

USING HISTORY TEXTBOOKS TO TEACH IN RURAL KENYA

George Muriira

History Teacher, Kaaga Boys High School

Imenti North, Meru, Kenya

gmuriiram1@gmail.com



Textbooks are crucial resources in the teaching and learning of History in Kenya. In Kenya, where I have taught History at Secondary School level for the past twenty years, textbooks are generally used by teachers for their own preparation as well as for the actual teaching or instruction in the class. Throughout my teaching career, I have found textbooks to be a vital tool in preparation of my lessons. As a matter of fact, I have used different textbooks to enrich my knowledge of the teaching content and to update myself on emerging issues in the teaching of History. Books that I have used in this regard include *Oral Tradition as History* by Jan Vansina, *UNESCO General History of Africa Volume VII* edited by A. Adu Boahen and *The History of Africa Volume 2 1840-1914* by Michael Tidy with Donald Leeming. In terms of History textbooks I use the following: *Milestones in History and Government Form 1*; *Gateway Secondary Revision History and Government Paper 2*; *The Evolving World Form 2* and *History and Government Form 1*.

In the classroom textbooks are useful to supplement notes and worksheets that I usually prepare from a wide range of textbooks. Typically, learners in my class usually have two or more different titles of prescribed textbooks that are shared between learners at the ratio of one book for every two learners.

More often than not, I refer learners to a section of a textbook to enhance their understanding of a given concept. I also refer them to a study or draw a

map, diagram or picture found in a certain textbook. Besides textbooks I also use diagrams, tables and maps drawn on the chalkboard to enrich my lessons. From time to time I prepare such diagrams and maps on flipcharts and use them during the lesson. In recent times I have embraced the use of audio visual materials such as radio lessons and video clips in classroom teaching.

Textbooks are also very useful in the assessment of learners, either during each individual lesson, during continuous assessment or summative examinations at the end of every term or year. In almost every lesson, I use the activities and questions in textbooks to evaluate the achievement of my lesson objectives. In the setting of questions for continuous and terminal assessment, I always refer to prescribed History text books to ensure the assessment conforms to the recommended syllabus and is relevant to what learners have learnt.

My choice of textbooks is to a large extent determined by their availability in the school and their suitability to the topic I am teaching. I try as much as possible to use the recommended textbooks when teaching in the classroom. However, during my preparation I use a wide range of textbooks, some of which are not prescribed but which I find useful nonetheless.

The use of textbooks in the teaching of History presents numerous challenges which I have struggled to circumvent throughout my teaching career. Some of the authors who have authored history books used in Kenyan schools are neither teachers nor historians but just businessmen out to cash in on the high demand for textbooks. The result is that such books are usually full of errors, inconsistencies and inaccuracies and are of little or no use to teachers and learners alike. Some of the textbooks available in book stores are also outdated and great care must be taken when using them with learners. Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges the pivotal role played by textbooks in the teaching and learning of History cannot be overemphasized.