

Full Length Research Paper

Matching intended and actual French curriculum objectives in secondary schools in western province, Kenya

T. O. Omusonga^{1*}, I. M. Kazadi² and F. C. Indoshi¹

¹Maseno University, Kenya.

²Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), P.O. Box 190, Kakamega 50100 Kenya.

Accepted 10 June, 2009

Intended French curriculum objectives refer to four official objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya as laid down in syllabuses; namely, to equip learners with basic communicative skills, give learners access to oral and written materials, facilitate further studies, and promote global peace (Republic of Kenya, 2002). On the other hand actual curriculum objectives refer to what teachers and students of French perceive to be the objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya. It is imperative that the intended and actual French curriculum objectives should match for there to be effective learning. However, the facts that French subject at secondary school continues to register low enrolment and retention of students as well as poor performance in national examinations indicate a mismatch between the two kinds of objectives. The purpose of the study therefore was to match intended and actual French curriculum objectives in secondary schools in Kenya. The study is based on survey design. It was carried out in 16 secondary schools offering French in Western Province of Kenya, selected by stratified random sampling to include provincial, district and private school categories. Saturated sampling technique was used to select 16 teachers of French and 327 students of French, from the 16 sample schools. Data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (*t* test). The study found match on only one objective of equipping learners with basic communicative skills. Based on these findings, it is recommended that officially French be taught starting from primary schools and equipping learners with basic communicative skills for effective communication where French is required be recognized as the main objective of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya.

Key words: French curriculum, intended objectives, actual objectives, match.

INTRODUCTION

Intended French curriculum objectives refer to four official objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya as laid down in syllabuses; namely, to equip learners with basic communicative skills, give learners access to oral and written materials, facilitate further studies, and promote global peace (Republic of Kenya, 2002). On the other hand actual curriculum objectives refer to what teachers and students of French perceive to be the objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya. The latter objectives emanate

from four types of curricula that shape teachers and students of French perceptions, which are the supported, taught, learned and tested curricula.

Supported curriculum is reflected and shaped by the resources allocated to deliver the curriculum. Taught curriculum is the delivered curriculum; that is, what an observer would see. The teacher applies his personal and practical knowledge in the light of his or her need for stability and predictability. Teacher's decisions in this case are based on the written curriculum, knowledge of the subject, perceptions of the learners, administrative pressures, available resources (e.g. textbooks), and examination requirements. Learned curriculum is concerned with the changes in students' knowledge, skills and atti-

*Corresponding author. E-mail: tomusonga@yahoo.com.

Table 1. The 8-4-4 system of education subject grouping.

Group	Subjects
1. Compulsory subjects	English, Kiswahili, and Mathematics
2. Science subjects	Biology, Physics, and Chemistry
3. Humanities subjects	History, Geography, and Religious Education
4. Technical subjects	Home science, Agriculture, Art and Design, and Computer Studies
5. Cultural subjects	French, German, Arabic, Music, and Business studies

tudes as a result of school experiences. Learned curriculum may be very different from what is actually taught. Tested curriculum is whereby standardized tests seem to drive instruction.

The match between intended and actual French curriculum objectives either fosters or hinders learning. Learning is fostered when the two kinds of objectives match perfectly but it is hindered when there is a mismatch. The connection or match between the two contributes to the dynamic nature of the curriculum. These connections are also connected to the various dimensions of curriculum (formal, non-formal, and informal dimensions).

In Kenya, learning foreign languages officially starts in secondary school. Students are introduced to a foreign language for the first time without any background at primary school level. The foreign languages taught are French, German, and Arabic. Of the three, French has always had a privileged position in the language policy in Kenya since it was the first to be taught in schools and universities (Ooko, 2006). It also holds a unique position in that it is the most widespread both in rural and urban schools.

According to the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) circular on subject selection guidelines for secondary schools (Kenya National Examinations Council, 2005), in the Kenyan schools that have adopted the country's official system of education; that is, 8-4-4, the program consists of courses divided into 5 groups, as depicted by Table 1. Based on the availability of teachers and equipment in schools, students in forms 1 and 2 must study at least 11 subjects, of which 9 are compulsory (3 subjects from each of groups 1 to 3) and 2 optional (1 subject from each of groups 4 and 5). French is a group 5 subject.

At the end of Form 2, the students make a selection of the subjects they will sit for at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination. These are 7 compulsory subjects selected as follows: 3 subjects of group one, 2 science subjects from group two, 1 subject from group three, and 1 subject chosen from groups two to five. Candidates can sit for a maximum of nine (9) subjects and the extra one or two subjects can be selected from any of the remaining subjects in group two to five.

Many students drop out of French at this stage and in some schools enrolment in the subject in form 3 remains

as low as less than five students. In fact, only one student out of three carries on with the subject up to KCSE. Consequently, only 1.5% of the total number of students enrolled in secondary schools in Kenya study French subject. Furthermore, performance in French KCSE examination is generally poor with 60% of the candidates failing to get the minimum required grade of C+ to access to university education in Kenya (Alliance Francaise, 2006). Western province is one of the areas in the country, which has witnessed declining performance and enrollment of students in French as a subject at KCSE. The outcomes have not been matched with the input and the loser is not only the student but also the tax payer. These are issues educationists must grapple with which call for ascertaining the match between intended and actual French curriculum objectives.

It is important to note what the most recent commission on education in Kenya, the Koech report, observes about 8-4-4 system of education and which seems to perfectly describe the scenario with regard to teaching and learning French in secondary schools: that its objectives at inception were laudable but the implementation process was haphazard and lacking in several crucial ways, especially the initial lack of consultation with crucial stakeholders, and the poor monitoring to ensure the readiness of educational personnel and institutions for its successful implementation. This led to poor rendering of practical orientation of the curriculum, and to requirements that were unaffordable to most parents. This in turn led to lower enrolments, high rates of drop-out and poor achievement because of increased rote-learning rather than practical application (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

A report by the Nairobi Alliance Francaise in 2006, on the status of French in Kenya, notes that the various KCSE reforms introduced since 1988 are not favorable to French. Candidates had to choose a combination of 10 subjects but from 1995, the number of examinable subjects was reduced to 7, and in 2006 French was put in competition with the rest of the subjects, except the 3 compulsory ones that are English, Kiswahili, and Mathematics. The report further indicates that French subject has become more difficult to potential candidates due to the very recent modifications in KCSE 2006. A dictation was introduced and presentations replaced the role-play, which took place between the examiner and the candi-

date. These new exam papers do not evaluate the ability of communicating in a foreign language that is supposed to be the target of learning French.

Kazadi (2006) sought to establish reasons as to why Kenyan students pursue French at university level. The study was based on the hypothesis that it is because of love of French language that Kenyan students choose to study the language at the university. Sample was drawn from 3 cohorts of fourth year students of French at Mase-no University. Data was gathered by one open ended question: "What reasons made you choose and pursue French at the university?" Data analysis was done by converting responses into frequencies and percentages. The results revealed three main reasons that range from the most important one, respectively, as de-sire to become a teacher of French, communicate in French, and work in international organizations. What this implies is that the main reason why Kenyan students study French is because they aspire to get a well paying job, contrary to the logical reason of communication-understanding emphasized upon by the intended French curriculum objectives at high school.

Kazadi's work can be critiqued on the grounds of having asked a question to a group of respondents who were expected to give obvious answers. For example, the main reason given for studying French at the university was expected since most of the respondents were not only already training to be teachers but were in the final year of the course. It would make more sense if the same question was asked respondents who are yet to choose a particular career path, especially students in secondary school, and particularly beginners in French, that is form ones and twos. Answers that would be received are likely to solve the riddle of low enrolment, high drop out rate and poor performance in French. This study, which matches the intended and actual French curriculum objectives in secondary schools in Kenya by focusing partly on form two students of French, is therefore very relevant and timely.

The following research question was formulated to direct the study: What is the match between the intended French curriculum objectives and the actual curriculum objectives in use in secondary schools in relation to:

- Equipping learners with the basic communicative skills for communication where French is required?
- Giving learners access to oral and written materials in French?
- Facilitating further studies in Francophone institutions?
- Promoting global peace through the understanding and appreciation of the culture of French speaking peoples and through a more positive perception of foreign peoples and their culture?

METHOD

The study was a survey. The target population for this study consisted of 48 teachers of French and 960 French students in 48 sec-

ondary schools (37 Provincial, 6 District and 5 Private schools) in Western Province which followed the 8-4-4 system of education. There was on average 1 teacher of French and 20 form two students of French per school that offered French subject in Kenya. The study opted to use teachers due to the fact that they are very important and influential in raising standards in schools whatever the existing situation (Fullan, 2001). Similarly, form 2 students were used in the study since this is the class where teaching and learning is at its peak in secondary schools, given that form one are still settling down and forms 3 and 4 are usually being drilled for examination. Therefore, the form 2 students were likely to give honest responses.

The samples were chosen by use of stratified random sampling and saturated sampling techniques from 16 secondary schools offering French in Western Province. The samples comprised 16 teachers of French (12 from Provincial schools, 2 from District schools and 2 from Private schools) and 327 students of French (287 from Provincial schools, 24 from District schools and 16 from Private schools). The samples represent at least a third of the total population; that is, 33.33 and 34.06% of teachers and students, respectively (Gall et al., 1996).

The research instrument used in the study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed of a closed-ended type question. It required respondents to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each of the four objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya, by putting appropriate letter (A – Agree, D – disagree or U – undecided) in the bracket at the end of the objective. Once the instrument had been developed, it was field tested on a small group of representative respondents. The pilot test was carried out in 3 secondary schools in Western province to eliminate any ambiguity that existed and to check on content validity of the research instruments.

Returns from teachers and students were 94 and 100%, respectively. The low return from teachers was because of 1 teacher who, unlike his students, failed to fill the questionnaire. Data obtained from the questionnaires were subjected to descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, means, and percentages. To arrive at means the items were scored 3, 2, and 1 for alternative A (Agree), U (Undecided), and D (Disagree), respectively. The overall mean scores of teachers and students on curriculum objectives were subjected to t-test. This was meant to establish whether the teachers' responses differed significantly from the responses of the students.

RESULTS

The samples' results on objectives are summarized in Table 2. The results from Table 2 indicate that 94.75% of teachers responded to the item on French curriculum objectives for secondary schools in Kenya. In general, 94.75% of the sample agreed to the objectives, while only 3.5 and 1.75% disagreed and were undecided, respectively. The overall mean score (M) attained by teachers on objectives was 2.91, standard deviation (SD) was 0.26, out of the possible maximum mean score of 3.00. Students' percentage response on objectives slightly exceeded that one of teachers by 1.25 and 89.22% of the respondents agreed to the objectives, 5.90% disagreed, while 4.88% were undecided. Students attained an overall mean score of (M = 2.83, SD = 0.11) on objectives.

DISCUSSION

Though the results show that teachers' mean score on

Table 2. Teachers' and Students' Opinions regarding French Curriculum Objectives.

Objective	E	R %	A %	D %	U %	Mean
1. Equipping learners with the basic communicative skills for communication where French is required.	T	100	100	0	0	3
	S	98	94.67	2.82	2.51	2.87
2. Giving learners access to oral and written materials in French.	T	93	93	0	7	2.93
	S	97	88.36	6.92	4.72	2.81
3. Facilitating further studies in Francophone institutions.	T	93	93	7	0	2.86
	S	96	85.99	8.28	5.73	2.78
4. Promoting global peace through the understanding and appreciation of the culture of French speaking peoples and through a more positive perception of foreign peoples and their culture.	T	93	93	7	0	2.86
	S	93	87.87	5.57	6.56	2.82
Mean	T	94.75	94.75	3.5	1.75	2.91
	S	96	89.22	5.90	4.88	2.83

Key. E = Respondents; T = teachers; S = students; R = response; A = agree; D = disagree; U = undecided.

objectives was slightly higher than that of students, a two-tailed test of the significance of the difference between the two means resulted in a value ($t = 0.18$) lower than the t critical value of 1.96 at .05 level, implying that there was no statistically significant difference in mean score on objectives between teachers and students. It means that teachers perceive the French curriculum objectives just in a similar way as their students. In general, there is no match but rather a tendency towards match between intended and actual French curriculum objectives.

Equipping learners with basic communicative skills

Regarding the objective of equipping learners with the basic communicative skills for communication where French is required, there was 100% response by teachers and all of them indicated that they were in agreement with it, hence attained the maximum 3.00 mean score. From teachers' perspective, it implies a perfect match on this particular objective between what is intended and what actually is in practice. And for students, 98% responded, 94% of those who responded agreed, 2.82% disagreed and 2.51% remained undecided. Their mean score was 2.92, which was the sample's highest on objectives. It can therefore be argued that the main objective of teaching and learning French in secondary schools is to equip learners with the basic communicative skills for communication where French is required, since this objective received the most favorable rating from both samples.

The results confirm earlier findings by Kazadi (2006) in his study on reasons that lead Kenyan students to learn French at university: Though in Kazadi's work the reason of communicating in French was ranked second out of 53 reasons; that is, after that one of becoming a teacher of French, arguably the latter reason complements the former in the sense that to teach French is to communicate in French. Being able to communicate is a pre-requisite

to being able to teach. Teaching cannot take place without a medium of communication and language is very central in communication. Indeed, in the current study the entire sample of teachers agreed that French is taught and learned in secondary schools in order to equip learners with the basic communicative skills for communication where French is required; teaching is one such area where communication in French is required.

Giving learners access to oral and written materials

Teachers think that giving learners access to oral and written materials in French is the second most important reason for teaching French in secondary schools in Kenya. They had a mean score of 2.93 on this particular objective. Sample response on the objective was 93% out of which another 93% agreed, 0% disagreed, and 7% said they were undecided. Students ranked the objective as third by attaining a mean score of 2.81. Their response was 97% with 88.36% agreeing, 6.92% disagreeing, and 4.72% being undecided. There is no match on this particular objective between what is intended and what actually is in practice. With the increasing presence of French language in the Kenyan society, especially in towns where it is now days common to come across French language, for example words such as Le café, Boutique, Bureau de change, Discotheque, Buffet, Barbecue, Maisonnette, etc (Kazadi, 2006; Nginye, 2008), it is imperative that the kind of education provided to learners should be able to prepare them to access to such oral and written materials in French.

Facilitating further studies

Regarding the objective of facilitating further studies in Francophone institutions, 93% of teachers responded, out of which 93% agreed, 7% disagreed, and none indicated to be undecided. Their mean score was 2.86, thus

the objective took position three. Students on the other hand ranked the objective as number last by attaining 2.78 mean score, while their response was 96%, out of which 85.99% agreed, 8.28 disagreed, and 5.73% were undecided. Again there is no match on this objective between intention and what takes place in practice. It implies that Kenyan students taking French in secondary schools are not keen at pursuing further studies in Francophone institutions. Understandably, Kenya being an Anglophone society, the tendency among many youth is to aspire to study in Anglophone colleges and universities and among most favorable destinations are in United Kingdom, USA and Australia. But what is perturbing is that even those students of French do not see furthering studies in Francophone institutions as a priority, which is an indicator of things gone wrong in French curriculum implementation process.

There is need to educate Kenyans, especially students and teachers of French, on the importance of having to further studies in Francophone countries. For example, France is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of almost all spheres of development. Students who go to learn in France can bring back with them scientific and technological knowledge and skills necessary for building Kenya in this era when the country aspires to be industrialized by the year 2030.

Promoting global peace

Teachers results regarding promoting global peace through the understanding and appreciation of the culture of French speaking peoples and through a more positive perception of foreign peoples and their culture was an exact replica of their results in the previous objective. However, 93% of students responded to this particular objective, and among those who responded, 87.87% were in agreement, 5.57% were not in agreement while 6.56% could not indicate their stand. The latter sample had a mean score of 2.82. Therefore, the implication is that not all teachers and students of French have internalized and come to accept that teaching and learning French can be a tool for promoting global peace. A lot needs to be done to ensure that both teachers and students of French understand and appreciate the culture of French speaking peoples in particular, and generally the culture of foreign peoples. One way of achieving this would be through teaching and learning Francophone literature in secondary schools. This used to be the case in the previous system of education where A-level students taking French would be exposed to Francophone literature. However, in the current system of education, where the number of years in secondary school was reduced to only four, starting to teach French at primary school would ensure that students will have acquired desired linguistic competence to enable them learn literature on entering secondary school.

In summary it is evident that the samples' mean scores

on objectives ($M_s = 2.91$ and 2.81) fall short of the expected mean of 3.00 for there to be perfect match between the intended curriculum and the curriculum in use. The implication of the results on objectives is that there is no objectivity on part of teachers and students in interpreting and internalizing the objectives of teaching French in secondary schools in Kenya. In other words, teachers and students have not come to grips with the conceptions or beliefs underlying the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language for the Kenyan society. What is there instead is subjectivity; that is, a picture of limited development of technical culture, especially on part of teachers who may have misinterpreted the objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya.

Should educationists be contented with these findings? The answer obviously is not in the affirmative; once objectives are misinterpreted then the rest of the curriculum (content, methods, and evaluation) is also likely to be misinterpreted leading to change only of surface features. Fullan (2001) sums it better that diffuse goals lead to lack of clarity, which is a recipe for a major problem at implementation as teachers and others find that change is simply not very clear as to what it means in practice.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally, it has emerged in this study that teachers' perception of French curriculum objectives in use is similar to that of students despite their professional training. Consequently, future studies on curriculum, especially those relating to perceptions, could make use of only one of the samples to save on cost in terms of time and money. It also means that the problems bedeviling teaching and learning of French in secondary schools are to a greater extent teacher related and solutions should focus more on this group.

There is no perfect match but rather a tendency towards a perfect match between intended curriculum objectives and curriculum objectives in use. However, out of the four objectives of teaching and learning French in secondary schools in Kenya, the study found a perfect match on one objective; that is, to equip learners with basic communicative skills for effective communication where French is required. This objective received the highest rating in terms of agreement from respondents, with 100% agreement from teachers. The study, therefore, recommends that this objective should be stated in the relevant official documents, like the secondary school syllabus, as being the main reason for teaching and learning French in Kenyan secondary schools. But the other three objectives of teaching and learning French in Kenyan secondary schools should also be emphasized since they are equally important. Finally, French foreign language should be officially taught right from primary schools as this would ensure that students will have acquired desired linguistic competence on entry in secondary school to enable them learn French literature.

REFERENCES

- Alliance F (2006). Report on the Status of French in Kenya. Unpublished Report. Nairobi: Alliance Francaise.
- Fullan M (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Gall DM, Borg WR, Gall JP (1996). *Educational Research*. New York: Longman.
- Kazadi IM (2006). Raisons conduisant les étudiants kenyans à poursuivre l'apprentissage du français à l'Université in F. K. Iraki (ed.) *Research on French Teaching in Eastern Africa: Opportunities and Challenge*. Nairobi: United States International University (USIU).
- Kenya National Examination Council (2005). Circular on the KCSE examination to be offered with effect from 2006.
- Ooko DA (2006). Gérer le français dans le contexte de la modernité: le cas du Kenya in F. K. Iraki (ed.) *Research on French Teaching in Eastern Africa: Opportunities and Challenge*. Nairobi: United States International University (USIU).
- Republic of Kenya (2002). *Secondary Education Syllabus. Vol.1*. Kenya Institute of Education.
- Republic of Kenya (1999). *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Koech Report)*. Nairobi: Government Printer.