Effective Ways of Overcoming Challenges Facing High School Teachers in Kenya

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Introduction

AACTE (2010) argues that 21st century students and teachers must possess learning and innovation skills, which are often referred to as the *21st century skills,* in order to be well equipped for more and more complex life and work environments. These skills include critical thinking and problem solving; communication; *collaboration*; and creativity and innovation skills (4 Cs).

Criticalthinking- every student must be able to compare and evaluate facts and opinions and make decisions based on that analysis. Students should be able to take information and apply it. Teachers need to foster classroom cultures that value questions more than answers. Scholars agree that great thinking begins with effective inquiry.
Creativity- one of the biggest predictors of a person's creative capacity is their openness to experience. Allow risk-taking behavior. To promote creativity, require that students should create work that is uniquely theirs. To make this happen, we, the teachers should also change.

Communication: powerful literacy skills have always included the ability to read and share thoughts, questions, ideas, and solutions in ways others can understand. Students must be capable of clear, concise writing and the correct use of topic- specific vocabulary.

Collaboration- we must be aware that students often dislike working in groups because they do not know how to collaborate productively. The teacher should take time to develop the norms for group work and discuss with them the behaviours and actions that result in successful items. Learning to build on one's knowledge involves respect, listening and contributing.

The 4 Cs are in perfect line with Bloom's Taxonomy. They occupy all the spheres of the pyramid and more importantly the first four spheres. Note that they are the first four that are part of HOT skills.

According to the new Education Curriculum in Kenya developed by KICD, teachers and educators are called upon to recognize the seven key competences learners are supposed to be grounded in at both primary and secondary level of education. These are: 1. Communication and Collaboration, 2. Critical thinking and Problem solving, 3. Imagination and Creativity, 4. Citizenship, 5. Digital Literacy, 6. Learning to learn, and 7. Self –Efficacy

The aim of teacher education is to produce quality teachers who can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the learners. The teacher is an essential facilitator in the implementation process of the curriculum. In education, therefore; the importance of the teacher takes second place only after that of the learners so that the quality of the teacher is of great concern to the education system. Quality in education is considered as the most important element. Improving quality according to UNESCO (2000) is as equally important as ensuring the education for all (EFA) goals are attained. The overall education policy of most governments is to achieve education for all. The priority is to ensure equitable access and improvement in quality and efficiency at all levels of education with the ultimate goal of being to develop an all quality education that is accessible and relevant to all its citizens. This is guided by the understanding that good education can significantly lead to economic growth, improved employment prospects and income generating opportunities for sustainable development (Republic of Kenya, 2005a). Teachers Service Commission (2013) argues that in order to achieve the above objectives of teacher quality, professional development and effectiveness, it would ensure that quality staff are recruited and effectively utilized to safeguard and maintain the highest possible standards of the teaching and learning process. It is no wonder, that the teacher is usually blamed for low pupil achievement. Proponents of teacher education distinguish it from teacher training. They argue that teacher education embraces a wider perspective of continued learning within the teaching process. They also perceive teaching as a profession where there is initial and in-service training (Borg, 2006).

The Kenyan Constitution (2010) and the Basic Education Act (2013) in Kenya contend that learners should be provided with free education from pre-primary to secondary level. Consequently, this has posed a serious challenge to teachers in Kenya. **A challenge** is an instigation or antagonisation intended to convince a person to perform an action they would otherwise not.

Teachers must therefore continue teaching despite the challenges posed by the 100% transition. The reality that was witnessed by primary school teachers nine years ago is now with the secondary school teachers!

Despite the 100% learner-transition challenge in Kenya, the teachers are required by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and the government in general to be pedagogically effective.

Pedagogical Effectiveness

Pedagogicaleffectiveness is typically defined as bringing about desired student learning. If the objective of a particular lesson or unit is to have every student spell new words correctly, then the teacher who brings all the students to that happy conclusion is said to be effective. Further, the more students learn, the more effective is the teaching (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1998, Napwora, et al, 2015).

Importance of Teacher Effectiveness

Why is measuring teacher effectiveness so important?

The evidence produced is used for major decisions about our future in the teaching profession. There are two types of decisions:

1. *Formative*which uses the evidence to improve and shape the quality of our teaching
2. *Summative* uses the evidence of our overall performance or status to decide promotion, tenure or pay.

Characteristics of an Innovative and Effective Teacher in the 21st Century.

The following are some of the characteristics of an innovative and effective teacher:

To begin with, the teacher should have a wealth of knowledge in his/her subject area. Professional knowledge is a matter of pride among teachers. S/he must have mastery of subject matter. S/he must be both academically and professionally trained and educated-not born a teacher but made a teacher. According to National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), (1998, 2010), teacher education is a continuous process and its pre-service and in-service programmes are complementary to each other. It is based on the theory that teachers are made not born in contrast to the assumption that teachers are born not made.

Second, his/ her professional needs must change over time and develop during his/her teaching and s/he must personally be committed to his/her professional development (lifelong learner).The excitement of researchers delivering yet another book, recommendation of another mindboggingly good link, a Whatsapp quiz that you are ready to answer. A conference/workshop near you, a conference on the web, all the tweets from last night. If you are still excited about any of these things, we're talking about you. If you watch a movie and 2 minutes into the film you start thinking about how you could use this in class, this is about you (Gardner, 2013). Most teachers start forgetting what they learn when they start their education, and will have forgotten why they are standing in front of a class by the time they have finished. They are the life-long forgetters. That is why teachers must be involved in continuous professional development.

Third, s/he have a set of personal qualities such as sensitivity, tolerance and warmth. Being fair to students by neither showing favourism or prejudice, Being able to organize, explain and clarify, as well as arouse and sustain interest and motivation and being available to students. Ability to create friendly atmosphere in the classroom. S/he is not harsh but friendly to the students, accepts students' mistakes and errors and helps to correct them. Should have closer, more relaxed and generally more positive relationships with learners and learners do not complain about their teaching (Mohamed, 2006).

Four, s/he must have a 'Calling' for the profession

To accept the fact that you are a teacher needs your real commitment for the responsibilities and expectations of the post but not just doing this job as a job for the perks and the advantages without a real commitment. (Napwora, et al., 2015; Borg, 2006; Bezzina, 2002)

Fifth is With-it-ness

This is the ability to deal with unpredictable situations and maintain discipline. The essential skill of being able to envisage possible classroom and curriculum events. Planning with an awareness of the objectives and the conditions. This is definitely an acquired skill that you can get better with every new- year, school and group.

Another characteristic is that s/he adopts reflective and collaborative approaches in teaching. S/he iseclectic in the use of teaching methods and possessing good verbal skills. **S/heisabletohelphis/herlearnerstodevelopthe4Cs**-critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication

S/he is creative, does not spoon feed the students but gives some challenging assignments to studentsandmarksthem**.** S/he explains clearly. Is not so fast in his/her teaching and answers students' questions

Also, s/he should be a role model in the school in terms of language, conduct, professionalism, among others. S/he is able to inspire students to learn their subject and perform better in it.

Moreover, s/he must possess technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK). This is a framework to understand and describe the kinds of knowledge needed by a teacher for effective integration of technology for teaching specific content of subject matter and requires understanding and negotiating the relationships between these three components: technology, pedagogy and content (AACTE, 2008). Technology learning should be closely connected to teacher's professional knowledge, that which directs their professional activities.

There are many challenges that affect teachers in Kenyan secondary schools. These include the following:
To begin with is school culture. This includes the values, beliefs and behavior or habits that characterize the school life. This implies that school culture can either promote or impede teacher effectiveness (TE). If the school culture promotes TE, then it will have a positive effect on the pedagogical effectiveness of teachers in terms of their cognitions. That is the way they feel, think, see and believe about their role as teachers. On the other hand, if it does not support TE then it will impact negatively on their TE in terms of their cognitions. That is, school culture can affect teachers' self- reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students, content and awareness of problem-solving strategies common to classroom teaching. If it promotes collegiality, then teachers will work together and solve problems, if it does not then teachers will work individually and this will affect their effectiveness (Mosha, 2006; Napwora, 2018).

The second challenge is lack of time. Research by Napwora (2016) revealed that lack of time is an impediment for teachers to embrace practices like peer observation, peer coaching, mentoring, action research, bench-marking and so on. Many of them complained that they had a heavy work load and finished their day very exhausted and had no time to reflect on their practice after work or even enroll for in-service courses. These findings agree with those of Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) who found out that lack of time and financial resources were the two major impediments that affected the PD of teachers of English language in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)

Third, lack of enough personnel and heavy work load. Many of them complained that they a heavy work and finished their day very exhausted and had no time to reflect on their practice after work or even enroll for in-service courses. Some teachers especially from district/sub-county school lamented that there was lack of enough personnel in their departments. This made them to be engaged in classrooms throughout the day, a majority of them teaching 28 lessons per week. The teachers argue that they can only be effective if there are enough members in the department. These findings matches those of Barasa (2005) , Napwora et al. (2015) and Herzallah (2011) who found out that heavy teaching load, lack of motivation and inadequate professional development programmes were some of the factors that impeded effective teaching in Kenya.

Fourth, lack of finances. Majority of the teachers have cited lack of finances as an impediment to the TE. They argue that they have many family obligations that do not allow them to enroll for further studies or short PD courses. Schools also lack enough finances to sponsor their teachers to attend in-service courses. Bezzina (2002) states that in-service activities for teachers face several constraints and inadequate funds to support them are the first one. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) also identify lack of financial resources as an impediment to their CPD., I would like to make a case that the Teachers Service Commission in Kenya should take full responsibility of financing and developing standards for administering teachers' career progression and continuous PD programmes. The TSC should establish collaborative linkages with relevant agencies such as the University Education Commission to ensure quality teaching and safeguard standards of education through undertaking research on teachers, training needs and developing appropriate capacity building programmes. The Government of Kenya in collaboration with Japanese Agency-JICA collaborates to strengthen the teaching of Mathematics and Sciences in Kenya. On the other hand, other subjects in the curriculum like languages and humanities lack such support. It is suggested that the government should seek collaborations with relevant agencies to help all teachers to grow professionally.

Also, lack of motivation by the employer makes the teachers not to embrace the PD practices that would enhance their effectiveness. Studies indicate that teachers suffer more than other professional groups from an occupational lack of motivation (Cheserek, 2013). Mosha (2006) argues that poor teachers' motivation is the most serious factor of all factors that obstruct teachers' professional development and effectiveness. Abott (2008) states that in spite of the fundamental importance attributed to teacher motivation, research reveals that teachers exhibit lower levels of motivation and high levels of stress. A case in Kenya is where the TSC finds it difficult to promote and improve salaries of teachers who have attained first degrees and teach in primary schools or those with Masters and PhDs and teach in secondary schools or tertiary colleges.

Furthermore, institutional leadership affects teacher effectiveness. Napwora (2018) found out that school leadership in Kenya affected the PD of teachers in secondary schools. A majority of teachers stated that most school principals were not supportive of their PD. This matches with Johnson (2011) who sees the negative role of school administration towards teachers' PD does not help teachers develop.

Moreover, the100%learner-transitionfrom primary to secondary schools has caused overcrowding in classrooms and overwhelmed the teachers. The teacher- learner ratio of 1:40 is no longer tenable. Teachers can no longer claim to be effective. Darling-Hammond, et al. (2017) observe that conditions for teaching and learning within schools and at the system level can inhibit the effectiveness of teachers' professional development.

Another challenge is the raise in indiscipline among learners. This is as a result of Children's Act that abolished corporal punishment. Guiding and Counselling services are not enough in schools because teachers who are to offer these services are overburdened.

Lack of enough infrastructure in schools is another challenge. The government abolished many of the school levies like PTA fund that helped in constructing classrooms, dormitories, laboratories, libraries, etc.

The practicability of the Teacher Professional Appraisal Development (TPAD) tool is to be questioned. Is it serving the intended objective? Is it making teachers more effective? If so, the better. But teachers and heads of institutions have lamented about it: turning them into clerks! I suggest that teachers should fully embrace this professional development tool so as to enhance their job effectiveness.

The demand by parents, society, TSC and government for students to pass their exams despite the poor entry behavior of learners that is common knowledge to all and sundry

The slow death of reading culture among the learners. Most students would rather use mobile phones to chat with friends than use them to do academic research. Students. This has made teachers not to be facilitators of learning among students but spoon feeders. Teaching, making notes and asking and answering same questions for learners!

Work burn out. There is a lot of pressure in work and home environments. They find it difficult to balance between their roles as teachers, parents (especially mothers) and wives. This causes stress among teachers and consequently makes them ineffective

Lack of competence in technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK). This is a framework to understand and describe the kinds of knowledge needed by a teacher for effective integration of technology for teaching specific content of subject matter and requires understanding and negotiating the relationships between these three components: technology, pedagogy and content (AACTE, 2010).

The Way Forward

In the light of the above discussion, I suggest the following:

One, teachers and schools should develop a culture of collaboration within and without so that they can exchange valuable experience with their colleagues thus creating teaching and learning communities among themselves, developing positive attitudes towards the profession and consequently growing professionally. This has the implication that teachers should be encouraged through their classroom practice, further training/education, workshops/conferences, being members of professional bodies like Association of English Educators and Researchers (ASELER) in Kenya, TESOL, among others in order to change their cognitions about teaching from the traditional individualistic or 'egg box' practices to collaborative practices where colleagues reflect together on their teaching experiences, share their classroom problems and seek solutions, share resources in order to teach effectively, develop professionally and achieve school -wide goals. Steel (2017) argues that collaborative supervision brought school- based and university- based teachers close together to value the sharing of understanding and complementing each other and this supported student teacher learning.

Teachers and HoD should be trained/educated on the use of different Collaborative Supervision practices (DCS) like peer coaching, peer observation, team teaching, action research, bench-marking/long distance collaboration, mentoring, discussions, co-operating to mark schemes of work, set and mark exams, among others in order for them to be embraced and promoted in their institutions. These practices include:

Peer observation and peer review

Peer observation involves seeing how one's colleague teach and deploy what they have learnt, while peer review asks for a critical response to this process. Observation involves visiting a class to observe different aspects of teaching. In order for observation to be seen as a positive experience and not a negative one, it should be a way of gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching (Richards, 1994). In many language programmes, teachers are often

Workshops **and** *seminars* are some of the most common and useful forms of professional development activities for teachers. They are intensive, short- term learning opportunities that are designed to allow teachers to attain specific knowledge and skills which they can later apply in their classroom (Richards & Farrell, 2005).Workshops can be *beneficial* in a number of ways: they can provide input from experts; provide teachers with the opportunity for hands- on experience with the topic; raise motivation; development of collegiality; offer practical classroom applications; support innovations; and are flexible in organization.

Mentoring

In teacher education a 'mentor' is a term used to describe a teacher who acts as a tutor and a guide to a student teacher or newly qualified teacher. In English, the word 'mentor' connotes a guide, a wise but understanding helper ready to share his/her experience for the benefit of others. Ong'ondo & Borg (2011) state that the main roles of co-operating teachers are to induct the student teachers into placement schools, to show them where to start and stop in terms of teaching and to assist them in obtaining the required teaching resources.

Team teaching

Is an arrangement whereby a group of teachers share a major responsibility for the instruction of a group of pupils and co-ordinate among themselves the allocation of teaching duties with this group. Supporters of the system claim that it: makes use of the raised skills of different teachers; makes possible more attention for individual pupils; avoids the waste of time caused in normal teaching by teachers having to say the same thing and explain the same problems to different classes following the same course; allows pupils greater responsibility in managing their own studies; gives teachers a sense of assurance through facing teaching problems as part of a team; allows a more flexible use of teaching space and presents a challenge to orthodox teaching.

Peer coaching

Is a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices, expand, refine and build new skills, share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the work place (Robb, 1991 in Richards &Farrell, 2005).

Action research

Kelly et al (2004) state that action research involves language teachers identifying a particular issue or problem encountered while teaching, gathering information about it, developing a plan of action, evaluating its results and sharing them with colleagues. Richards (1994) states that action research is teacher –initiated classroom investigation which seeks to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning, and to bring about change in classroom practices. It encourages reflexivity and an inquiring approach and gives teachers a substantial theoretical frame work for resolving difficult issues.

Incorporating research into teaching

There are forms of research relevant to teacher education, some more general, some more specific to teaching a particular subject. Teachers need to be aware of a huge range of research available to them. Teacher educators and mentors have a key role to play in encouraging teachers to think positively about the values and relevance of research for teaching and learning.

Collaborative journal writing

A journal is a teacher's or a student teacher's written response to teaching events (Richards, 1994). Keeping a journal can be beneficial when one or more colleagues share their journals and meet regularly to discuss them (Brock, Yu & Wong, 1992). Keeping a journal serves two purposes: events and ideas are recorded for the purpose of later reflection and the process of writing itself helps trigger insights about teaching. Writing in this sense serves as a discovery process.

Co-operating to set and mark examinations

Teachers of English are able to work together in setting and marking the exams, recording their learners' results and from these they must recognise areas of strengths and areas where more work is needed. This is useful, according to Kelly et al (2004), as it acts like an audit for the standard of teaching in general and highlights individual learner's needs. They can also collaborate to construct the examination/test table of specification in order to identify the content/topics to be tested and make the test valid.

Two, in terms of lack of finances, the researcher urges the government to support teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through providing required finances in order for the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission to organize for in-service programmes that will support their professional growth and improve their job effectiveness.

Three, schools and departments should be encouraged to come up with *incomegeneratingprojects* that can help them raise funds and/or seek partnership with other institutions or business enterprises within the country or abroad that may sponsor teachers to attend international or national conferences; attend in-service workshops/seminars or higher studies; or buy recent literature in teaching. I believe that this partnership will help teachers to grow professionally.

Four, school principals and Boards of Management (BoM) should fully support teacher professional development programmes in their institutions in terms of finances and leadership and should attend refresher courses on institutional leadership and collaborative supervision.

Five, the government through the Teachers Service Commission and the Ministry of Education should employ more teachers in order to make effective teaching and learning a reality in learning institutions, for it is impossible for institutions with few teachers to be effective

Six, the schools to strengthen and promote Guiding and Counselling and Pastoral programmes and the government to employ and post Counsellors and Mentors to all schools in order to help on students' discipline and morality

Seven, every teacher is encouraged to embrace life-long learning in order to be kept abreast with developments in teaching due to globalization and technological advancements.

Furthermore, teachers in secondary schools should accept the reality of receiving students with low entry grades and overcrowding in classrooms and find ways of overcoming the challenges e.g. through students' self- correction, group work and presentations, discussions, student peer teaching, among others. Wellsarguesthat*: "we should strive to welcome change and challenges, because they are what help us grow. Without them we grow weak like Eloi in comfort and security. We need to constantly be challenging ourselves in order to strengthen our character and increase our intelligence."*

One bird told the other: "since men have learnt to shoot without missing, I have learnt to fly without perching."

In addition, teachers must plan in advance especially during the holidays. Planning during the term causes unnecessary wastage of teaching time. Therefore, professional documents schemes of work, lesson notes, lesson plans should be prepared in advance. We should avoid procrastination in order to reduce burn out and enhance job effectiveness. Albert Eisteen argues that: "It is sheer madness to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results."

Lastly, the schools and the government should roll out similar programmes like those of Strengthening of Mathematics and Sciences (SMASSE) to teachers of other subjects in general so that these teachers are ICT compliant.

Conclusion

The saying: "if you want to move fast, go alone but if you want to go far, go with others" is very insightful to us. When we collaborate in our teaching profession, we will be able to overcome more challenges and achieve a lot together than when we work individually. When we work individually, we make our teaching "an egg-box" profession which is unable to overcome the challenges.

Teachers develop professionally and become more effective when they work together in communities teaching each other, learning together and focusing on the success and challenges of educating their students. People in a group are united by more than membership; they are involved in practices that bind them together. They become a community with practices that reinforce what they share. This concept, which reflects the wisdom of many writers, has recently been crystallised in a conceptual framework called a 'community of practice.'

This idea of belonging to a community changes the way we think about teacher learning. Its importance lies in the fact that it changes the relationship of teachers to their peers, breaking the isolation that most teachers have found so devastating. In supportive communities, teachers reinforce each other in a climate that encourages observing students, sharing teaching strategies, trying out new ways of teaching, getting feedback and redesigning curriculum and methods of instruction. Teachers' professional communities serve as important mediators for teachers' interpretations and analyses of student learning. In communities where reform, restructuring and school transformation are the vision, teachers learn to make public their challenges as well as their successes. Teachers receive support, learn from one another, and gain confidence for changing their practice to better meet their students' needs.

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