

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE**

ISSN-2213-1356

www.ijirk.com

**PLUGGING GENERIC GAPS BY INCLUDING THE
LITERARY ESSAY IN THE KISWAHILI SECONDARY
SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

It is a truism that professionalism or academic acumen is a gradual process that is patiently nurtured from pre-school through primary and secondary school education before being solidified at a tertiary level or university. In the case of Swahili Literature genres of literature are introduced at primary school, get developed and diversified at high school and further on at university where learners are helped to think critically. However it is notable that the Kiswahili Literary Essay is superficially included in the secondary school curriculum. This paper explores the probable reason for this anomaly and the ramifications occasioned thereof. This paper roots for the correction of this anomaly and provides justification for the position that has been taken. Plugging this gap will allow learners to proceed to university cognizant of a dynamic literary genre. In addition their creative abilities will also be enhanced further.

KEY WORDS: *Plug, Genres, Syllabuses, Needs Theory, Content Analysis*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Syllabuses the world over have a shelf life. They have to be reviewed and changed all so often. In all cases there would be statutory requirement to have syllabuses changed after a given period. This is an important safe guard because it ensures relevance in the face of changing circumstances that would otherwise render certain aspects of a syllabus obsolete or unable to meet the changing needs of a dynamic society. These facts have inspired change of Education Systems in Kenya several times since independence. At independence in 1963 we had 7-4-3-3, then 8-4-4 was introduced and now 2-6-3-3-3 is on the offing as the 8-4-4 is weaned out, gradually.

It is observable that the Secondary School Syllabus in Kenya revised in 2002 and even the previous one of 1992 does not include the Kiswahili Literary Essay as a distinct topic to be taught and examined.

It is obvious that the syllabus content at the secondary school level gives a foundation to what will be taught at the University level. Furthermore it influences the career directions of the learners. These facts were even more pronounced during the 7-4-3-3 system because the 'A' Level System clearly categorized students who were headed to the Science based careers and the others who were more inclined to take Arts based careers.

The New System of Education is currently being piloted at selected primary schools in Kenya. After the specialists are satisfied with the outcomes and the modus operandi it will be formally adopted and implemented country wide.

Ultimately at the secondary school level, career directions for learners will be clearer as they will have a chance to select broad areas of specializations that are generally career specific. These areas are:

1. Science, Technology and Mathematical
2. Social Sciences
3. Sports and Arts

The philosophy behind the latest changes in the syllabus was to ensure early specialization. The benefit of these approaches is to enable learners to be properly schooled in their career lines before they get into institutions of higher learning either at the college or university level.

It is therefore imperative that students at the secondary school level are given a wholesome academic content that includes as many aspects as possible. In the case of Kiswahili the Literary Essay and various forms of writing have not been given adequate attention thus denying the recipients of the current curriculum (Revised in 2002) adequate exposure that will open their world view in as far as career choices are concerned. The fact that the aforementioned genre do not feature adequately in these syllabus has made writers to have very little production of Kiswahili Literary Essays. The validity of these statement is proved by the fact that prior to 2006 when the Kiswahili Short story was examined for the first time the number of short story anthologies that were in the Kenyan market were very few. Taking the cue from the action of including them in the secondary school curriculum there was a surge in the production of short stories from that time and the increase continues.

The increase was brought about by the fact that as an examinable aspect at the K.S.C.E. level it meant that all candidates required a copy of the set book. The decision to select a set book is a protracted process that takes time and attracts a lot of interest. This in turn leads to a lot of competition from authors and hence there is a significant leap in production of books.

This paper examines the impact of the inclusion of Kiswahili Literary Essays in the new curriculum to the students and to the publishing industry as well as to the individual writers. By so doing the paper argues that the syllabus will be richer and the students better prepared for career choices and ultimately for the job market.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Winchester and Weathers (1968) have detailed salient aspects of the essay form. They have also classified essays and articles distinguishing the following types; the Popular Article, the Professional Essay, The Formal Essay and the Critical Review. Their work is quite detailed and in addition they have provided practical examples of the various types of essays that they have critiqued.

Holman H. C. and Harmon W (1976:186) describes the essay as: 'a moderately brief prose discussion of restricted topic'. They acknowledge that the application of this terminology is broad hence controversy about its specific definition can arise.

Hedberg J. quoted by Hesse D (1989) explains that 'essays differ from short stories in that they consist of facts sifted through the authors imaginations and have unlimited scope in terms of subject and form.

Sengo (1992) analyses the writings of Shaaban Robert and explains that the recurring concern in his work has to do with moral issues. These are the prominent issues that he has discussed in both his prose works and the many poems he has written.

Arege T. (2007) describes the essay as:

An Essay is creative work that has been written. This work can focus on any issue and can be written in a variety of ways and in different contexts depending on the goals of the writer.

In the context of a school an essay is a small text that is written as a exercise to be marked by a teacher.

(Translation)

Arege's definition is a general one and also constrained within a school setting.

His approach leaves out the literary essay and its conspicuous aspect of being a literary vehicle that looks at facts without fictionalizing them.

There are many essayists who have made major contributions in this genre using the English Language. To mention but a few we have; V.S. Naipaul, Fanon, Wa Thiong'o amongst many others.

Naipaul's (1974) collection has four powerful essays where he discusses several issues. He discusses the struggle of Black people for their civil rights in America, The Populist politics of Eva Peron in Chile and the issue of misrule and exploitation in an African Country.

Fanon's (1969) collection of essays surveys the destructive effects of colonialism in the Third World. He explores the cruel mishandling of the colonial subjects that leads to spontaneity that again is countered by more violence leading to the destruction of people physically and psychologically.

Wa Thion'go's (1981) essays look at the issue of 'decolonizing the mind' to use his own words. In this work he roots for the use of African Languages in teaching literature. He wonders why departments of Literature in African Universities continued to teach foreign Literature without giving their own literature enough attention. Robert's essays (1967) and (1968) are interesting collections where he has discussed several issues. Like in all his writings the underlying philosophy has to do with moral issues as understood from the Islamic Faith.

Literary Essays written in Kiswahili are indeed very few. Majority of the writers use the other genres. However the few that are available are interesting and delve at many issues in the society albeit in a factual perspective without fictionalizing reality.

2.0 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This paper is anchored on two theoretical perspectives that is; content analysis and needs theory. Since the discussion is about the need to include an extra genre in the teaching of Kiswahili at the secondary school level, it follows that it is necessary to make a content analysis of the syllabuses under focus. This activity will show where the gap is and consequently validify the argument.

Secondly in order to justify the requirement of making this additional change then it will become necessary to do a need analysis. This will answer the question as to why it is necessary to undertake the suggestions advanced by this study.

Gomm R (2008:297-298) describes content analysis thus: “Content Analysis refers to the quantitative analysis of documents...” he further explains that: “a content analyst wants to make some claims about the representativeness of the data entered into the analysis”. In the case of this study a general view of literary genres will be made with a view of showing the position of the literary essay in order to lay the foundation of the argument in regard to its exclusion in the current syllabus.

The paper will endeavor to show the need to rethink this matter in the current and the one being piloted. The purpose of doing so will be to investigate if there will be any value addition by including this genre in the targeted syllabus.

Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) define a need as:

...Something that is necessary or useful for fulfilling a defensible purpose...a desired end that has been legitimately defined consistent with a guiding philosophy set of professional standards, mandated curriculum, national constitution, or public referendum (pg. 11)

In the case of this paper the focal point will be what is described above as professional Standards’ because an attempt will be made to argue for inclusion of an extra literary genre in the secondary school curriculum. Stufflebeam op cit (2007) further elaborate:

Needs may be of either the outcome or treatment variety. An outcome need is a level of achievement or outcome in a particular area required to fill a defensible purpose, such as preparing students for higher education.(pg.11)

This elaboration is in tandem with this paper because it explores the ramification of excluding the Kiswahili literary Essay in the syllabus and the resultant benefits that will accrue from addressing this anomaly in the current and the new syllabus that is being piloted.

4.0 DISCUSSIONS

Literary Genres are very many and in addition they have many sub genres. For a long time the three most popular genres amongst Kenyan Kiswahili readers were the novel, drama and poetry.

Thereafter the short story especially after it was first examined in the Kenya Certificate for Secondary School (K.C.S.E.) became very popular and its production has been growing steadily.

The Literary essay is presently in the same situation as the short story prior to 2002 when the short story was first examined in the K.C.S.E. It is not receiving adequate attention.

It is therefore imperative to pause and Interrogate the reasoning behind its omission in the syllabus. Likely the curriculum implementers had ranked it lower in the hierarchy of genre than the novel, the poetry and the drama.

It is notable that in the preceding Secondary school syllabus (7-4-2-3) where the secondary school education had three tiers primary school class one to eight, the ordinary level (Form I-IV) and Advanced Level (For V-VI) the Kiswahili Literary Essay was not an examinable aspect. The examination comprised Plays, Prose and Poetry.

The subsequent syllabus that replaced this one (8-4-4) that comprises of eight years at Primary School, four years of secondary school and four years at the university has also left out the Kiswahili Literary Essay.

In regard to Kiswahili syllabus for secondary school K.I.E. (1992) provides the following genres to be covered in form three and four. Analysis of:

- i) Poetry
- ii) Novel
- iii) Drama
- iv) Analyses of recommended text books (pg 39-42)
(Translated)

In the Secondary School Syllabus K.I.E. (2002) the following genres to be covered:

- i) Novel
- ii) Drama
- iii) Poetry
- iv) Short story

It is notable that in the 2002 syllabus the short story was included in addition to the other genres; namely novel, drama and poetry. As previously noted inclusion of the short story led to a significant surge in the number of short story anthologies. In addition to this increase in terms of variety it also provided the learners with a new perspective of looking at issues just like what the inclusion of the literary essay will do.

Furthermore this benefit was cascaded at the university level where critical works on this genre started emerging. It also became necessary to have them taught especially at the Kenyan Universities offering Bachelor of Education (Arts) because the trainee teachers will handle the same aspect once deployed as teachers in secondary schools.

4.1 JUSTIFICATIONS FOR INCLUDING THE ESSAY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

I wish to advance three reasons:

- i) The essay like any other genre is a form of literary expression. It is a vehicle that a particular author may choose to express himself or herself. The ancient debate about the content and manner of presenting it exonerates the essay as the message reigns supreme over the manner of presenting it. Furthermore it does not make sense to claim to train an individual in literature and deny him knowledge in a certain genre.
- ii) The essay is a solid genre that can address any issues that are usually addressed by other genres.
- iii) The Literary essay deals with facts and can therefore directly address many issues in a way that fiction cannot. This is because the other literary forms fictionalize reality while the essay is a presentation of reality as it is albeit from the perspective of the writer.

To illustrate this fact I will make a brief critical review of three collections of essays namely; *Kielelezo cha Fasili* (1968) *Uandishi wa Tanzania kitabu cha kwanza-Insha* (1976) *Insha za Hekima* (1979).

Robert's *Kielelezo cha Fasili* is a collection of essays and short poems. In these numerous essays he has analyzed many issues such as reputation, hard work, social interactions, morals etiquette in speech, social harmony amongst many other issues.

In "Tusitengwe na Suluhu" [Let us strive to get solutions(to social or political discords)] The writer analyses the various causes of conflicts between people such as scarcity of resources, social and class supremacy wars and so on. He urges humans to seek solutions to these problems so as to have peace.

In "Maua na Maneno" (Words and flowers) He uses the analogy of the bee explaining that they are very selective on the flowers they draw honey from. He explains they avoid poisonous plants that would otherwise destroy them. Similarly he advises people to use word carefully so as to avoid discord in society among individuals and communities.

In "Ukaidi" (obstinacy) Robert explains that he will not insist on holding onto traditional ways of doing things if they will go contrary to his interests. This is an important lesson in the sense that tradition and changing circumstances have been a great cause of discord in the society.

Uandishi wa Tanzania kitabu cha –Insha is a collection of various subjects by different authors. Kezilahabi's "Wasubiri Kifo" (You are waiting for death) is an interesting analysis of a village in Tanzania that is plagued by the problem of alcoholism. This village has been neglected by both politicians and civil servants thus villagers have been left to their own devices and the result is social decay and economic woes for the villagers.

Mohammed's "Mchuchu si mchumba wa kuo" (a woman of loose moral is not marriage material) delves into the issue of dressing among girls focusing on the ones that dress scantily and indecently and remarks that such ones are not marriage material because they are likely to be of loose morals.

Dumila (1979) has written twenty one collection of essays on various subjects. In 'Kuwa na lengo katika maisha' (Have aims and ambitions in your life) he details what it means to have goals and aspirations in life. He explains:

It is not proper for a citizen to proceed in life as if he is
blindfolded, moving about aimlessly. The life of an
Individual who has no goals is empty, dull and dark. (pg 7)
(Translation)

In this particular essay the author encourages citizens to work hard in order to meet their expectations in life. It is through human endeavors that society has taken great strides in all areas of life.

In "Asiyependa Kushindwa si Mshindani" (Competition is Healthy) the author details how competition can be healthy or unhealthy. He explains that at work places if every worker competed with colleagues to be more productive then the public will benefit. He also alludes to how different states and community can have unhealthy competition for political or economic control and end up bringing about political upheavals.

It is true that the topics alluded to here have been discussed elsewhere in other literary genres. However as previously mentioned the essay does not fictionalize reality as the other genres do; it peers at reality directly. Another additional benefit (which is also shared by other types of anthologies) is the fact that the Literary Essay can either be the work of a single author or a collection involving many authors writing on many issues with varying perspectives. This aspect of literary essays will make our students more exposed to varying styles in the confines of one publication.

5.0 CONCLUSION

If this bold move to include the Kiswahili Literary Essay as an examinable literary type is made there will be a plethora of publications released to the reading public just like it happened to the short story after it was first examined in 2002. This led to many publishing houses commissioning writers to turn their creative skills in that direction. Consequently the short story genre grew very rapidly thus expanding both the literary and creative space for authors and the knowledge base for learners.

From a perspective of the Need Theory op cited this move will allow the learners to proceed to university cognizant of a literary type that is not only unique in comparison to the others but quite dynamic. Thus I suggest that the existing literary gap should be filled for the benefit of the learners so that they will be all rounded in regard to literary types.

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