

Am I a robot? English language teachers on teachers' guides

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Abstract

Teachers' Guides were part of a wider textbook study that I carried out in Kenya (2008-2012), where both Students' and Teachers' Books undergo vetting for Ministerial approval. While this endorsement is important, there is, equally, a need to explore the responses to materials from the perspective of the end-users of the product. The aim of this article is to examine teachers' views on Teachers' Guides for secondary school English in Kenya, where English is a Second Language. Face-to-face teacher interviews (2010) provided more nuanced data than a preliminary survey questionnaire (2009), indicating rare or selective use of guidebooks for various reasons. Teacher insights into guidebooks are potentially useful to other teachers, teacher trainers, materials developers and regulatory bodies.

Keywords: materials development; textbooks; teacher development; teachers' guides; textbook policy.

Resumen

Dentro de un estudio sobre el uso de libros de texto en Kenia (2008-2012), las guías para docentes fueron una parte del mismo. En Kenia, los libros para los estudiantes y las guías para docentes deben ser aprobados ministerialmente. Mientras que este apoyo es importante, también es importante explorar la evaluación de aquellos que emplean dichos materiales. El objetivo de este artículo es examinar las miradas de los docentes de inglés sobre las guías docentes para la escuela secundaria en Kenia, donde el inglés es una segunda lengua. Las entrevistas realizadas arrojan el uso selectivo o bajo de las guías para docentes debido a varias razones aquí discutidas. Las opiniones de los docentes son relevantes para otros colegas, formadores, autores de materiales, y entes reguladores.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de materiales didácticos; libros de texto; guías para docentes; regulación de libros de texto.

...you are supposed to be acting like a robot, and I think that is not teaching... maybe it should be written in such a way that it gives the teacher the freedom to set the agenda himself, based on whatever he is going to teach.
(T11 on Teachers' Guides)

THESE WERE MEMORABLE words spoken by a secondary school teacher of English in Kenya in 2010. I elicited teachers views on Teachers' Guides as part of a wider textbook study that responded to the call for textbook research to go beyond an examination of the materials alone (Johnsen, 1993; Harwood, 2010). Teachers' Guides were part of this wider exploration that encompassed views on textbooks from curriculum developers, publishers, authors, teachers and learners. My findings prompted me to conceptualise this paper primarily because my perceptions about the guidebooks, which were initially shaped by data from a preliminary questionnaire completed by teachers (2009), underwent a shift and gained in depth and complexity in the course of my main study (2010). The interview data generated from teachers in 2010 showed that the Teacher's Guide proved to be a far less clear-cut subject than the written responses from questionnaires had led me to expect.

In this paper, I begin by providing a background to the status of English in Kenya and an overview of the educational publishing context within which the Teachers' Guides under study were developed. Next, I examine the relevant literature on Teacher's Guides and elaborate upon the methodology adopted in the study. I then discuss the findings pertaining to Teachers' Guides, and, finally, I conclude with insights gained on the subject arising from teacher-responses in this study.

Background

In this section, I provide a brief background of English in education in Kenya, and an overview of the educational publishing context within which the Teachers' Guides in question were produced and are being used.

Status of English in Kenya

Kenya, a former British colony (1920-1963), has now existed as an independent country for 50 years. In this culturally and linguistically diverse nation of sixty-nine languages (Lewis, 2009), there are two official languages: Kiswahili, a lingua franca within the Eastern African region, and English. Both are compulsory subjects within the school system; however, English is the medium of instruction in schools from Class 4 (around age 9), following mother-tongue instruction in the formative years. As Muthwii (2002) reports, the language policy has been interpreted by stakeholders in view of their own understanding of it, the resources at their disposal, and their beliefs about what is best

for their learners within the wider socio-educational context.

It is also worth noting that in a linguistically heterogeneous nation, such a policy poses the challenge of skewing resources towards development of English language materials, and inequity. Children in urban areas and those of higher socio-economic status or of ethnically mixed backgrounds may have earlier and greater access to English in a variety of domains compared to their counterparts from relatively homogeneous areas and/or of lower socio-economic status. Nonetheless, English plays a major role in education, for official purposes and as a vehicle for general upward mobility. In the secondary school English syllabus, English is described as the pre-eminent language of international communication, whose importance cannot be overemphasized (KIE, 2002).

The Educational Publishing Context of the Study

Multinationals and local companies, which include ex-and existing parastatals¹, university presses and church presses, among other stakeholders (The World Bank, 2008) are part of the publishing scene in many Anglophone African countries. Educational publishing in Kenya was initially marked by domination of foreign (British) publishing houses in the pre-and early post-colonial years. While stakeholders rightly sought to move towards the development of local and locally relevant materials in the early post-independence years, the procedures that were put in place resulted in state dominance through parastatal publishers, which did not promote a vibrant and competitive educational publishing environment (Chakava, 1992; Muita, 1998; Pontefract & Were, 2000; Rotich, 2000, 2004).

Chakava (1992) provides a brief history of the shift towards state monopoly in the mid-1980s, a period that marked the onset of the current education system² and the entrenchment of textbook development and supply procedures that were skewed in favour of parastatal publishing houses. The curriculum development body, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), would form subject panels, develop materials and publish them through parastatal publishing houses for supply to public schools, leaving little room for local private and multinational publishers.

In the last decade or so, textbook procurement and supply in Kenya has been undergoing market liberalization, resulting in new opportunities and challenges in a globalizing world. Among several factors associated with globalization cited by Gray (2007) are the deregulatory policies of economic neoliberalism and marketization of areas of life that were previously state preserves. Indeed, Stridsman (1999) notes that the decreasing role of state and parastatal organisations in production processes and the devolution of responsibility for education from central to regional and local levels are two trends that have been causing a shift in materials design programmes from state to

commercial and from single to multiple textbook systems in Africa.

In Kenya, these trends resulted in the national textbook policy on publishing, procurement and supply (MOEHRD, 1998). Fuelled by global trends, donor conditions, and private sector pressure, the 1998 textbook policy signalled the beginning of what was intended to be a more level playing field for all stakeholders. It outlined the background of textbook supply, spelt out the vision of textbook development, procurement and supply, provided policy guidelines, advised on textbook management, and promoted liberalization and commercialization of the book trade (MOEHRD, 1998; Muita, 1998; Pontrefract & Were, 2000; Rotich, 2000).

Publishers are now required to meet various content and technical requirements during submission of manuscripts for vetting to the curriculum development body (KIE), which organises evaluation of materials. The textbooks that score highest are recommended to the Ministerial Textbook Vetting Committee (MTVC) for award of approved status. A great deal of publishing occurred in the four-year period following the 2002 curriculum review. It was during this period that the materials under study were developed. Under the textbook policy, a maximum of six textbooks per subject could be approved for schools, and public schools were expected to make their choices from the approved list.

Positively, this policy intended to promote price rationalization in a more liberal market, promote development of higher quality materials and enhance a reading culture. Negatively, encoded within it were the dangers associated with economic neoliberalism. For instance, Simam and Rotich (2009) observe that the high cost of submission of manuscripts for vetting and approval can be detrimental to local publishers who may not have as strong a financial base as multinational publishers. This, then, describes the existing educational publishing context, the onset of which resulted in the materials discussed in this paper.

The Place of Teachers' Guides within the Textbook Policy

The MoE, through their annual list of approved books for schools, provides easily accessible guidelines to schools on selecting textbooks for their learners. Rotich and Musakali (2005) critically examine the process of evaluation and selection of textbooks for approval and make some recommendations for improvement. They explain that manuscript submissions for vetting must be accompanied by Teachers' Guides, which are evaluated against the following criteria:

- Diagnostic assessment exercises
- Provision of additional content for the teacher
- Activities to support multi-ability learning

- Suggestions to use low-cost or no-cost materials
- Clarity of writing and presentation of text
- Clear cross-referencing to the textbook
- Clear methodology and support for pupils with special learning difficulties.

One of my research participants from the curriculum development body (KIE) clarified that if the Teachers' Guide does not pass at the evaluation stage, then the entire submission fails. In other words, there cannot exist a scenario where the Students' Book has been approved without the accompanying Teachers' Guide having successfully met the evaluation criteria. These regulations ostensibly propel publishers to strive to develop quality Students' Books and Teachers' Guides.

Literature Review

Citing previous research by Coleman (1985) and Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991), Hemsley (1997) acknowledges that literature with a specific focus on Teacher's Guides is scanty. In exploring existing perspectives, I established three main themes: the functions of Teachers' Guides, availability and use of guides, and evaluation criteria.

Functions of Teachers' Guides

Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991) explore five functions of Teachers' Guides:

- To state the purpose of the teaching material and their underlying methodological rationale
- To encourage the development of teaching skills
- To provide guidelines on how to use the materials, and on the course as a whole
- To demonstrate practical use of the materials
- To offer guidelines on the linguistic and cultural information required for their effective use.

The important role of Teachers' Guides in professional development is generally not disputed, and several researchers have commented on what this entails (Coleman, 1985; Loewenberg Ball & Cohen, 1996; McGrath, 2002; Nunan & Lamb 1996). Teachers' Guides not only potentially strengthen content knowledge, provide extra content, and raise awareness on new approaches to teaching, but also promote reflective practice, thereby providing an impetus for positive change. Coleman (1985), however, points out that there is a dearth of information on the attitudes of non-native speaker teachers

of English towards textbooks and Teachers' Guides. More recently, other researchers from English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts have contributed to this area. This paper, therefore, adds to the growing body of knowledge on Teachers' Guides by examining the views of secondary school teachers of English in an ESL context.

Availability and Use of Teachers' Guides

Availability of teachers' guides. Moulton (1994) observes that textbook research in developing countries has stemmed mainly from an interest among World Bank staff to "determine the relative impact of textbooks on student achievement." She notes that in the USA, in comparison, textbook research stems from the pedagogue's interest in knowing "what influences teachers' use of textbooks and how use varies among teachers." Indeed, in my own textbook research experience, crucial information on textbooks in Africa was mainly sourced from World Bank reports, news reports and a few published articles and book chapters by researchers and publishers. In developing countries such as Kenya, where government and donors fund public education, it is not surprising that there has been a focus on the question of availability/lack of textbooks, since this is an important factor in considering which aspects of education will receive prioritization and, subsequently, funding. In developed countries, the discourse tends to stem from a quest to understand better the role and use of textbooks.

In Kenya, the targeted textbook: student ratio was 1:2 in 2010, at the time of my study (MoE, 2010), with the eventual aim of achieving a 1:1 ratio. Encoded in this, perhaps is the assumption that the availability of the Students' Book presupposes availability of the Teachers' Guide; however, commercial publishers may not view Teachers' Guides as an important area of investment. In their study of *English Book 1*, a high school textbook used in Iranian high schools, Soori et al. (2011) found that among the comments by teachers was that the Teacher's Guide was available only initially, when the book was first published and prescribed. This is an indicator that although Teacher's Guides may be a requirement for Ministerial approval, commercial publishers may publish them only once, upon initial approval, and in low quantities. Students' Books, on the other hand, bring in high returns and are generally readily available throughout the life of the textbook.

Use of teachers' guides. As Moulton (1994) notes, even in educational contexts where taught content is tightly controlled, teachers still use materials differently, and the task of the researcher is to find out why this is so. This paper therefore sheds light on teachers' views of their guidebooks in an ESL context where textbooks, in general, have received little attention from teachers and researchers.

Hemsley (1997) indicates that the extent to which Teachers' Guides fulfil their

general functions is closely linked to the teachers who use them. Teachers undergo different training experiences. In some instances, trainee teachers are often discouraged from following textbooks and relying on Teachers' Guides (Loewenberg Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988). Teachers also develop and hold different beliefs about language teaching and learning, and have different levels of skill and confidence.

Researchers acknowledge that guidebooks are often dismissed or rarely consulted (Nunan & Lamb, 1996), or their suggestions are ignored (Nair, 1997). It is therefore significant that Hemsley (1997) suggests one more function of Teachers' Guides: their role in developing the teacher towards self-reliance and away from overt guidance. Some guides provide systematic guidance (Cunningsworth, 1984), while others basically provide answers (Sheldon, 1988); therefore, teachers are likely to use and respond to them differently at different stages in their careers. This helps explain some of the negativity associated with the use of guidebooks, namely that since Teachers' Guides range in the degree of explicit guidance offered, they are unlikely to satisfy all the needs and wants of teachers who are at different stages in their professional development.

Positively, Good (2001) indicates that the majority of teachers use Teachers' Guides and consider them a valuable resource. Similarly, in his exploration of cultural representations in Iranian ELT textbooks, Aliakbari (2004) notes that the systematic instructions found in Teachers' Books can be very useful for inexperienced or untrained teachers. Equally, drawing an example of a trained native speaker teacher and an untrained non-native speaker teacher, Hemsley (1997) suggests that the guide may serve to deskill the former, while building the skills and confidence of the latter. The native/non-native speaker paradigm has, of course, been questioned in recent times, with Graddol (2006) suggesting a reformulation of Kachru's (1985) three circles of English into a representation of the community of English speakers based on levels of proficiency.

Teacher feedback on their use and views of guidebooks will, clearly, be partially defined not only by the content of a particular guidebook, but also by the individual's beliefs, attitudes, training and teaching experience gained over time. These factors work together with contextual and other mediating factors in helping to explain why Teachers' Guides may be viewed ambivalently, or yield a wide range of perspectives from users even when they are part of a set of materials that have been vetted and approved by a regulatory body. This leads to the third major strand of research on Teachers' Guides, which is evaluation.

Evaluation of Teachers' Guides

Some studies have provided descriptions on how to evaluate Teachers' Guides. Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991) and Hemsley (1997) both advocate global/general

and local/detailed evaluation. At the global level, it is suggested that evaluation should include the views in the guide on the nature of language and the language learning process, as well as the extent to which the guide develops teachers' awareness and understanding of language and teaching theory and practice. At the local level, areas for evaluation include objectives, content, cultural loading, correction and testing, procedural guidelines, language and lesson evaluation, and advice on the unpredictable.

Gearing (1999) indicates that the main reasons for evaluating Teachers' Guides are to help in textbook selection, raise awareness of the content of the guidebook and its effectiveness, and to generate ideas for improvement. She further notes that few of the available textbook checklists focus on Teachers' Guides, perhaps because they are assumed to target an experienced audience. Gearing (1999) indicates that the evaluation criteria may be obscure for those who lack experience and confidence, yet these are the teachers who are likely to benefit most from guidance. She therefore suggests a checklist that takes cognisance of the different levels of experience and language proficiency among teachers. Zabihi and Tabataba'ian (2011), in their study of three Teacher's Guides used in Iran concluded that although teachers differed in their use of guidebooks, even experienced teachers desired more useful guides.

Finally, Ansari and Babaii's (2002) have focused on the evaluation of EFL and ESL textbooks and have proposed universal features of ESL/EFL textbooks based on an examination of ten evaluation checklists and reviews respectively. Content presentation is one of the suggested universal features, and among its specifications is satisfaction of the syllabus to the teacher. This entails providing supplementary material, a guidebook, and giving advice on methodology, including theoretical orientation and keys to exercises.

This discussion of the literature shows that teachers of English work in varied educational-publishing contexts and their use and views of materials must be understood in the light of these contexts. As Graddol (2006) observes, the traditional and, perhaps stereotypical, categorizations of English users are being challenged. It is important to interrogate and articulate the views of teachers of English across the globe. As indicated, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on Teachers' Guides, and in particular it provides perspectives from secondary school teachers in an ESL context where English is, officially, the medium of instruction from Class 4. In addition, it provides a perspective from a context where textbook development has undergone a shift from state monopoly towards market liberalization in the last decade, and where Teachers' Guides must meet certain thresholds in order to achieve Ministerial approval of the entire textbook package.

Methodology

Introduction

The wider study from which I have developed this paper was aligned to the constructivist paradigm. Interpretation of data relied upon close examination of textbook content as well as an exploration of views from curriculum developers, publishers, authors, teachers and learners. As such, meanings developed interpretively as the research proceeded (Richards, 2003). Although the main study included these various stakeholders, this paper focuses, in particular, on the responses of teachers to Teachers' Guides drawn from their responses to a preliminary survey questionnaire in 2009 and their subsequent interview responses in 2010. It is worth noting that while responses from other participants also shed light on Teachers' Guides, this paper focuses on presenting an in-depth examination of teachers' responses to Teachers' Guides derived from these two instruments.

Approach

I had a choice of seven secondary school English textbooks drawn from publishers whose English language textbooks were either fully (Form 1-4) or partially approved by the Ministry of Education between 2002 and 2006. At the onset of this period, a new national syllabus had been released. The syllabus was phased into schools on an annual basis, and new materials were concurrently developed, evaluated and approved. Among the submissions, only two publications were eventually approved at all class levels (Form 1-4). My choice of materials for study was not, however, based on full approval at all class levels; it was a function of teachers' feedback on the textbooks they actually used in the classroom. This arose from the preliminary survey questionnaire (2009) which shed light on the textbooks that participants most frequently used. The adoption of a case study approach allowed for a degree of flexibility in the research design since case studies are transparadigmatic and therefore amenable to mixed methods since they do not prescriptively guide the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007).

Data Generation Instruments

Questionnaire. In 2009, I arranged to have a preliminary survey questionnaire distributed to accessible secondary school English teachers. I overcame the challenge of an anonymous questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2010) by including an optional final page for interested participants to include their names and contact details, and to detach if they so wished. I intended to overcome the inherent weaknesses of questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2010; Munn & Drever, 1999) in my main study, where I adopted a qualitative approach. The questionnaire sought information on a range of issues including access to

textbooks, choices and selection procedures, strengths and weaknesses of the materials, and interpretation of syllabus concepts. It specifically addressed the Teachers' Guides in Q. 9, which sought information of the textbook that teachers had identified as the one they most frequently used with learners across all levels taught.

9. a) If you use the Teacher's Guides for the series you have rated above, have you found them helpful? Tick (✓) as appropriate.

Yes No

b) If yes, describe in what ways they have been helpful.

c) If not, explain why not.

Semi-structured interview guide. Later, in my main study, I developed a semi-structured interview guide in order to elicit further information from teachers. I adopted a format that included introductory questions as icebreakers, followed by content questions and probes, and an opportunity for teachers to express any additional views they had (Dörnyei 2007). I specifically asked teachers to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the series they most frequently used, including their views on Teachers' Guides.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

Accessible secondary school teachers were mainly those attending holiday classes towards undergraduate and Master's degrees. These teachers were drawn from one private and two public universities in Kenya between May and August 2009. The questionnaires were distributed with the aid of a research assistant and colleagues in the various institutions, given that I was away from the research site at the time. By August 2009, 400 questionnaires had been distributed to teachers, and by October 2009, I had received 103 responses. The responses from these participants formed the basis for subsequent decisions on choice of materials for study. In turn, this informed my selection of a narrower sample for teacher-interviews and subsequent qualitative analysis of data.

Forty-four (43%) survey questionnaire participants expressed willingness to participate further. I sub-classified them according to the textbook series predominantly used (Table 1). Based on their questionnaire responses, I developed a profile of the teachers including their gender, experience in years, class levels taught and academic qualifications. In planning for fieldwork, I considered these and other factors such as time (First Term, 2010), location and the resources available. However, my actual sample depended upon the willingness of schools and teachers whom I approached to engage with me. I eventually interviewed a corpus of 21 teachers.

Data Analysis Procedures

Questionnaire item No. 9, which dealt with the Teacher's Guide, had two parts - one closed and one open-ended. I obtained frequencies for the closed questions and organised the comments from the open-ended question thematically, per textbook (Appendix A). Similarly, I thematically analysed the interview responses from the teacher interviewees and categorised the findings into positive and negative perceptions of Teachers' Guides (Appendix B).

Results

The Preliminary Survey Questionnaire yielded 103 responses. The findings indicated that at the time of the survey (2009), teachers had not necessarily settled on a particular coursebook for use in all classes, but they identified the textbook series they predominantly used as follows:

Textbook series	Publisher	Used most frequently (N:103)
Head Start Secondary English	Oxford University Press-EA	37 (36%)
New Integrated English	Jomo Kenyatta Foundation	35 (34%)
Advancing in English	Longhorn Publishers	9 (9%)
Excelling in English	Kenya Literature Bureau	8 (8%)
New Horizons in English	East African Educational Publishers	1 (1%)
Unidentified	—	13 (13%)

Table 1: Frequency of use per Textbook Series

Of these participants, 101 responded to Q. 9a, which sought to know whether teachers found the guidebooks helpful or not. Ninety-one teachers (90%) indicated that they found Teacher's Guides helpful in one way or another, while only ten (10%) indicated that they did not. Teachers then went on to justify their responses based on the publication that they used most frequently in all the classes they taught. A categorization of their comments according to particular Teachers' Guides is reflected in Appendix A. This shows that teachers who found Teachers' Guides helpful did so based on provision of methodological guidance, provision of answers, identification of potentially challenging areas, provision of extra exercises and content, and the perceived potential to boost teachers' confidence. Those who did not find guidebooks helpful cited factors such as lack of detail, lack of additional content and exercises, the need for teachers to respond to whatever issues learners' raised, and to be involved in materials preparation. Although teachers expressed both positive and negative views of Teachers' Guides,

the overall perception from the questionnaire, garnered from Q. 9a, was that teachers overwhelmingly (90%) viewed guidebooks as a helpful resource.

The second phase of my work, however, revealed the complexity of teachers' views. During this stage, I generated interview data from 21 teachers who had indicated that they primarily used Head Start Secondary English (36%) or New Integrated English (34%) in the survey questionnaire (Table 1). My subsequent qualitative inquiry revealed that some teachers had changed their textbook preferences over time. Interviews yielded slightly more negative than positive comments about Teachers' Guides. Several views recurred among participants, while others, though unique to the individual, were quite strongly and passionately expressed. Because participants often added that they rarely used the guides, they tended to make generalised statements about Teachers' Guides that they had used in the course of time. The views of the interviewed sub-set are analysed and discussed in the section below.

Discussion

Appendix B summarizes the main ideas on Teachers' Guides that emerged from teacher interviews. It reflects the general and specific, positive and negative views of teachers. The qualities assigned to guidebooks cannot be viewed as uncontroversially positive or negative; indeed, different teachers often expressed diametrically opposed views on a single issue arising from their experiences, which had evolved over time, their beliefs and practices. In this section, I have isolated the main themes and presented the positive and negative perspectives of Teachers' Guides as expressed by the 21 teacher-participants.

Availability of Answers

The provision of answers in Teachers' Guides was a recurring theme, often linked to other themes in teachers' responses. Firstly, some teachers expressed the view that the traditional role of the guidebook was to provide answers, and therefore they expected little else in terms of guidance from this resource. In addition, their experiences with materials had led them to believe that provision of answers, was, in fact, the main function of guidebooks. Secondly, and closely related to this, were comments by teachers who commented appreciatively on the availability of answers in guidebooks; however, their views were greatly diluted by those who took issue with the accuracy of the answers provided. Finally, teachers viewed the Teacher's Guide as a resource to use when faced with controversial points to which they had no clear answer. Under such circumstances, the availability of answers sometimes caused the guidebook to be viewed as an arbiter; however, teachers pointed out that even then, guides were not always helpful in solving points of dispute. I discuss each of the angles related to availability of answers in

Teachers' Guides next.

Teacher's guide as 'answer book.' Teachers who viewed guidebooks quite simply as answer book expressed what is, perhaps, a deeply- ingrained view of the Teachers' Guide. This view was often tied to their habitual manner of using the resource. T3 tended to call the guide an 'answer booklet' (and indicated that his use of this term was a result of influence from mathematics teachers in his school), but acknowledged that the materials contained more than answers in the form of guidance to teachers. The views from the following three teachers are indicators of rather low expectations of Teachers' Guides:

What is the traditional concept of the teacher's guide?... the Teacher's Guide is for answers only. They hardly use it to refer to anything else... probably the listening comprehension. (T13)

...for example, Head Start - there is an assumption that a teacher has the schemes of work, so the scheme of work is supposed to take care of the teaching process. Then maybe all that you get from the guide is maybe just answers to the exercises given... (T1)

...although it is a TG, it doesn't guide too much. It only gives answers. (T5)

T5 went on to explain that since, in his view, the guidebooks focused on answers, it followed that they did not actually guide much. He indicated that what was more important than answers was provision of information on how the teacher should proceed.

The guide should tell you how you are supposed to progress...that is why it is there...how much you want to give the students; how much you want to give yourself...not necessarily give answers or have a lesson plan. (T5)

Nonetheless, three teachers appreciated the methodological guidance found in Teachers' Guides. T4, a *Head Start* user, indicated that he found the pre-reading content quite relevant since he usually engaged his learners in pre-reading activities during reading lessons. T9 and T16 both noted that although they rarely used guidebooks for answers, they found the methodological suggestions helpful. Other teachers, who delinked their responses on the issue of guidance from provision of answers, expressed generally positive views of the Teacher's Guide as an aid to planning.

Quality of answers. Three teachers cited the availability of ready answers as a positive aspect of Teachers' Guides. Although these teachers appreciated inclusion of answers,

the quality of the answers, was, conversely, one of the most frequently cited reasons for dissatisfaction with Teachers' Guides. Teachers who expressed dissatisfaction indicated that sometimes the answers or ideas were too general, inaccurate, or had typographical errors. Several teachers expressed particularly strong reservations about the responses to grammar questions.

... in the answer booklet sometimes they give wrong answers... this is a wrong preposition... if you are a teacher and you are following the answer booklet, then definitely you'll mark the sentence wrongly. (T3)

Head Start, the main problem is that the Teacher's Guide has many errors, so you cannot totally rely on it...certain ideas are not correct. Mainly answers. You find like if it is grammar, you find the answers given are not correct. Not all, but in certain areas. So that is the major weakness with the Teacher's Guide. (T5)

I don't use them much...there is a time I used Guide to *Head Start* Book 2 and there are some instances where I could really differ with what was there...I believe I am not badly off in grammar...not every teacher will be like me. There are people who will need to check all the time. (T7)

Guidebook Answers as Arbiter. Teachers indicated that they turned to guide books when faced with disputed and controversial points. In such cases, guidebooks were viewed as helping to boost the teacher's level of certainty about a response. Teachers who indicated that they use guides under such circumstances were also keen to point out that they otherwise rarely used this resource.

I rarely use it. I mainly use it when in doubt. (T20)

So when you find where you are torn between two answers – which one is correct – so that's when I go to the guidebook. But it is not my handbook. (T7)

... I find that the exercises that I give, the answers to me are automatic. I understand the exercises. Mostly I don't refer to the guide for answers but mostly when I come to the guide is when we find a controversial issue. (T18)

T18 went on to cite a grammar topic on gerunds and verbs, which had been controversial, and had recently required her to refer to the guide.

You know sometimes, you feel like you are the one who could be wrong – so it is better for us to get it from the guide...you have to get the difference between a gerund and a verb. I think it was a controversial sentence whereby the word conserve is a gerund and conserve is a verb, so you are convincing the students it is a gerund, and they are supporting themselves fully it is a verb, so you as the teacher, you have to go and get the right answer from the guide. (T18)

Teachers, however, also indicated that the guides were often unhelpful in providing straightforward solutions to controversies, among them T3, who, in seeking to differentiate ‘answer booklets’ from guidebooks, concluded that the lack of straightforward answers was a characteristic to be expected of guidebooks. Others, like T17, had come to the realisation that it was important to explore learner perspectives, notwithstanding the responses provided in the Guide.

...once you give a composition, will you just go to the answer booklet and mark? And even the sentences may vary...for us [English teachers], they are actually guidebooks, but for them [mathematics teachers], they are answer booklets. (T3)

You find yourself cornered if you tend to follow the TG. The students will definitely doubt your answer...and if you look at it critically, the student is correct...the TG sometimes...it is debatable...They normally give an answer. If there is another answer that could be grammatically correct, they don’t write about that... (T17)

Aid to Planning

Teachers’ Guides were regarded as an aid to planning. Four teachers expressed this view, and it was predominant among users of *New Integrated English*, but most profusely expressed by T12, who had used other textbooks and finally settled on *Excelling in English*.

The Teacher’s Guide is used in most cases for preparation of schemes. (T20)

It has samples of lesson plans; how to organise your work during the lesson. (T18)

...[the guide gives] insight of what to expect in class, and how to introduce a topic...it gives me the time limit—how many lessons would you expect for this lesson—so that I’m able to plan ahead. (T19)

...they have their objectives—specific. They have the learning aids. It is like a lesson plan. With it, you don’t need a lesson plan. It tells you everything to do...The others are just wastage of time, really...but these ones, they give you the objectives direct; the specific objectives... “At the end of the lesson, the learner should be able to”...they give you the activities for introduction and even suggest other activities. They tell you what to do all the time. (T12)

T11, on the other hand, expressed strong opinions on the possible mechanization of teaching through use of Teachers’ Guides. He viewed use of the resource as a causative factor in leading to boring, ineffective and robotic teaching, and thus presented an overall view of the guide as a deskilling agent.

...you know, the TG is more mechanical...by that I mean you are supposed to be acting like a robot, and I think that is not teaching, because if you start teaching like that, you’ll find yourself very ineffective... I see it as making me to be a boring teacher. Yes. (T11)

Basis for Direction

Teachers indicated diverse ways in which the Teacher’s Guide served as a prompt and thereby offered direction to them. T6 viewed it as a “pedestal” from which he, the teacher could expound upon issues while taking into account the level of his particular learners. T12 also recognised the important role of the teacher, despite his great enthusiasm for the *Excelling in English Teachers’ Guides*.

...look at the learners again; see what else you can bring in...alter some bits here and there, or where they have said this activity, you can skip that and bring in a different one to cater for the needed information. (T12)

T10, who did not express strong pro-guide book sentiments acknowledged the importance of Teachers’ Guides in a context where teachers are trained in different

institutions and diverse stakeholders are involved in textbook processes, ranging from syllabus designers to textbook evaluators. He therefore regarded the guidebook as a resource with the potential to provide direction amid the potentially diverse views that often inform textbook content.

T19, on the other hand, appreciated prompting in terms of provision of insights into what to expect in class, how to introduce a topic and references to where particular content could be found in other books in the series.

While these comments show that teachers appreciated different types of direction offered in Teachers' Guides, there also existed strongly opposing views.

In their responses, some teachers underscored their sense of their own professionalism in explaining why they seldom used Teachers' Guides. They were confident about the training they had received and their knowledge of the subject. Similarly, other teachers indicated that they had discovered that they could do without the guides.

When you have trained in this area, it is not usually very hard to get what you are looking for. And therefore it is very easy, without that guide, to get these concepts. (T8)

...I'd say I really didn't use the guide as such because I really felt I was a specialist in that area. That's why I had to leave it because I felt whatever was being taught was below par. So for me I didn't consult the guides as such. I did what I felt was relevant... (T14)

In other instances, teachers noted that they felt guidebooks were unnecessary and indicated that the reason for this was tied not only to their perception of themselves as competent practitioners, but also to their desire to project competence to learners. Reliance on Teachers' Guides was viewed as a threat to the teacher's self-perception as a competent professional and it raised the spectre of learners' doubting their teachers' competence.

I'm not a fan of Teachers' Guides, so in the first place I don't even refer to it... I had this quarrel with a colleague...because this colleague was asking for the Teacher's Guide. And it's like that was a prerequisite for going to class. Then I challenged this teacher that that ka-small [emphasizes the diminutive] exercise that the boys and girls have done, you are not able to assist them to correct the same until you carry the Teacher's Guide? And then there was that quarrel again, up and down, but then at the end of it all I think we agreed with the colleague that for sure, when you become

dependent on the Teacher's Guide, supposing you are posted to a school where there is none, what are you going to do? And supposing the boys know, they realise that *Ala!* [expresses surprise] Even *Mwalimu* [teacher], when he gives us these exercises, he doesn't have ready answers for the same. He has to rush to the staffroom to look for the same. How does it impact on the learner? (T13)

The possibility of lack of availability of guides, which T13 so succinctly raises in relation to teacher-dependency on materials, was also raised by three other teachers as a reason why teachers do not use guidebooks.

Availability of Extra Information

T15 and T18 were teachers who expressed the opinion that guides were helpful because they had extra content. Teachers had in mind extra information on topics covered, detailed explanations on suggested answers, and extra exercises. Teachers who appreciated availability of such information were predominantly users of *New Integrated English*. T18, who indicated that she has a few special students, noted that the guide also had suggestions on how to handle different types of learners; however, T15, also a user of *New Integrated English*, indicated that there was insufficient focus on weaker students.

It has some extra work that is not in the text. You can find another exercise that is not in the text in the guide. You can use it to give surplus work in class. (T18)

With *New Integrated English*, they have some exercises that are in the Teacher's Guide that are not in the Students' Book...it is appropriate...but not to the low-average student. (T15)

T18 also noted that learners sometimes used guidebooks to confirm their answers while working independently. As such, she felt that Teachers' Guides ought to contain much more detailed explanations about the suggested responses.

Three of the four teachers who expressed the opposing view-that the materials lacked extra content-were predominantly users of *Head Start*.

They should give extra information – not the one in the textbook...stuff which is a bit harder, the university stuff - so that at least you understand the topic better...let them remind you of such things. (T3)

They should provide more examples and detailed examples. (T9)

They should add more reference material because sometimes you deal with a topic and you were hoping to find some more information in the Guide and you go there, you find there is nothing they have extra on that particular topic. (T17)

These responses show that apart from providing a range of possible answers, teachers expected guidebooks to carry detailed information, examples, and extra work suitable for learners with a range of abilities. The lack of extra information made guides unattractive as a potential resource for teachers.

Source of Content for Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills

The 2002 national curriculum review emphasized the inclusion of listening and speaking skills within the integrated English/literature-in-English curriculum that is characteristic of the teaching and learning of English in Kenyan secondary schools. This emphasis was subsequently reflected in national examinations from 2006. Consequently, these skills have received greater attention in teaching, learning and research since then. Four teachers, among them those who claimed not to use Teachers' Guides often, cited the listening and speaking section as an area that led them to refer to the guidebook. In particular, they sought guidance in teaching listening and speaking skills. They pinpointed 'listening comprehension' passages (the materials do not have accompanying audio content), as a specific point of reference for them in Teachers' Guides.

If I were to use the Teacher's Guide, it is to use that story...listening comprehension. Those are the ones you might find me using. (T11)

...I only look at it when it comes to some aspects like listening and speaking... (T7)

...mostly when we come now to use the guide is when we have the listening comprehension because it is always in the Guide, then you read it to the students. (T18)

The teaching and testing of listening and speaking skills, and the development of learners' communicative competence remains a growth area, and one in which teachers clearly feel the need for more guidance.

Design

Design was an area in which teachers made quite specific comments about particular materials. T12, who had used several other Teachers' Guides, commented that the *Excelling in English* guidebook was the 'most beautiful' he had ever seen. As indicated above, he appreciated the format of the guides due to their resemblance to a lesson plan, including specific objectives, activities and learning aids.

With it, you don't need a lesson plan. It tells you everything to do. (T12)

Meanwhile, in terms of cross-referencing, T17 preferred *New Integrated English* to *Head Start*.

I think in terms of the design...they could co-relate pages that are in the text with the ones that are in the guidebook for teachers. (T17)

Insights from the Study

As explained in the first section, I was motivated to explore teachers' perceptions of Teachers' Guides mainly because the findings from my qualitative research provided much more depth, and a better feel of the strength of the participants' opinions, than I had initially experienced from my initial questionnaire to teachers. Although several issues recurred, face-to-face interviews provided much richer and more nuanced data, with examples from actual teacher experiences with guidebooks and suggestions for improvement. For this reason, the adoption of mixed methods worked well in first identifying potential issues and subsequently allowing room for alternative and competing views. This approach led me away from a neat, but probably inaccurate binary view of Teachers' Guides.

The key factors that underlie teachers' perceptions of Teachers' Guides arising from the discussion are as follows:

- Past experiences with guidebooks

Based on prior experiences with guidebooks, teachers have certain over-riding expectations of what to expect in a guidebook. When these basic expectations are not adequately met, they express dissatisfaction; however when they are positively exceeded, especially in comparison to other available guidebooks, teachers express strong satisfaction.

- Professional self-concept

Teachers' own beliefs about what is expected of them in terms of subject knowledge sometimes dictates the extent to which they find guidebooks useful. Teachers who

believed they had strong competence in certain areas of language indicated that they did not need to refer to guidebooks in handling these areas.

- Desire to project competence

For some, the guidebook boosts their confidence, while for others it becomes a resource only when faced with controversial issues. Conversely, some teachers discourage their colleagues from referring to the guidebook, believing that over-reliance projects one's inadequacy and is poor preparation for the possibility of teaching in resource-scarce schools. These are twin sides of the same issue, perhaps simply approached differently. In both instances, the teacher desires to gain professionalism and competence and project the same to learners.

- Level and nature of teacher experience

Some teachers use guidebooks less frequently over time, while for others, their early experiences in schools that lacked Teachers' Guides prepared them to teach without reference to such a resource.

- Topic

Teachers, even experienced teachers and those who rarely use guidebooks, occasionally refer to Teachers' Guides. This occurs mainly in regard to topics that have led to controversial responses, or where the Teacher's Guide contains specific information, such as listening comprehension passages, which are required to address content in the Students' Book.

Conclusion

Teachers value Teachers' Guides for diverse reasons depending on their beliefs, expectations and needs. These findings are of importance to curriculum developers, teacher trainers and materials developers. Even where textbook approval by the Ministry of Education hinges upon the Teachers' Guide meeting certain laid-down criteria, it is equally important for authors and publishers to gain insights from teachers in order to truly meet the needs of the consumers of their products.

This study has drawn upon views from teachers in the ESL context described above. All participants were local teachers, who are themselves second language users of English. Teachers of English in EFL contexts, whose experiences have evolved in different educational publishing contexts are likely to offer other perspectives, which are worth exploring.

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Notes

1. Fully or partially state owned enterprises through which the government acts indirectly.
2. Eight years in primary school, four years in secondary school and four years at university (8-4-4).
3. Appendices, [click here](#)

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