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**Teachers' role in the implementation of the revised secondary  
Literature in English curriculum in Uganda****Rebecca Nambi**

Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

**Abstract**

*This is a study on teachers' role in curriculum implementation of the secondary revised Literature in English curriculum in Uganda. It explores teachers' perceptions versus their adoption of the revised curriculum and the contextual challenges to the implementation process. The study was conducted with five teachers in two urban secondary schools in Uganda. It was guided by the interpretive paradigm. Data was from semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. Findings show tensions between the expectations of the revised curriculum and the realities of implementation in the two schools. Tensions manifested in the areas of teachers' ownership of the curriculum classroom patterns, and contextual challenges such as large class sizes and inadequate teaching materials. Teachers selectively adopted the proposed innovations despite their deep understanding of the curriculum and appreciation of the potential of the innovative approaches to enhance learning.*

**Key words:** *revised curriculum, implementation, Literature in English, teachers*

**Introduction**

Curriculum reform has been an on-going process in Uganda over the last decade. The secondary school Literature in English curriculum, like with other subjects, was significantly reformed in 2008 by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) the mandated body by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) to develop and monitor the implementation of education curricula. Indeed some studies have been carried out about this trend

of curriculum reform though most of them focus on primary education in Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010; Sikoyo, 2010). Altinyelken (2010) for instance examines primary school teachers' perceptions of the thematic curriculum and notes that although teachers show a great degree of enthusiasm towards the reforms, their implementation of the same is characterized by a 'multitude of challenges'. Sikoyo (2010) in particular explores the contextual challenges facing the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy and her findings reveal that there is continued need to support teachers to develop appropriate strategies within their specific contexts. The challenges facing implementation of reforms in primary schools in Uganda are not far removed from those in secondary schools. The implementation of curriculum innovations in English and Literature in English in particular stand out because of the major role these two subjects hold in supplementing the teaching of the other subjects in secondary education. English is not only the language of instruction in Uganda but it is the formal language used in politics, business and other national transactions. Despite the importance placed on English proficiency levels among the youth in Uganda are very low. Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB, 2012) states that literacy proficiency at lower secondary school level was at 48.3% in 2012 dropping from 66.4% in 2011.

### **Curriculum implementation**

Curriculum implementation involves "the actual use of an innovation or what an innovation consists of in practice" (Fullan and Pomfret 1977, p. 336). In their seminal paper Fullan and Pomfret (1977) contend that for any innovation to be productive, attention must not be limited to the policy making phase but also include what happens after the innovation has been introduced to the implementer. Implementation is worth studying to examine and identify some of the problematic aspects of bringing about the expected change otherwise it will be difficult to interpret and evaluate the outcomes of the intended innovations. Literature from research identifies teachers as the major conduits for curriculum implementation although there are other factors such as contextual aspects and the nature of innovation itself (Beauchamp, 1981; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Fullan, 2008).

Beauchamp (1981), Spillane et al. (2002) and Fullan (2008) contend that policy implementation is constituted in what it means in the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes and the contexts under which they work. Thus if there are discrepancies between the innovations and teachers' beliefs then there is likely to be resistance to the innovation on the part of the teachers. Beliefs and attitudes are usually acquired through socialization and collegiality among teachers. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes can be manifested in the way teachers think about the curriculum, for example most teachers usually regard the curriculum not being mandatory because they view themselves as being independent in making decisions for their classes (Shkedi, 1998). This creates a gap in the process of curriculum actualization because policy makers provide the curriculum as a package to be utilized uniformly in schools.

Spillane et al. (2002) argue that in addition to teachers' beliefs and attitudes it is imperative for teachers to understand the requirements of the innovation and its implications to them as implementers. Sometimes teachers are uncertain about the expectations of the curriculum and thus end up selecting only parts of the curriculum that they are most familiar with. Thus teachers may be willing to implement the curriculum but may lack the skills to do so. Teachers end up creating their own understanding of the curriculum or what Shkedi (1998) refers to as 'curriculum stories'. This is where teachers re-organize the curriculum to focus on what is important to them.

Teachers tend to give more attention to the prescribed content as opposed to other elements such as teaching strategies. Content is often presented in form of textbooks and these are used to replace the curriculum. Shkedi (1998) and Obara and Sloan (2010) emphasize the prominent role that textbooks play in schools as teachers frequently use them to plan their lessons. However the argument of this article is that much as textbooks drive the major thrust of the curriculum, there are other elements of the curriculum such as the teaching strategies and

objectives that are equally important in the actualization of the curriculum. Shkedi (2009) emphasizes that “The idea of the curriculum package is to ensure that contents, goals, and ideas go beyond the writer’s intentions and are translated into practice in the field” (p.834).

Spillane et al. (2002) argue that passing on the instructional programmes to teachers creates a managerial role for teachers as merely coordinators of the students’ work who simply ensure that students get the material on time. Curriculum and any innovation in the curriculum is usually implemented using a top down approach. This partly explains why teachers may ignore it. Beauchamp (1981) and Shkedi (2009) present that teachers often ignore the official curriculum tasks because they do not consider themselves as important partners in the change process and as such not obliged to adopt the changes. Thus they continue with the same pattern of teaching they used prior to the change.

Some writers have argued that for curriculum implementation to be successfully achieved there is need for the continued material, financial and human support for teachers (O’Sullivan, 2002; Obara & Sloan, 2010). Teachers may need extra support from external sources such as researchers, policy-makers and in-service trainers to guide them in the implementation process. Financial support is also a significant factor in obtaining materials that may be required for the innovation to be effected. Support from school administrators also creates a suitable atmosphere for accepting the innovation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Beauchamp, 1981; Obara & Sloan, 2010). For example in some contexts teachers may need extra training to help them design and adopt the new approaches in teaching.

Contextual factors such as the setting of the school and the number of students in a class also affect the way teachers implement innovations in the curriculum (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Powell & Powell, 2010). For example teaching strategies suggested in the curriculum may be incompatible with the school physical setting or moral beliefs. In some cases the school management may put more emphasis on content coverage at the expense of other aspects of teaching. Many school administrators for example, emphasize excellence in examinations and this has impact on how teaching and learning are conducted in the classroom (Alderson & Wall, 1993). The wash-back effect can lead to “teaching to the test with an undesirable narrowing of the curriculum” (Alderson and Wall, 1993, p. 118).

### **Curriculum changes in Uganda**

The changes in the secondary school curriculum echo the educational reforms in most sub-Saharan countries since the year 2000 (Altinyelken, 2010) and thus studies from other parts of sub-Sahara Africa are relevant to this review. The revised curriculum presents interactive teaching methods as a major innovation. Some of the aims of introducing this approach include enabling learners to engage practically with their learning experience to lessen the significance attached to examinations (Chisholm & Leyendecker 20008). In Uganda interactive teaching methods have been introduced at primary and secondary levels but the ideas have not taken root in the classrooms (O’Sullivan, 2004; Sikoyo, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2011).

Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) observe that in Uganda teaching is still predominantly teacher centred at almost all levels of education’... the *modus operandi* in Uganda is said to revolve around a traditional (predominantly behaviourist) model of curriculum and instruction rather than, for example, one based on development of meaning; inquiry-based/ (p. 197). Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) and Schweisfurth (2011) state that one of the reasons responsible for this status quo is that policy makers prescribe new approaches without consulting all the concerned parties (teachers included) thereby imposing ideas in a top down approach.

Interactive teaching approaches lend themselves towards a certain environment such as space, resources and small class sizes (O'Donoghue, 1994). In most of sub-Saharan Africa this is not the case: where classrooms are available the numbers of students are often large and resources are scarce. In such situations the teachers are the major sources of knowledge and they resort to rote learning. Also, some curriculum innovations educational reforms require a high level of qualified and experienced teachers with a certain set of skills usually acquired through continuous professional development (O'Donoghue, 1994). Rowell (1995) illustrates that even teachers holding bachelors' degrees may need extra support through training to be able to use educational reforms effectively.

Despite the above challenges, Sikoyo, (2010) reports that some teachers in Ugandan schools are aware of the curriculum innovations educational reforms and have attempted to use them in their classes although the teacher-centred approaches still dominate classroom practice. This partly creates the gap for this study to explore how teachers perceive innovative approaches in the formal curriculum and how they put some of those innovations into practice in their classrooms.

### **Secondary Literature in English curriculum context in Uganda**

Like the rest of curricula the Literature in English curriculum contributes to the realization of the general aims of secondary school education. The importance of Literature in English in secondary school education is closely linked to its association with the English language, which is the official language of Uganda as noted earlier. English is a compulsory subject in the secondary school curriculum while Literature is an optional subject. The MOES prescribes that trainee teachers of English choose Literature as their second teaching subject and the English curriculum states that: "This syllabus targets the teacher who has been trained as a teacher to teach English language and Literature in English" (NCDC, 2008 p. vii). Thus Literature in English as a subject in Uganda's education system enriches the teaching and learning of English.

The revised lower secondary Literature in English curriculum for Senior One and Senior Two is structured under the major elements of the curriculum: the content to be taught, learning objectives and teaching and learning strategies per class during a specified period. It includes the major genres of Literature categorized under aspects of drama, poetry, prose and oral literature. The curriculum breaks down this content further to give sub-sections of the content to be taught. The teaching strategies emphasize approaches such as drama, class performances, dramatization and role-play (NCDC, 2008). Thus the NCDC curriculum responds to the curriculum elements of what should be taught, by what means, under what conditions, and with what outcomes. The content to be taught per class is specified although it is stated in general terms such as 'narrative poems, short poems' (NCDC, P. 4).

The MOES does not provide schools and learners with the set novel, drama texts or poetry anthologies and parents or school administrators usually undertake this responsibility. In addition the study texts such as novels, drama and poetry anthologies for Senior Three and Senior Four are routinely changed every four years, necessitating the procurement of new sets of books. Schools find this quite expensive especially if compared to the science subjects, which are provided with materials because of the government policy to promote sciences (Tembe, 2006). Many schools do not have libraries or if they do, their stocks of reading materials are limited and mostly outdated.

Finally, a weak exposure to the use of English especially outside of school has resulted in what is often described as the lack of a reading culture although reading is a major pre-requisite to Literature in English teaching and learning (Muthwii, 2001; Jonsson & Olsson, 2008).

## Research Questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the revised Literature in English curriculum?
2. How does classroom practice reflect the requirements of the Literature in English curriculum?
3. What challenges do teachers face while implementing the LE curriculum?

## Research Methodology

The study employed an interpretivist research framework and data was collected through interaction with the participants to explore their beliefs and attitudes towards the curriculum (Bryman, 2004; Descombe, 2010). The key interpretivist principles that guided this study in formulating the research design and methods were: naturalism in social research; engagement with the research context; multiple interpretations and perspectives on a single phenomenon (Gray, 2004; Cohen, Manion & Marrison, 2011; Descombe, 2010).

The study that informs this article was carried out in two private (not aided by the government) urban schools, Ntandikwa Secondary School (NSS) and Kayera Girls' Secondary School (KGSS) (pseudonyms). The schools were also selected because they teach Literature in English starting from Senior One to Senior Six and also perform quite well at the national level. The study concentrated on Senior One and Senior Two classes in each school. This sample size enabled depth of study in preference to breadth.

Table 1 below summarizes the qualities of the participants:

*Table 1: Profiles of the teachers who participated in the study*

Name (Pseudonyms)	School	Qualification	Years of teaching Experience	Teacher's classes that participated in this study
Rita	NSS	B.A (Educ.)	3	3
Mary	NSS	B.A (Educ)	6	3
Sara	KGSS	B.A (Educ)	7	2
James	KGSS	B.A (Educ), M A (A)	6	2
Nana	KGSS	B.A (Educ), M A (A)	19	2

Individual interviews were carried out with each teacher before lesson observations with the purpose of gaining an early orientation about participants' general views about the revised Literature in English curriculum (Gillham, 2005; Bryman, 2004). In addition, brief interviews were conducted after each lesson observation to make crucial follow up on some of the teachers' classroom choices. A semi structured non-participant observation approach was used and events during the lessons were recorded in a pre-set observation schedule. Scott and Usher, 2011) suggest that in a school setting documents form a major component of the education process, thus studying documents such as the Literature curriculum and teachers' schemes of work provided the overarching context in which the Literature in English curriculum was implemented in the two schools.

Data analysis began during the process of data collection and continued during transcription, coding and categorization of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Bryman, 2004). The data were broken into chunks according to the research questions and theoretical assumptions and were assigned descriptive codes. Initial codes were refined to yield three major categories of findings as the data provided clearer nuances regarding teachers' use of the Literature in English curriculum.

## Findings

### Category 1: Teachers' ownership of the curriculum

All the five teachers who participated in this study were aware of the existence of the revised Literature in English curriculum and often highlighted its importance in preparation for and teaching of their classes. The teachers were articulate about the different elements of the curriculum such as content, objectives and teaching strategies. During interviews teachers stated that the two major objectives of teaching Literature in English at lower secondary were to enhance the teaching of English language and to promote the interest and awareness of the learners for Literature. In addition teachers acknowledged that the teaching strategies prescribed in the curriculum were helpful in arousing the interest of the learners in the subject and enhancing their cognitive ability. For example Rita said: 'We aim at helping them to interpret the English language so we dwell more on language but not being so technical about it'. Sara on the other hand prioritized learner interest.

Sara: At S.1 and S.2, I mainly focus on capturing the interest (of the learners) ... they've come from primary schools on the word Literature has never been heard so at first I introduce literature as a whole to create that interest to learn and appreciate what literature is and what it is really all about.

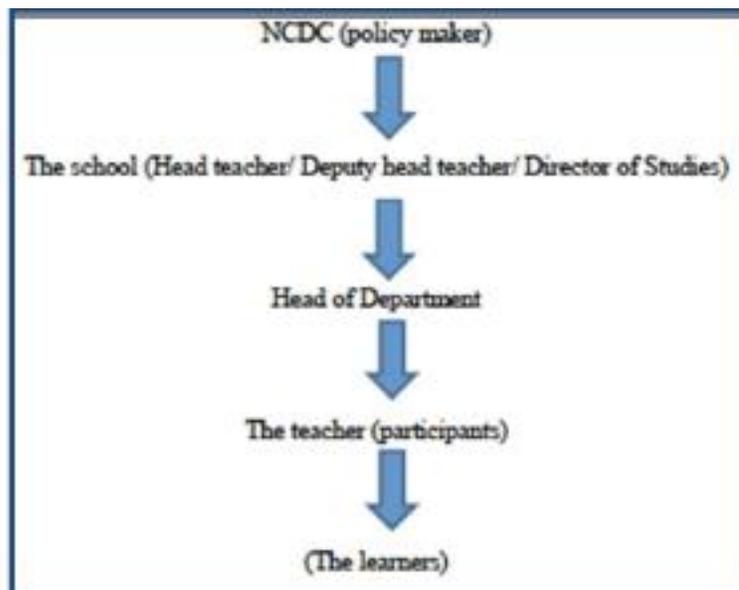
In the above statements teachers echoed the objectives of the revised Literature in English curriculum, which include motivating the interest of the learners for the subject. Hence the teachers seemed to show an awareness of the curriculum requirements. In addition teachers noted that the curriculum was significant because as Sara said: 'It gives teachers a real source of information and sense of direction'.

However asked how they integrated the curriculum in their classroom practice some of the participants said they did not fully observe the curriculum. As stated by James: 'I follow it but not everything'. Despite the acknowledgement that the curriculum was useful, data showed that most of the teachers did not seem to regard the curriculum as mandatory and selected from it some aspects such as the content. The participants worked with the curriculum in different ways and the following issues emerged in relation to teachers' ownership of the curriculum.

*Copies of the curriculum:* In the literal sense teachers did not seem to possess or have regular access to a copy of the revised curriculum. Questions as to whether they had the curriculum received responses such as Nana stated: 'We have that book here somewhere. We tried to follow it but what has helped us most are the Literature seminars. Sometimes we integrate the curriculum aims and objectives in our schemes of work and try to follow them'.

Nana was the Head of Department of Literature in English at KGSS and teachers in her department said they depended on her to make decisions about what to teach. Nana's response above showed that although she was familiar with the curriculum she was selective while using it. She seems to depend on other avenues such as seminars to make decisions for her lessons. However it was evident that the school owned a copy of the revised curriculum although the teachers did not own personal copies. The situation was not different in NSS, a copy of the curriculum was available but teachers did not keep personal copies of it. Mary said: I have seen it in Mr. (X's) office, but I do not keep a copy. Further probing showed that all teachers who participated in the study did not own copies of the curriculum or consult the ones that were available. As Mary said, she had seen it and that was as far as she went in owning the revised curriculum. Thus 'ownership' stretches only as far as teachers having seen the document rather than using it often.

*Top down implementation process:* The teachers' limited ownership of the revised curriculum seemed to originate from the way the document was designed by NCDC (top) and then handed down to the teachers (down) as illustrated below:



**Figure 1:** An illustration of the top down approach to curriculum dissemination

The top-down approach was also evident in the schools when the head of department and director of studies made decisions about what to teach without the input of other staff in the department. This tended to widen the gap between the curriculum and the teachers and their ownership of the policy. For example Sara said the following during the interview:

**Researcher:** Do you use the revised curriculum on a regular basis?

**Sara:** Not really, but the head of department tells us what to teach and she refers to it but we don't have to look at it ourselves.... It is a yellowish-greenish book and she refers to it.

James reiterated as follows when asked about his use of the curriculum:

**Researcher:** You have just taught George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, is the novel recommended by the curriculum?

**James:** I am not quite sure. But I think it is part of the curriculum because in each and every class they usually display all the books they will be using.

**Researcher:** Who displays the books?

**James:** The head of department, then we select one. You can't select the book that is not on the list.

In NSS the situation was similar because the teachers were 'told' to use the curriculum. When asked whether they used the NCDC curriculum Mary said: 'They have told us to draw a school curriculum from that curriculum. As Rita explained: 'Most of the time we have been reluctant to use the new curriculum they brought from NCDC. It requires more preparation and time. However the head of department informs the teachers what genre they are to teach each term. This term we are studying poetry. Next term we will cover a novel and then the last term is for plays' (Rita). Participants again did not appear to have much ownership or participation in making decisions and perhaps this informed their reluctance to adopt the curriculum fully as Mary pointed out.

*Selection of teaching content:* the teachers appeared to rely on textbooks, which replaced schemes of work. For instance the poems to be taught were chosen according to what was presented in the textbooks rather than pre-planned scheme of work and the curriculum. When asked about this Mary replied. 'I follow the textbook (more than the curriculum) unconsciously because it provides poems that I can choose from'. However the teachers agreed that for poetry the teachers had to use different textbooks in order to achieve variety in content as Rita explained:

**Researcher:** What about textbooks, what do you use?

**Rita:** That is the problem we are always told to be creative and to improve so I draw from various sources. Any book that has poems; *Growing up with poetry, Poems from East Africa, An anthology of East African poetry*. There is no specified text. I get some from colleagues, borrowing really from here and there. At times I buy my own textbooks. The school also tries... but you can't use a single text because no single book has it all.

Rita's response brings another dimension to the ownership of content. Each teacher owned individual content for his or her classes. For example teachers teaching different streams of the same Senior One class used different poems in their classes. The teachers had different reasons for their selections. Nana's reason was that she thought some books presented content that related to learners' life experiences as she said: 'There is a particular book I happened to get and I find that the poems are actually relevant to Senior One and Senior Two life (experience)'. Sara gave the following explanation during a post-lesson interview as to why she taught the poem 'Building the nation' (Appendix 1):

**Sara:** I wanted them to get a moral lesson from that poem. Currently we have a kind of political crisis in our country. I wanted to pick on their sense of nationalism. That's why I chose a poem that deals with patriotism: love for one's country and to appreciate what other people go through and whether they are doing the right thing or the wrong thing.

However, teachers emphasized varying features of content in their classrooms. Where some teachers emphasized the meaning and enjoyment of the poems, other teachers seemed to emphasize the technical aspects of poetry like definition of terms such as: subject matter, tone, theme, mood, and rhyme. For example in one of her lessons Mary introduced 'rhyme and rhythm' as the topic. She started the lesson by defining the two terms and writing notes on the blackboard and then had the students read aloud the definitions before she illustrated with a poem. She continued to define different types of rhyme such as "end rhyme", "internal rhyme" and "the rhyme scheme". The purpose of the lesson seemed to be about learners' ability to define these poetic aspects.

## **Category 2: Teachers' classroom patterns**

Teachers' classroom practices revealed the following issues:

*Common lesson structures:* Ten out of the fifteen lessons observed were poetry lessons. Most of the teachers had a lesson structure similar to the one Mary described: 'If I am teaching poetry, I first write the poem on the chalkboard then they [learners] read aloud or do silent reading. Then we discuss the various aspects of the poem and finally I always give them work to do'. Sara's lesson when she was teaching the poem 'Building the nation' had the following structure.

**Table 2: Summary of the activities in Sara's 80-minute lesson on the poem 'Building the nation'**

Lesson segments	Teachers' activities	Learners' activities
Preliminaries (5 minutes)	Greeting and settling down the class	Settling down, finding their notebooks
Blackboard work (25 minutes)	Writing the poem on the blackboard	Copying the poem from the blackboard into their notebooks
Reading (15 minutes)	Instructs learners to read the poem silently from their books Chooses 2-3 learners to read from the chalkboard loudly.	Reading silently from their notebooks 2-3 learners read the poem loudly from the chalkboard
Discussion (15 minutes)	Some of the teachers' questions: What is the poem about? How many people are mentioned in the poem? Who has ulcers in the poem What shows that the driver is unhappy? What did the PS have for lunch? What is the central idea in the poem?	Put up their hands and some are selected to answer the questions. They give short and precise answers, for example, 'the poem is about suffering', there are two people in the poem'
Written exercise and marking (20 minutes)	Writes an exercise on the blackboard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize the meaning of the poem.</li> <li>• What feelings are aroused by the poem?</li> </ul> Teacher starts marking in class.	The learners attempt the exercise in their notebooks. The first ones to complete up their hands and teacher marks them at their desks.

All the participants who taught poetry adhered to this pattern with minor adjustments. For example Rita asked the whole class to read the poem chorally. The time allocated to discussion was usually a question and answer session with learners giving factual responses. Some of the questions required comprehension of the poem, but most of the answers were given in brief sentences. Even the teachers who taught other content like the novel and oral literature went through a similar pattern where writing, reading and an exercise at the end were common features.

*Teachers' roles in the class:* Apart from the class where the learners had a debate, the teachers appeared to be at the centre of the teaching/learning process in the lessons that were observed. They first introduced the poems to the learners during the lesson and not before since the learners had no copies of the textbooks where the poems were selected. In most cases the teachers wrote the poem on the chalkboard. In case of notes, teachers wrote the notes on the chalkboard, for example the definitions of the different sub-topics in James' lesson about oral literature. The teachers also asked the questions in all the classes and they selected the learners who gave the answers. Often the teachers started marking the given exercise in class. Only a few learners who managed to finish their work first were marked during the lesson. All these roles appeared to portray teachers as authoritarian figures during the lessons, which is in contradiction with the requirements of the revised curriculum. Part of the challenges related to the fact that the schools did not provide adequate copies of textbooks but nonetheless most of the teachers did not appear to interactively involve learners in group or pair work activities.

*Learners' roles in class:* All the learners participated in the writing activity and their exercise books had neat notes and well-written poems from previous lessons with all the stanzas clearly structured. Rita revealed:

Rita: We encourage them to take notes, and we may write the notes on the chalkboard, or we encourage them to listen and write their notes, these are the notes from where we are going to take the examination questions. It is part of the school system, the notes are good, the student is expected to have continuous notes right from S.1 to all levels.

The second role for the learners was reading aloud and silently. When teaching the novel *Animal Farm*, James selected different learners to read different paragraphs of the text. This involved around ten learners. During the poetry classes only between two to four learners were selected to read the poem aloud although several learners showed interest in reading aloud. Sara explained to the learners; 'We cannot all read this single poem, some of you may get an opportunity to read next time'. All learners appeared to participate in silent reading and they read from their books after copying the poem from the blackboard. Learners also had a role of giving oral and written answers to the teachers' questions. However it can be observed that these are mostly passive, peripheral roles that would have been further enhanced with other skills building strategies like buzz, tableaux, group work, and other learner-led actions.

*Teaching strategies:* Data from lesson observations showed that participants adopted three (reading aloud, silent reading and writing) out of ten teaching strategies suggested by the curriculum and these did not involve all the learners in the lessons. Teachers said they adjusted the strategies to fit within their contexts. Nana said; 'Our numbers are huge for example, S.1 has 110 students in one class stream. Within a double lesson (80 minutes), you do chalk and talk, questioning technique, give them work and go around marking some of them. One-on-one is hard'. All teachers seemed to regard reading (silent and loud) as a major activity in involving learners in the lessons.

All the teachers said that they would use interactive learning activities if they had smaller numbers and more space in the classrooms. The following are some of the participants' responses to the question: 'What would you have done differently if you had a smaller class?'

**James:** If they are may be like 40 or 50, I would have divided them in groups of 10 and given them some tasks to read and note some major events then I would monitor them but a large class like that it is complicated to monitor. I would give some questions to work in groups and then come back to report to class.

**Nana:** Role play, drama (pause) we would do a lot, because as I said Literature is about life, if the students can see what it is about. In this school it is not only the small class, it is also about the space. We used to do role play out here or in the main hall, but class control, it is like you are giving them (learners) a holiday. They learn best because they are participating, they are involved in the action and it is not like a classroom setting where you are seated behind desks. They are able to come out and be themselves.

**Rita:** We would have the poem dramatized because these poems have very nice stories that you can act out. I try as much as possible to make them write poems.

**Mary:** May be if I had a smaller class; you know it is easier organizing groups with smaller numbers just like this time. I could have put them in groups and all of them talk about the poem and discuss; but you need time and you can't give attention to so many students. You can't get all the students to read.

In the above statements the teachers expressed their knowledge of the possibilities of using other classroom strategies such as group work, drama and role play if they had small classes. The activities they mention echo what was stated in the revised curriculum although the teachers do not elaborate in great detail how they would specifically use them during their lessons.

### **Category 3: Contextual challenges to the revised literature curriculum**

Most of the following challenges stemmed from the school context although some teachers pointed out some weaknesses with the curriculum as well.

*Space, time and large numbers:* Analyzed data from lesson observations in both schools revealed that space within the classrooms was inadequate and this seemed to curtail both teachers' and learners' movement during the lessons. The classroom space was also used as storage space for learners' property since they were not allowed to access their dormitories until the end of the day's lessons; learners had to move with everything they needed during the day including books, sweaters, money, snacks, soft drinks, cups and plates. Nana noted: 'It is the small space between students and the chalkboard that's where the teacher stands so movement becomes impossible. It is a nightmare'. All the teachers were of the view that in order to use methods such as dramatization, role play and group work it would mean reorganizing the class or moving the learners outside which would consume more time. Mary said; 'The classroom is congested; you don't see any space actually. The rooms are very small and the students are many, there is even no space for movement. The space is not enough for grouping'. Even if the space was available teachers had to acquire more skills to handle such large numbers. As they pointed out, one-on-one interaction was hard and teachers ended up focusing on class management issues, which meant that teachers used classroom activities such as writing that would not disrupt their classes.

*Examinations:* teachers unanimously agreed that examinations influenced the way they taught. Learners were trained right from Senior One to answer examination questions and the classroom activities emphasized this. Some of the participants felt that the schools had a different agenda than that expressed by the NCDC curriculum as noted by Sara. 'The (national) examination performance is given much prominence over other priorities'. Data from lesson observation revealed that all the participants often gave learners guidelines as to how to answer examination questions. Sometimes when learners got the opportunity to ask questions their questions also rotated around what to expect and possible approaches during examinations. One particular incident during Sara's lesson stood out.

**Learner:** Shouldn't the chapter summaries be written in chronological order?'

**Teacher:** Have I ever asked you to summarize a chapter in an examination?'

**Learners:** (chorus answer): 'No!'

During interviews teachers revealed that the learners were anxious about the examinations because one of the repercussions of poor grades was to repeat a class or to be sent away from the school. The teacher's concern was clearly to train for examination answers and the learners' response indicated that they were aware of the practice and accepted it as such.

*Perceived gaps in the curriculum:* Some teachers pointed out that the revised Literature in English curriculum had some gaps because it did not clearly state which poems to teach and the steps that the teacher should follow in the classroom as Rita said:

**Rita:** The curriculum does not give you teaching things such as what you should focus on in class. It is more about learners' enjoyment and dramatization. And then they want us to teach students to be able to write poems, write songs, write plays, but they don't have a system to follow. For example how do I teach how to write a poem, a play, a story?

Although part of Rita's dilemma could spring from problems of interpretation, teachers felt the curriculum did not provide enough details. Nana, the teacher with 19 years of teaching experience was articulate about interactive teaching approaches and she clearly showed understanding of the possible ways of sufficiently employing them with her class. However she was also of the view that the curriculum was 'theoretical' and hardly applicable to the current teaching conditions as she pointed out: 'It (the challenge) is in the school; the more students pass the more (students) the school enrolls. The schools' race is commercial. There are many factors; they (the school) want to appear in the newspapers'.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The teachers managed the interpretation and management of classroom content individually and this caused a mismatch in what was taught in different classes. Yet the general opinion of the teachers was that they were following the revised Literature in English curriculum and not teaching outside it. It appears that interpretation was finally done in the context of teachers' beliefs and knowledge as the reviewed literature indicated (Spillane, et al, 2002; Fullan 2008; Shkedi, 2009). In such a situation it was apparent that there were possibilities of misinterpretations of the elements of content and how much was to be covered within a given time limit. Participants seemed to have no clear guidelines as to what aspects of poetry to emphasize in Senior One and Two. For example it was not clear why learners had to recite definitions of technical terms of poetry although the participants believed they had to memorize and write them down as part of the class notes. This misinterpretation of the prescriptions of the curriculum is one of the indicators of failure of policy implementation leading to uneven experiences for learners at the same level in secondary school. The nature of Literature in English requires internal support to interpret the curriculum because the syllabus is changed often. To cope with this situation it means the teachers have to work as a unit to support each other. More experienced teachers such as Nana need to be encouraged to share and work with newly qualified teachers especially during the interpretation process.

The contextual realities in the two schools were not supportive of curriculum innovations especially those that recommended interactive teaching approaches to the learner-centred approaches that are recommended by the revised Literature in English curriculum, something that is reflected in other studies (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Powell & Powell, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2004; Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Sikoyo, 2010). However it was also clear that although they acknowledged the strengths associated with the curriculum, they made minimum effort to access and use some of the teaching strategies recommended by the curriculum. Some activities such as writing the poem on the blackboard seemed to consume a lot of time. Teachers could compile poems to be used during one term and make them available to the learners at the beginning of the term. Like in some of the classes observed by O'Sullivan (2004) teachers need to train learners to work in groups and delegate responsibility to some learners. Teachers could also benefit from continuous professional development that can help them unpack some of the innovations.

In addition to the school contexts, the social context in Uganda elevates examinations (Morgan, 2008; Sikoyo, 2010). This was clearly the case in this study. Currently in Uganda it is common practice for schools to reward teachers and learners for good performance and this practice is also a publicity opportunity for the schools

(Lukwago & Nyakato, 2011). This scenario poses a major issue of concern in relation to Literature in English teaching. Examination questions usually require learners to remember extensive content that was taught in class and not to, say, perform an act in a play or to dramatize poem. In addition, one of the major aims of teaching Literature in English at lower secondary is to delight or to tap the interest of learners for the subject and the teacher-centred approaches that emphasize learners' ability to memorize content cannot help achieve this aim (Zyngier & Fialho, 2010). In any case literary texts are not static pieces of information; each reader brings a different interpretation and understanding to them and as such Literature in English examination questions cannot be answered with merely factual responses.

Ultimately teachers' roles in the implementation of the revised Literature curriculum are mainly determined by the nature of the school and classroom contexts they work-in. Curriculum developers may need to incorporate measures within the new curricula to ensure that implementation is achieved. For instance, it is worrying that teachers rarely 'see' the curriculum. Curriculum developers may have to devise means of dissemination to ensure that teachers access, possess and use the document on a regular basis otherwise it remains largely irrelevant to daily classroom practice. This could be achieved by seminars and workshops at regional levels where teams of teachers engage in dialogue about the changes to consider a range of applicable strategies that are possible within their contexts. This would be a way of expanding teachers' repertoire and equipping them to enrich the curriculum as well as making it more relevant to particular contexts. In addition, policymakers could ensure that every practicing teacher gets a copy of the curriculum/teaching syllabus, just as they do with pocket copies of the teacher's code.

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## Appendix 1

Building the Nation by Henry Barlow

Today I did my share

In building the nation

I drove the Permanent Secretary

To an important function

In fact to a luncheon at the Vic.

The menu reflected its importance

Cold Bell beer with small talk,

Then fried chicken with niceties

Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs

Ice-cream to cover the stereotype jokes

Coffee to keep the PS awake on return journey

I drove the Permanent Secretary back

He yawned many times in the back of the car

Then to keep awake, he suddenly asked,  
Did you have any lunch, friend?  
I replied looking straight ahead  
And secretly smiling to his belated concern  
That I had not, but was slimming!

Upon this he said with seriousness  
That amused more than annoyed me,  
Mwananchi, I too had none!  
I attended to matters of the state.  
Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know,  
Ah, he continued, yawning again,  
The pains we suffer in building the nation!

So the PS had ulcers too!  
My ulcers I think are equally painful  
Only they are caused by hunger,  
Not sumptuous lunches!  
So two nation builders  
Arrived home this evening  
With terrible stomach pains  
The result of building the nation  
Different ways.