	English	Kiswahili	Maths	Science	Art & Craft	Social Studies	CRE	Islamic R.E	Physical Educ.
KLB	2		6	5		2, 6	2		
Phoenix Publishers	2, 6	6		2, 6			2		
JKF	2, 6	6	2, 6	1, 6	2, 5, 6				
OUP	2, 6	2	2, 6	2		6	2	1, 2, 5, 6	
EAEP		2, 6	2, 5	2, 5, 6		2			
Dhillon Publishers	6		2, 6	1, 5, 6					
Macmillan (K) Publishers	1, 2, 6	2, 5, 6	6	2		2, 5	2		
Evans Brothers		2, 6		2, 6					
Longhorn Kenya Publishers	1, 2, 6	2, 2, 6	2, 6	1, 2, 6		2	2, 6		
Focus Publications			2, 5			5			

Key: 1 – Standard 1: 2 – Standard 2: 5 – Standard 5: 6 – Standard 6

At the end of phase three, there were 218 titles in the orange book. These titles were shared by three categories of publishing houses – the local private publishing firms, the multinationals and the state-owned publishing houses. The local private publishing firms whose titles were in the orange book were six; this accounted for 50 per cent of the publishing firms whose titles were recommended. However, their share in the textbook market is 40 per cent. It should be noted that the large local private publishing firms control majority of this percentage. The number of state-owned publishers is two accounting for 17 per cent of publishing firms in the textbook market. They however control 25 per cent of the textbook market. The multinationals that participated in the textbook submission exercise were four; this accounted for 33 per cent of the operators whose textbooks were recommended. Their share in the textbook market was 36 percent, almost equal to that of local private publishing firms.

The above scenario demonstrates that large publishing houses with access to financial resources attract well-trained personnel, produce textbooks in a short time and had higher chances.

Table 3. Approved List of Primary School Textbooks 2003 - 2005

Publishers	Class/Subject								
	English	Kiswahili	Maths	Science	Art & Craft	Social Studies	CRE	Islamic R.E	Physical Educ.
KLB	1,2,5,7	3,5,7	3,6,7	3,5,7		1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,5,7		
Phoenix Publishers	1,2,3, 6	6	1	2, 6		1	1,2,5	1,5	
JKF	1,2,5,6	1,6	1,2,5,6	1,3,5,6	1,2,3,5,6,7	1,5,6	1,2,5		1,2,5,6,7
OUP	1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,3,5,7	1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,3,7		1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,3,5,6	1,2,5,6	
EAEP	5	2,3,5,6	1,2,5	1,2,5,6		1,2	5		
Dhillon Publishers	5,6,7		1,2,3,5,6,7	1, 5, 6		2,5,6			
Macmillan (K) Publishers	1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,3,7	6	1,2,5,7		2,3,5,6,7	1,2,3,5,6,7		
Longman (K) Ltd	3,7		3	3,7		3,7			
Evans Brothers	5	1,2,5,6,7		2,3,6					
Longhorn Kenya Publishers	1,2,3,6,7	1,1,2,2,3,3,5,5,6,6,7,7	1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,3,5,6		1,2,3,6,7	1,2,6		
Focus Publications			2, 5			3,5			
Malimu Publications			3						

Key: 1 – Standard 1: 2 – Standard 2: 3 – Standard 3: 5 – Standard 5 6 – Standard 6: 7 – Standard 7

Secondary School Textbooks

Secondary school textbooks go through the same process of evaluation and a maximum of six titles are recommended from which teachers are expected to select one as the core class textbook. In the first phase seven publishing firms managed to get at least one title for form one to the recommended list. During this phase some subjects like Biology, French and Computer Studies had no course book recommended for that year, therefore, students in form 1 continued to use books meant for the old curriculum.

In the second phase, the ministry advertised for submission of form 2 textbooks and resubmission for missing form 1 textbooks for vetting and evaluation. During this phase, ten publishers managed to have at least one title in the recommended list. When the recommended list of the third phase was released, cumulatively, a total of 12 publishing houses had their books listed. These publishing firms were in the three categories of publishers that operate in Kenya. However, in the secondary school market, the market share was dominated by the big publishing firms regardless of

their categorisation. Out of 12 firms, five of them had more than 10 titles each on the recommended list of 154 titles.

Table 4. Approved Textbooks for Secondary Schools, 2003 - 2005

Subjects	Year/Form					
	2003	2004		2005		
	Form 1	Form 1	Form 2	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3
English	1,2,3,4		6,3	6	7	1,3,6,7,10
Kiswahili	3,6	2	3,6	10	1,7,10	3,6,7
Mathematics	1,3,5,6		3,6,7,10	4,7	5	1,3,5,6,7,12
Chemistry	6,7	4,8,9	1,3,6	1	4,7,10	1,3,4,6,7,9
Physics	3,4	6,7	6,7,9	9	3,4	3,4,7,12
Home Science	2,7			11	7,11	7
Agriculture	2	7,9				1,4,7
Geography	3	6,7	3,7	11	1,10	3,6,10
History & Government	1,2,3,4		1,3,6,7	6,7		1,3,6,7
CRE	3	6,7	1,6,7		3,7	3,6,7
Business Education	2,3,7	4	3,6,7	6,11	11	3,7,10
Physical Education	4					4
French		2			2	
Biology		2,3,6,7,9	3,6,7		1,4	1,3,7
Computer Studies				6	6	

Key: 1- Longman Kenya Publishers

2- EAEP

3 - OUP

4- JKF

5- Dataweb Enterprises

6 - Longhorn (K) Publishers

7 - KLB

8 - Univ. of Nbi Press

9 - Phoenix Publishers

10 - Macmillan Kenya Pub.

11- Focus Publications

12- Malimu Publications

Conclusions and Recommendation

Textbook preparation for publication is a long process that requires adequate time to allow for identifying authors, writing the manuscripts, processing them for production, evaluation and printing. In the Kenyan case, publishers were given less than three months to come up with manuscripts, prepare dummies and submit them

for evaluation. After evaluation and approval, they had less than two months to print and distribute them. This has led to publishers not being able to prepare and submit textbooks in all subjects in the curriculum.

The technical specifications of the approved textbooks that were given to publishers were very stringent and could not be met by most publishers. Some of the textbooks which were approved were not in conformity with the required standards. This could have been due to the evaluation of dummies as opposed to the actual textbooks to be used. The research also found out that after evaluation and approval of the dummies, there seemed to be no follow-up by the MTVC to ascertain if the textbooks that go to the market meet required standards. At the same time, there seems to be more emphasis on the technical specifications as opposed to the contents, thus locking out books whose dummies did not meet the minimum technical specifications but with good contents. This could have resulted into publishers preferring to print their books outside the country, hence denying local printers printing jobs and revenue to the country as a whole.

It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education in Kenya should consider whether it is prudent to continue using dummies as a bench-mark for textbook recommendation. There is also need to come up with criteria of assessing textbooks that are already in the market if they are still within the technical specifications. It is prudent also to redefine the role of MTVC to include monitoring of textbooks being released into the market to see if the standard on the dummies were maintained.

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