

# Reconstructionist Analysis on the Relevance of Secondary School Learning Opportunities in Promoting National Cohesion Among Students in Machakos Town Sub-County, Kenya

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## Abstract

The study investigated the relevance of secondary school learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion. The study was based on the ideals and principles of a school curriculum as advocated by Brameld Theodore on reconstructionism philosophy. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of four hundred and nine (409) respondents comprising of three hundred and sixty (360) student leaders, Forty eight (48) teachers and Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO) was used for the study. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedule were used for data collection. The study established that the secondary school learning opportunities do not to adequately capture learner related peculiarities such as aptitude, interests and regional diversities. It thus recommended a review on secondary school learning opportunities to reflect the emerging issues on national cohesion and integration. The findings of the study will provide information to educational stakeholders on the vital role that the secondary school learning opportunities plays in promoting national cohesion.

**Keywords:** Reconstructionist analysis, Secondary school curriculum, Learning opportunities, National cohesion.

## 1. Introduction

Education is an organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning (UNESCO, 2003). Education facilitates development and stability of a nation through schools supporting the existing political, social and economic system in the nation. Bowers (1997) notes that schools through the prescribed curriculum develop national unity while promoting economic development. Further, education fosters transmission of values, norms and expectations related to national cohesion. National cohesion is a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens to have a sense and a feeling that they are members of the same nation engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and opportunities (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Thus, national cohesion enhances national development in a country.

In developed countries like United States of America, development of nationalism is considered as a major aim of education (Fain, Barantovich & Raquel, 2004). Woolman (2001) on a comparative study about educational reconstruction and post-colonial curriculum development of four African countries, Mali, Nigeria, Mozambique and Kenya, noted that the relationship between education and national cohesion in Africa continues to be a question of critical concern in many countries. Education should reflect the dynamic process of nation building that is continually being modified by new conditions (Woolman, 2001). In Kenya, the education sector provides skills and builds knowledge that enable individuals to contribute to the development, safety, security and national growth of the country (Ministry of Education, 2010).

The objective of secondary school education in Kenya is to prepare students to make a positive contribution to the development of society and to acquire attitudes of national patriotism, self-respect, self-reliance, cooperation, adaptability, a sense of purpose and self-discipline (Sifuna, 1990). Rafique (2009) observed that a national curriculum of a country is the backbone of educational system and should remain the government's subject for promoting national cohesion. Brameld (1966) explains that a learning opportunity refers to the experiences that supply an individual with sense of purpose and should fulfill three criteria: must be real, must require action and must teach values. For reconstructionists, learning opportunities should provide an idealistic vision of a moral community by bringing out a picture of what life should be and insist that practical programs be measured by the degree to which they create this kind of society (Brameld, 1971). Learning opportunities that exemplify the importance of religious tolerance, ethnic co-existence, gender equity, socio-economic integration and racial diversity should be emphasized.

The manner in which teaching and learning are carried out, represents the real implementation of the objectives of the curriculum as immediated by the curriculum plan. A secondary school may organize methods of teaching with a common focus for integration of learning experiences (Brameld, 1959). The methods of teaching may include: group research, reports, analysis of current issues, reading, guest speakers, small group discussion, dramatization, role playing, debating, field trips, essay writing, students reformulating ideas and providing strategies for implementation. Learning is facilitated not only in dialogue with the minds but especially with the hearts of students so that they are more deeply engaged in the learning experience (Brameld, 1966). Participation is highly encouraged as well as group discussion. This implies that suitable methods of teaching enable students

to assimilate desirable values.

Freire (1970) whose experiences living in poverty led him to champion education and literacy as the vehicle for social change noted that humans must learn to resist oppression and not become its victims, nor oppress others. To do so requires dialogue and critical consciousness which lead to development of awareness to overcome socio-economic domination, religious intolerance, ethnic differences, racial discrimination and political oppression. Rather than "teaching as banking," in which the educator deposits information into students' heads, Freire (1970) viewed teaching and learning as a process of inquiry in which the student must invent and reinvent the world.

In Kenyan secondary school curriculum, teachers are an important component of education whose services are indispensable in the realization of educational goals (MOE, 2010). The implication that reconstructionism has for teachers is that teachers must be prepared to tackle diverse classrooms (Brameld, 1965). In order to be committed to bring about constructive social change and reform, teachers should cultivate a planning attitude among students that will be carried into adult citizenship activities, join in promoting definite programs of social, educational, political, and economic reform. The education system need to produce citizens who can function within the society and in order to do that, some level of understanding and tolerance needs to be taught (Brass, 1991). Reconstructionist programs include a new movement in teacher education towards multicultural education (Dewey, 1944). Teacher programs are incorporating courses to address issues such as multi-culturism, socio-economic status and societal issues. Reconstructionists hope that by equipping teachers with the tools to discuss these topics productively they will have the opportunity to influence change in their students. This requires the school curriculum to give a room for teachers to be sensitized to the imperative need for national cohesion which was the concern of the study. According to Brameld (1977) teaching is geared towards the maximum self-realization of the student and therefore this study investigated the relevance of secondary school learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

In spite of the crucial role played by education in the achievement of long term cohesion and integration among Kenyan communities social ills like ethnic divisions, clashes and religious intolerance have been witnessed over the years in Kenya; a vice that threatens the development of the country. This raises the question on the relevance of the secondary school learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion. This study sought to investigate the relevance of secondary school learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion among students in Machakos Town Sub-County.

## **3. Literature Review**

Brameld (1966) explains that a learning opportunity refers to the experiences that supply an individual with sense of purpose and should fulfill three criteria: must be real, must require action and must teach values. For reconstructionists, learning opportunities should provide an idealistic vision of a moral community by bringing out a picture of what life should be and insist that practical programs be measured by the degree to which they create this kind of society (Brameld, 1971). Learning opportunities that exemplify the importance of religious tolerance, ethnic co-existence, gender equity, socio-economic integration and racial diversity should be emphasized. The learning opportunities discussed were: methods of teaching, the role of the teacher and the role of the learner.

## **4. Methodology**

Methodology of the study comprised of research design, location of the study, population of the study, sampling procedures and sample size, research instrumentation and data analysis.

### **4.1 Research Design**

The study used descriptive survey research design. Best and Kahn (1998) describes a descriptive survey research design as the research that deals with variables that have already occurred and hence cannot be deliberately manipulated through researcher's invention. The purpose of descriptive survey research design in a study is therefore to determine reasons or causes for the current status of the phenomenon under study. The research design enabled the researcher in this study to determine the relevance of secondary school curriculum in promoting national cohesion. The description was enriched with philosophical techniques of critical analysis and conceptual analysis to ensure that elaborate analysis and description was done.

### **4.2 Critical Analysis Approach**

Critical analysis approach is a positive evaluation that seeks to evaluate and judge things in light of clear and distinct ideas (Njoroge & Bennaars, 2004). In this study, the approach was applied in making rational judgment of the manifestation of the aspects of national cohesion in Kenyan secondary school curriculum. Olela (1988) notes

that critical thinking allows the mind to do abstract work, analyze, reflect and evaluate beliefs. The issue is that human beings ought to make crucial decisions about the present and future needs without being hoaxed to do so. In respect to this, critical thinking assisted the researcher in making decisions as well as answering important questions pertaining to the phenomena under study and respondents' responses.

#### **4.3 Conceptual Analysis Approach**

Conceptual analysis is an approach that is used to clarify concepts so that whatever is to be said about the concepts is said clearly. The idea is that some philosophical problems are created by the complexities of language because a given concept or statement may have a range of uses and meaning (Ogola, 2011). The role of conceptual analysis in this study was to clarify concepts such as reconstructionism, relevance, secondary school curriculum and national cohesion.

#### **4.4 Location of the Study**

The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Machakos Town Sub-County. Singleton (1993) observes that an ideal reason for the setting of any study should be the existence of a problem that the study hopes to generate solutions for. The Sub-County is a cosmopolitan region with a higher probability of the schools admitting students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The region is also relatively stable because it has never been affected by ethnic clashes hence reducing the chances of respondents giving subjective opinions driven by emotional issues related to ethnic animosity.

#### **4.5 Population of the Study**

The target population for this study was 24,441 subjects made up of 22,750 students, 1,690 teachers in 65 secondary schools and one Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (Machakos Town Sub-County Education office, 2013).

#### **4.6 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size**

A sample is a part of large population which is thought to be representative of the larger population (Orodho, 2009). Sampling is a process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population such that the selected group contains elements representatives of characteristics found in the entire group (Orodho, 2009). According to Kathuri and Pals (1993), a sample of 377 is considered normal for a population of 24,441 subjects. To take care of attrition, a sample size of 409 respondents was used for the study. Stratified sampling was used to ensure that all categories of schools were involved in the study that is; national, extra county, county and sub-county. Purposive sampling was adopted to select teachers, student leaders and Machakos Town sub county QASO. Taking an average of 30 student leaders, one head teacher, one curriculum master, one co-curricular master and one guidance and counseling teacher in each school, this translated to 34 respondents per school. Thus the number of schools selected for the study were 12 that is,  $(409-1/34) = 12$ . Three hundred and sixty (360) student leaders, 48 teachers and the Sub-County QASO were sampled for the study.

#### **4.7 Research Instrumentation**

The researcher developed two sets of questionnaires to collect primary data: the student leaders' questionnaire and the teachers' questionnaire. The researcher also developed interview schedule that guided interview conducted with the Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer.

Before the actual data collection, piloting of instruments was done with 34 respondents in the neighboring Mwala Sub County since it had similar characteristics with the Sub County under the study. The piloting involved 30 student leaders and four teachers. The researcher ensured that the research objective was adequately covered in the questionnaires to enhance content validity. The content validity was also ascertained by supervisors and experts in the faculty of education and resources development of Chuka University who checked the effectiveness of the questionnaire to address the study objectives and ascertain whether or not the instrument measured what it was supposed to measure. Reliability of the instruments was tested using Cronbach coefficient alpha method. The Cronbach coefficient alpha method can assess multiple response items (Kathuri & Pals, 1993). This was done to improve the quality of the research instruments thus increasing their reliability. The correlation coefficients were 0.78 and 0.81 for teachers and student leaders' questionnaire respectively. Since the coefficients obtained were greater than 0.7, the instruments were deemed reliable enough to collect the expected data to address the formulated research questions.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

Questionnaires were checked to remove incomplete items and multiple entries. Data collected was coded by assigning a number to each answer in the question. Coded data was then transferred to a computer sheet prepared using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 for the purpose of analysis. The research yielded

both qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data obtained using frequency counts and percentages. Qualitative data obtained from open ended questions was organized into themes and reported thematically in line with the objectives of the study. The critical analysis approach enabled the researcher to examine the merits and demerits of the data. Philosophers use critical questioning as a means to an end. That is, the critical function tends to encourage honesty of thought; it seeks to protect the researcher from ideas that could be based on fanaticism and hypocrisy, from intolerance and dogmatism, from slogans and ideologies. Conceptual analysis helped in examining the varied meanings of concepts and phrases as expressed by respondents. This analysis involved cutting down the ideas presented by the respondents into small parts to allow for examination of concepts and statements contained in them.

## 5. Results and Discussions

The objective of the study sought to determine the relevance of learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion. The question items on this objective were constructed based on the ideals of a school curriculum as advocated by reconstructionism philosophy. An item in the instrument sought responses from the student leaders on how often are they involved in role playing activities on issues related to national cohesion.

The information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Leaders' Responses on Role Playing Activities

Rate of involvement	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	31	8.6
Often	45	12.5
No opinion	20	5.6
Rarely	209	58.0
Never	55	15.3
Total	360	100.0

Information in Table 1 shows that majority (58.0%) of the student leaders indicated that they were rarely involved in role playing in activities that relates to issues affecting national cohesion; this is in comparison to 12.5% who indicated that they were often involved in role playing.

Teachers were asked to indicate how often they involved their students in role playing on issues affecting national cohesion and the responses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Teachers' Responses on Role Playing Activities

Rate of involvement	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	5	10.4
Often	9	18.8
No opinion	2	4.2
Rarely	21	43.8
Never	11	22.9
Total	48	100.0

Information in Table 2 shows that 43.8% of the teachers indicated that they rarely involved students in role playing on issues affecting national cohesion. However, 18.8% of the teachers indicated that they often involved students in role playing while 10.4% indicated that they do involve them very often.

Basing on the information in Table 1 and 2 there is an indication that students were rarely involved in role playing activities on issues affecting national cohesion. This implies that the learning opportunities and experiences that learners are exposed to do not allow them to acquire issues related to national cohesion. According to Counts (1971) a learning opportunity should fulfill three criteria: It must be real, must require action and must teach values. Learners must have the opportunity to recognize the real importance of what they do and act on a problem rather than merely studying it. Learners must also form a coherent system of values. For learning opportunities to promote national cohesion, the school curriculum should focus on greater participation of individuals, critical thinking, problem solving and non-authoritarian teaching methods. Basing on the ideals of reconstructionism philosophy, the findings of this study suggest that there is no relevance of learning opportunities under role playing activities in promoting national cohesion.

An item was included in the questionnaire which required both the student leaders and teachers to indicate the extent to which they are involved in dramatization on issues related to national cohesion. Table 3 summarizes the responses of student leaders.

Table 3  
Student Responses on Dramatization

Issues related to national cohesion	Very actively involved		Moderately involved		No opinion		Lowly involved		Not involved at all	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Religious tolerance	35	9.7	52	14.4	31	8.6	131	36.4	111	30.8
Ethnic co-existence	50	13.9	50	13.9	33	9.2	143	39.7	84	23.3
Gender equity	49	13.6	69	19.2	53	14.7	108	30.0	81	22.5
Socio-economic integration	47	13.1	56	15.6	23	6.4	161	44.7	73	20.3

n=360

Information in Table 3 shows that, 36.4% of the student leaders indicated that they were lowly involved, while 30.8% indicated that they were not involved at all in dramatization on issues related to religious tolerance. Only 9.7% indicated that they were very actively involved. On ethnic co-existence, 39.7% of the student leaders indicated that they were lowly involved in dramatization while 23.3% pointed out that they were not involved at all. However, 13.9% of the student leaders indicated that they were very actively involved in dramatization on issues related to ethnic co-existence.

As relates to gender equity, 30.0% of the student leaders indicated that they were lowly involved in dramatization while 22.5% indicated that they were not involved at all. However, 19.2% and 13.6% indicated that they were moderately and very actively involved respectively. On socio-economic integration, 44.7% of the student leaders indicated that they were lowly involved in dramatization on issues related to national cohesion while 20.3% indicated that they were not involved at all. Only 15.6% indicated that they were moderately involved while 13.1% noted being very actively involved in dramatization on issues under socio economic integration as related to national cohesion.

An item was included in the teachers' questionnaire that sought information on the extent of involvement of students in dramatization on issues related to national cohesion. The teachers' responses were as shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
Teachers Responses on Dramatization

Issues related to national cohesion	Very actively involved		Moderately involved		No opinion		Lowly involved		Not involved at all	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Religious tolerance	2	4.2	9	18.8	1	2.1	19	39.6	17	35.4
Ethnic co-existence	3	6.25	6	12.5	1	2.1	22	45.8	16	33.3
Gender equity	4	8.3	9	18.8	1	2.1	18	37.5	16	33.5
Socio-economic integration	1	2.1	11	22.9	1	2.1	23	47.9	12	25.0

Information in Table 4 shows that 39.6% of the teachers indicated that students are lowly involved in dramatization on issues related to religious tolerance with 35.4% indicating that they are never involved at all. Only 4.2% of the teachers indicated that students are very actively involved. Results in Table 14 further showed that 45.8% of the teachers indicated that students were lowly involved in dramatization on issues related to ethnic co-existence while 33.3% pointed out that they were not involved at all. However 12.5% and 6.25% of the teachers indicated that students are moderately and very actively involved respectively on dramatization on issues related to ethnic coexistence.

On gender equity, 37.5% of the teachers indicated that students are lowly involved in dramatization while 33.5% indicated that they are not involved at all. 18.8% of the teachers indicated that students are moderately involved while 8.3% indicated that they are very actively involved in dramatization on issues related to gender equity. On socio economic integration, 47.9% of the teachers were lowly involved. The above analysis shows that student leaders and teachers responses are in agreement. The finding suggests that students are lowly involved in dramatization on issues related to national cohesion.

Dramatization has the potential to empower the students, give them many opportunities to have pride in their work, it teaches them responsibility, problem solving, management and directing proficiencies (MOE, 2010). The many activities of team work force students to develop organizational skills and thinking



capacity. These are tools that can be used in all aspects of their lives. We all present ourselves in everyday life as we want to be perceived (ROK, 2007). Therefore, it makes sense that dramatic skills can help us become the person we want to be. In this way, drama has a wider reach than simply making us more fluent in a second language. It has the potential of making our lives better as we will be better understood and may help us become the people we want to be. Drama is all about how we present ourselves. If the student can communicate better, the more likely others will see him or her as he or she wishes to be seen. Therefore, the skills of drama can help the students to inculcate values of national cohesion and integration. The findings of this study suggest that the students are lowly involved in dramatization.

The study also sought to determine from the student leaders and teachers the extent to which they were involved in debates on issues related to national cohesion. Table 5 summarizes both student leaders and teachers responses on extent of involvement.

Table 5

Extent of Involvement in Debates

Respondents	Very great extent		Great extent		No opinion		Small extent		No extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	Student leaders	23	6.4	32	8.9	13	3.6	196	54.4	96
Teachers	4	8.3	6	12.5	2	4.2	24	50.0	12	25.0

Information in Table 5 shows that, majority (54.4%) of the student leaders indicated that they were involved in debates on issues related to national cohesion to a small extent, 26.7% indicated no extent while 8.9% indicated a great extent. Among the teachers, 50.0% of them are in agreement with the student leaders that students are involved in debates on issues related to national cohesion to a small extent. Only 8.3% of the teachers indicated that students are involved to a very great extent in debates on issues related to national cohesion.

Applied skills and understanding should be stressed over abstract knowledge by engaging students in learning process through observation, demonstration, discussion and other practical skills (Brameld, 1965). Brameld (1966) noted that for a curriculum to meet the needs of the citizens it should include activities such as drama, debates, role playing, and competition of writing essays among others. Based on the ideals reconstructionism philosophy, the findings of this study suggests that there was no relevance of learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion among secondary school students in Machakos Town Sub-County.

## 6. Conclusion

Teaching is the process of imparting knowledge, skill, attitudes and values to students (Oluoch, 2002). The manner in which teaching and learning are carried out, represents the real implementation of the objectives of the curriculum as immediated by the curriculum plan. In Kenyan secondary school curriculum, teachers are an important component of education whose services are indispensable in the realization of educational goals (MOE, 2010). Due to their central role in the enterprise of education, teachers at all levels require effective and sufficient education to be able to adequately carry out their roles and responsibilities. The role of the learner in the reconstructionist learning environment is to be an active participant (Brameld, 1956). Students are encouraged to think critically about the world in which they live in and how it can be changed for the better. Students learn how to be problem solvers and decision makers. From the findings, the researcher concluded that; the learning opportunities under dramatization, role playing and debates did not promote national cohesion. The curriculum is perceived not to adequately capture learner related peculiarities such as aptitude, interests and regional diversities. For learning opportunities to promote national cohesion, the school curriculum should focus on greater participation of individuals, critical thinking, problem solving and non-authoritarian teaching methods. Basing on the ideals of reconstructionism philosophy, the findings of this study suggest that there is no relevance of learning opportunities in promoting national cohesion.

## 7. Recommendations

The goal of reconstructionist learning for students is that they themselves may envision the good future and spend their learning as a preparation for their role in the future for which they reach. This is an idea of change for a better educational system. Goals are needed to achieve the desired change and students should work together and use each other as a support system to achieve their goals. Teaching is geared towards the maximum self-realization of the student. The secondary curriculum should provide opportunities for fostering national cohesion through role playing activities, dramatization and debates. The government should enhance sensitization on the importance of national cohesion. This can be done through debating, drama, music, essay writing competition and establishment of clubs geared towards promoting peace and appreciating diversity.

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