

Emerging Trends in the Performance of Christian Religious Education in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examination

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Abstract

This paper examined the emerging trends in the performance of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the Kenya certificate of secondary school education examinations (KCSE). The main objective in this paper was to establish significant reasons that may have prompted the declining performance in the performance of this subject during national examinations in the recent past. The study involved both primary and secondary data which was skillfully analysed to generate the findings in this paper. Significantly, oral interviews (abbreviated as O.I in the entire text) from teachers of CRE in various schools across the country were conducted to beef up the findings in this paper. It is indeed true from the findings that CRE has been experiencing average or poor performance since 2016 after the introduction of the stringent mechanisms to curb the alleged national examination cheating that had been witnessed in the previous years. It has also been established that CRE is no longer a “booster” subject and the discipline may become unpopular in the near future should the status quo remain.

Keywords: Kenya National Examination Council, Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, Syllabus, the Bible.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE-313) is one of the many other academic subjects that comprise the curriculum in the Kenya Secondary school education system (Simiyu, 2016: 1). The subject is one of the oldest in the curriculum that has been considered significant in modelling the moral upbringing of learners. After the inception of 8-4-4 education system in Kenya in 1989, Social Education and Ethics (SEE) was a non-faith subject that was introduced to serve a similar purpose with CRE. According to Wasike (O.I, 2021), SEE was however dropped by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) and today CRE is a group 3 subject together with Geography (312), History (311), Islamic Religious Education (IRE-314) and Hindu Religious Education (HRE-315). According to KNEC, group three subjects are classified into the category of electives and optional subjects and students are only allowed to select a maximum of two subjects from this category. Infact, students who opt for CRE are barred from pursuing IRE or HRE.

It should also be noted that there are other subjects which must be studied together with CRE in order to fulfill the requirements put in place by KNEC

for the award of KCSE certificate. Group 1 subjects are all compulsory and they include English (101), Kiswahili (102) and Mathematics (121). Group 2 subjects are ideally pure sciences that include Chemistry (233), Physics (232) and Biology (231) and KNEC stipulates that a candidate should study at least two subjects in this category to qualify for the attainment of the KCSE certificate. Otherwise, the examining body also allows students to pursue the three subjects at the same time (Oluoch, O.I. 2021).

Essentially, group 4 subjects are electives and they attract very few students. These subjects are; Home Science (441), Art & Design (442), Agriculture (443), Woodwork (444), Metalwork (445), Building & Construction (446), Power Mechanics (447), Electricity (448), Drawing & Design (449), Aviation Technology (450) and Computer Studies (451). They are ideally not compulsory and students may qualify for the award of the KCSE certificate without pursuing any subject from this category. Group 5 subjects are basically foreign languages, Kenya Sign Language, Business Studies and Music. According to Masenge (O.I. 2021), these subjects are optional and students do not need to study any of them to successfully complete Secondary School

Education in Kenya. The subjects are; French (501), Germany (502), Arabic (503), Kenya Sign Language (504), Music (511) and Business Studies (565) (Refer to

table 1: Subject Groupings in Secondary Schools in Kenya).

Table-1: Subject Groupings in Secondary Schools in Kenya

GROUP	SUBJECTS	CODE	REMARKS
ONE	English	101	Compulsory
	Kiswahili	102	Compulsory
	Mathematic	121	Compulsory
TWO	Biology	231	At least two
	Physics	232	
	Chemistry	233	
THREE	History and Government	311	At least one and utmost two. N/B, Only one Religious Subject may be selected
	Geography	312	
	Christian Religious Education	313	
	Islamic Religious Education	314	
	Hindu Religious Education	315	
FOUR	Homes Science	441	Not compulsory and those who opt for this group may select only one subject
	Art and Design	442	
	Agriculture	443	
	Woodwork	444	
	Metalwork	445	
	Building and Construction	446	
	Power Mechanics	447	
	Electricity	448	
	Drawing and Design	449	
	Aviation Technology	450	
	Computer Studies	451	
FIVE	French	501	Not compulsory and those who opt for this group may select only one subject
	German	502	
	Arabic	503	
	Kenya Sign Language	504	
	Music	511	
	Business Studies	565	

Source: Past KCSE Examination Time Tables

KNEC stipulates that students must undertake at least seven and utmost eight subjects to be awarded the KCSE certificate. As noted earlier, group 1 subjects are compulsory whereas students must pursue at least two subjects from group 2 category. In group 3, a student must study at least one subject and the seventh subject is usually selected from group 2 to group 5. For certification and grading purpose, KNEC determines the performance of the learner by averaging the total aggregate marks to arrive at the student's mean grade (Wesonga, O.I. 2021).

Since the inception of 8-4-4 education system in Kenya, the performance of CRE stood above other subjects and for this reason, the subject attracted higher candidature with the assumption that good results would be realized at the end. The subject was nicknamed "booster" or "*ngazi*" (Swahili word for a ladder) due to the believe that those who pursued it were assured of posting good results. Akaranga and Simiyu (2016: 125) seemingly are in consonant with this assertion when they posit that Christian Religious Education performance trend had a notably higher mean

score prior to the introduction of Social Education and Ethics.

Surprisingly, the 2016 KCSE results shocked many Kenyans due to the poor and dismal performance that was recorded. The general performance dropped drastically with only 141 students scoring a mean grade of A down from 2636 in 2015 which translated to 1869.5% decline (The Daily Nation of 29th December 2016). This was a significant drop and it attracted the attention of so many people within the education system in Kenya. The 141 students who scored grade A represented only 0.2% of the total candidature that sat the 2016 KCSE. However, the Kenyan government defended these results arguing that it was a true reflection of the students' capability unlike the previous two to four years which had witnessed the alleged massive exam irregularities that were almost tainting the credibility of KCSE certificate internationally. It was noted that Kenyan students who excelled in KCSE were being questioned and some of them were being re-examined elsewhere hence the KCSE certificates and papers were about to become worthless.

In CRE, the much anticipated good performance in the subject also declined and that was the trend for 3 years that followed (2017, 2018 and 2019), leaving key stakeholders wondering and contemplating about the observable declining performance. However, all questions that were tested in 2016 were lifted from previous KCSE papers and those who defended the observed poor performance claimed that the variable of cheating was eliminated (Musyumi, O.I. 2021). It is however important to explore other possible explanations that may account for the declining trend in the performance of CRE in secondary schools in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed approach in data collection and analysis. This essentially implies that aspects of quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated to limit the possibility of unrealistic results and outcomes. Oral interviews (abbreviated as O.I in the entire paper) was a key method of primary data collection in which informants were selected using the tenets of purposive and snowball sampling procedures due to their vast knowledge and experience in teaching and examining CRE. That aside, questionnaires were also administered to selected number of CRE teachers whose information was corroborated with that collected through Oral Interview to ascertain the facts in both. Perhaps, it should be mentioned that secondary data was also utilized and this was chiefly borrowed from written materials about CRE in the Kenyan secondary schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CRE syllabus

CRE has a total of 41 topics which are taught in four years before subjecting candidates to a final test to determine and measure the cognitive understanding of the learners in the subject. The topics are further subdivided into lesser sub-topics that entails abstract concepts which may not be practically measured and observed to verify the factual entities in this subject, unlike sciences and technical based ones whose ideologies are easily verified in laboratories and workshops (Kilobi, O.I. 2021). The major themes advanced in the teaching and learning of CRE are the religious beliefs and values largely derived from Christianity as one of the world's leading religion (Kimani, O.I. 2021).

It is also plausible to observe that the teaching and learning of CRE is anchored on the notion that students are encouraged to believe and have trust in the Biblical concepts taught to them in schools (Situma, O.I. 2021). Essentially, it is also paramount to clarify

that the teaching and learning of CRE in secondary schools takes into consideration the fact that Christianity as a religion is a multi-denominational movement and each denomination has divergent dogmas or doctrines that may not be incongruent with the rest (Aberi, O.I. 2021).

According to Murutu (O.I. 2021), CRE syllabus is thus developed with this notable fact in mind and the subject tutors are cautioned against preaching and advocating for the advancement and understanding of Christian doctrines aligned towards their denomination. Perhaps, this was the rationale behind the inclusion of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) in the curriculum development of CRE (Amisi, O.I. 2021). In some cases, non-Christian teachers do teach CRE from a professional point of view without any form of prejudice that may arise as an outcome of their religious affiliations and background.

As noted before, the dissemination of CRE knowledge in Kenya's secondary schools has been staggered in four grades and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) envisages the attainment of certain values at the end of each level or grade (Oluoch, O.I. 2021). Legally, KICD is under the Ministry of Education and it has the sole mandate of formulating and reviewing curriculums for primary and post-primary levels of education with the exception of universities (KICD, 2006).

At the initial level (form one) of implementing Secondary School CRE curriculum, learners are taught a total of 10 topics across the academic year that is further split into three sessions or terms (Masenge, O.I. 2021). Term three is relatively short, around seven weeks and it is the significant period at which the National Examination is administered. According to Wasike (O.I. 2021), the implementation of the secondary school CRE curriculum in the second level (form two) is achieved through covering a total of 12 topics while the third level (form 3) has a total of 9 topics.

The fourth level (form 4) covers a total of 10 topics after which learners are subjected to a national examination to measure their cognitive understanding of the total topics taught for four levels (Aberi, O.I. 2021). For a clear and precise summary about the specific CRE topics taught in different levels in secondary schools, refer to table 2- Topic summary for form one, Table three-Topic summary for form two, Table four-Topic summary for form three and Table five-Topic summary for form four.

Table-2: Topic summary in form one

S/NO.	TOPIC
1.	Introduction to CRE and The Bible
2.	Creation and Fall of Man
3.	Faith and God's promises-Abraham
4.	Sinai covenant-Moses
5.	Leadership in God's Plan-David and Solomon
6.	Loyalty to God-Elijah
7.	Selected aspects in African Religious Heritage
8.	The meaning of Life and its Wholeness in Traditional African Society
9.	The Rites of Passage and Moral Values in Traditional African Society
10.	African Moral Values

Source: Secondary Christian Religious Education, Students' Book one

Table-3: Topic summary in form two

S/NO.	TOPIC
1.	The Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah
2.	The infancy and early life of Jesus
3.	John the Baptist
4.	Jesus begins his work in Galilee
5.	The Sermon on the Plain
6.	Some Works and Teachings of Jesus
7.	Jesus and the twelve disciples
8.	The Journey to Jerusalem
9.	The Kingdom of God
10.	Wealth, Poverty, Faith and Prayer
11.	Jesus Teachings in Jerusalem
12.	Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Source: Secondary Christian Religious Education, Students' Book two

Table-4: Topic summary in form three

S/NO.	TOPIC
1.	Gifts of the Holy Spirit
2.	Unity of Believers
3.	The writing of prophetic messages
4.	Prophet Amos
5.	Prophet Jeremiah
6.	Jeremiah's Teachings on Judgement and Punishment
7.	Jeremiah's Teaching on Suffering and Hope
8.	Nehemiah
9.	The restoration of the Jewish community

Source: Secondary Christian Religious Education, Students' Book three

Table-5: Topic summary in form four

S/NO.	TOPIC
1.	Introduction to Christian Ethics
2.	Human Sexuality
3.	Responsible Sexual Behaviour
4.	Marriage
5.	The Family
6.	Christian Approaches to work
7.	Christian Approaches to Leisure
8.	Christian Approaches to Wealth, Money and Poverty
9.	Christian Approaches to Law, Order and Justice
10.	Christian Approaches to selected issues related to modern science and environment

Source: Secondary Christian Religious Education, Students' Book four

CRE Exam setting pattern

The testing and examining of CRE is accomplished through two papers, CRE paper 1 (313/1) and CRE paper 2 (313/2) with each paper having six structured questions out of which the candidate is instructed to answer only five (KCSE CRE past paper). Each question has a total of twenty marks and the cumulative score of a candidate is determined by summing up the total marks scored from each question (Kilobi, O.I. 2021). Since 2006, the setting trend that KNEC adopted in developing test items for CRE has been very consistent and by 2019, experienced teachers in this subject were able to predict possible questions that could be tested in both papers (Kathure, O.I. 2021).

It is also imperative to observe that CRE paper 1 (313/1) ideally examine the learner's cognitive understanding of significant themes derived from the Old Testament section of the Bible and the Traditionally African heritage (Kimani, O.I. 2021). Further still, four of the six questions are always derived from the topics taught during the first academic year upon the beginning of secondary school education while the remaining two questions are reserved for the topics covered during the third academic year (Mashaka and Murimi, 2015: v).

According to Aberi (O.I. 2021), CRE paper 2 (313/2) usually examine the St. Luke's gospel that is normally covered during the second academic year of the secondary school education. The paper also examine selected topics in the New Testament section of the Bible taught during the third academic year of the student's study (Murutu, O.I. 2021). Contemporary issues taught to learners in the final academic year accounts for a significant portion of CRE paper 2 (Refer to tables six and seven; KCSE setting pattern summary for CRE since 2006).

However, the setting pattern of this paper has undergone significant changes since the inception of 8-4-4 system of education in Kenya to acquire its current structure. By 2005, CRE paper 1 had twenty questions that were compulsory and each question had a total of five marks (KCSE CRE paper 1, 2005). CRE paper 2 on the other hand had six structured questions out of which the candidate answered only five of them (KCSE CRE paper 1, 2005). Each question earned the candidate a maximum of twenty marks and unlike the current setting pattern and trend, the previous approach lacked the specification of certain topics for paper one or paper two.

Table-6: 313/1 KCSE setting pattern

S/NO	TOPICS	YEAR TAUGHT
1.	Meaning of CRE	Year one (form 1)
	The Bible	
	Creation and Fall of Man	
2.	Faith and God's Promises-Abraham	Year one (form 1)
	The Sinai Covenant-Moses	
3.	Leadership in God's Plan (Saul, David and Solomon)	Year one (form 1)
	Loyalty to God-Elijah	
4	The writing of Prophetic messages	Year three (form 3)
	Prophet Amos	
5	Prophet Jeremiah	Year three (form 3)
	Nehemiah	
6	Traditional African Heritage	Year one (form 1)

Source: Summarized from CRE KCSE past paper from 2006 to 2020

Table-7: 313/1 KCSE setting pattern

S/NO	TOPICS	YEAR TAUGHT
1.	The Old Testament Prophecies about the coming of the Messiah	Year two (form 2)
	Infancy and early life of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist and Jesus	
2.	Jesus Begins His work	Year two (form 2)
	The sermon on the plain	
	Some works and teachings of Jesus	
	Jesus and the twelve disciples	
3.	Journey to Jerusalem	Year one (form 2)
	The kingdom of God	
	Wealth, Poverty, Faith and Prayer	
	Jesus teaches in Jerusalem	
	The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus	
4.	Gifts of the Holy spirit	Year one (form 3)
	Unity of believers	
	Introduction to Christian Ethics	

S/NO	TOPICS	YEAR TAUGHT
5.	Human sexuality	Year one (form 4)
	Marriage and Family	
	Christian approaches to work	
	Christian approaches to leisure	
6.	Wealthy, money and poverty	Year one (form 4)
	Law, order and justice	
	Selected issues related to modern science, technology and environment	

Source: Summarized from CRE KCSE past paper from 2006 to 2020

Regardless of the patterns and the trends adopted by KNEC while setting the CRE exam, it is paramount to develop a quality test which takes into consideration the Blooms Taxonomy approach that is significant in measuring various skills to determine the

cognitive and the affective understanding of the learner in the subject content (See figure 1: the Cognitive domain chart derived from the Blooms Taxonomy and Fig 3: Revised Blooms Taxonomy skills).

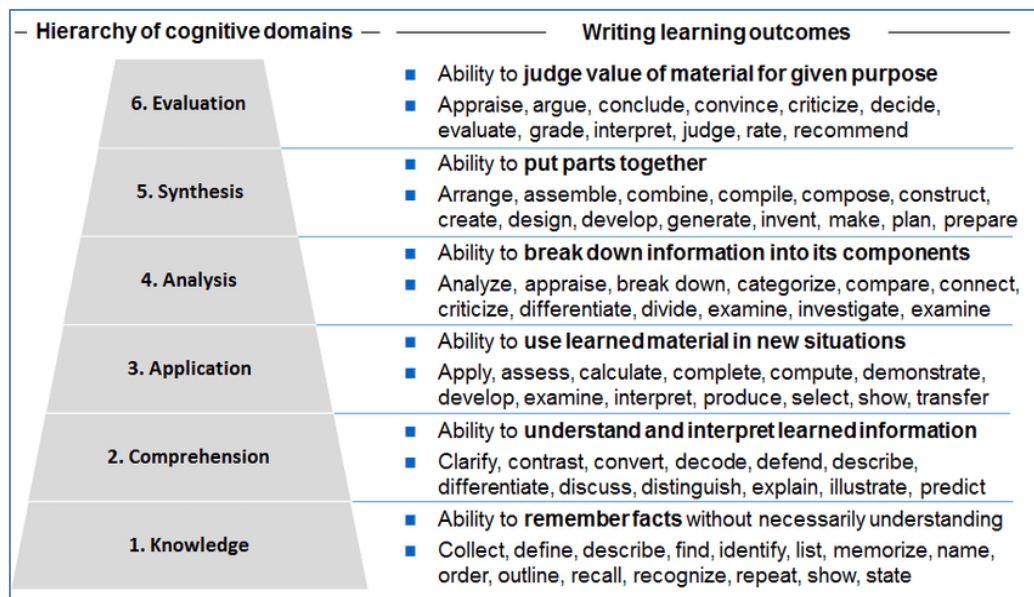


Fig-1: The Cognitive domain chart derived from the Blooms Taxonomy)

Source: Hoque, E (2016)

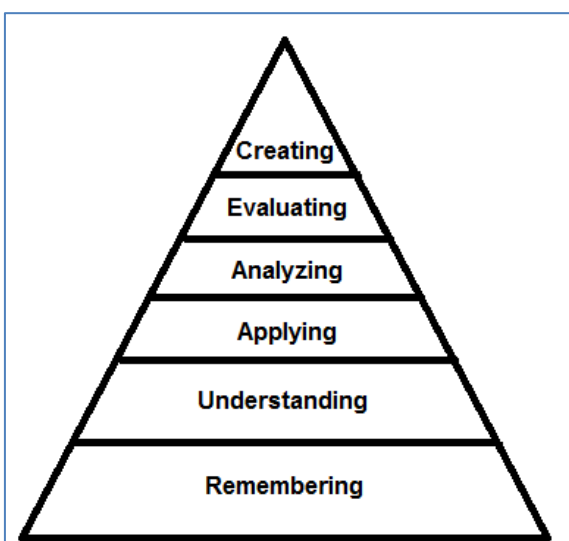


Fig-3: Revised Blooms Taxonomy skills

Source: Hoque, E (2016)

This is according to Kathure (O.I, 2021) who also affirms that a well-developed exam should be relatively fair enough to cater for all students who possess different abilities in terms of the abstract conceptualization of the subject content. Essentially therefore, such exam should be reflected through a normal distribution curve in which majority candidates scores are average while excellent and poor performance takes a lower percentage in such graphical representation of the results. Perhaps, this reasoning is what informed Prof. George Magoha (former Chief Executive Officer, KNEC) to make the following remarks regarding KCSE results prior to 2016; *“In any population, A materials (students) fall between five to ten percent, and therefore, Kenya being a normal country cannot keep on producing A’s that surpass what would be expected in a normal distribution curve. Anything outside that bracket (five to ten percent) is suspicious or extraordinary and for a school to have 96.6 percent scoring A, then that is stupidity of the*

highest level and nobody should be associated with such.” (The Daily Nation of 29th December 2016).

Magoha’s reasoning is indeed realistic and coherent but it is extremely important to also assert that the performance of pupils in their final year in primary schools determine the type and nature of secondary schools they would join in Kenya (Wesonga, O.I. 2021). National secondary schools are always the highest beneficiaries of top performers in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam and as such, they admit pupils who are fairly above average and the end results after their four years in secondary schools must always reflect their entry behaviour (Masenge, O.I. 2021). Magoha’s reasoning should therefore be re-examined because of this segregating policy that puts good performers in KCPE exams together and then expecting poor or average results from the same cohort.

This notwithstanding, it is imperative to clearly develop a standard exam that caters for all students with different mental abilities and skills (Musyim, O.I. 2021). The basis reference for a standard exam is the normal distribution curve but a negatively skewed curve in general reflects poor performance in any given subject and several other implications while a positively skewed curve could mean good performance. The possibilities of a negatively skewed curve could be that the exam was very hard beyond the cognitive comprehension of students or perhaps the teaching methodology adopted by teachers could have been ineffective making it difficult for the timely coverage of the syllabus (Amisi, O.I. 2021). The latter observation may be objected due to the fact that Teachers Service Commission (TSC) in Kenya has been so keen in ensuring the attainment of higher teaching standards and professionalism. The introduction of the Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) tool by TSC has been fruitful in enhancing professionalism in teaching and it would be unlikely to imagine that the teaching methodology would be a significant factor to explain the negatively skewed curve in performance (Wasike, O.I. 2021).

Revisiting the Blooms Taxonomy as presented in Fig 1 and Fig 2, a standard set exam should have very few questions testing higher skills such as evaluation, synthesis and analysis. Instead, significant questions should test the knowledge and comprehension skills that requires remembering and understanding of concepts. Since 2016 however, KSCE CRE questions have been examining higher skills in the Blooms Taxonomy such as evaluation, synthesis and analysis and such questions have been answered poorly by students resulting to the unprecedented results in the subject (Aberi, O.I. 2021). This assertion is supported by Hoque (2016: 46) who contends that higher levels of the Blooms Taxonomy requires more and complex mental operations and such skills are not necessarily

more desirable than lower levels due to the fact that one cannot achieve higher levels without an ability to use lower levels.

Exam administration

The administration of KSCE examination is a significant component in the test management of Secondary School Education and the evaluation of secondary school learners in Kenya (Masenge, O.I. 2021). It is accorded due diligence it deserves and it is the mandate of the Ministry of Education through KNEC to ensure a smooth process of administering the exam. Significant to this process are the relevant personnel that are always brought on board to oversee the administration of these examination. And teachers have been very essential in this process because of their continued interaction with students while in school (Wesonga, O.I. 2021). However, most teachers have complained about the poor allowances given to them by KNEC for the services they render. Again, the inception of stringent and punitive measures against teachers since 2016 for some unavoidable mistakes during exam administration has also made some teachers to shy off from this exercise (Masenge, O.I. 2021). Teachers have been interdicted while others have been dismissed by TSC over some irregularities emanating from the exam administration.

KNEC as corporate entity in Kenya is the chief administrator of KCSE examination (KNEC, 2017a; 1). However, this examination council usually contracted teachers and security personnel to administer the examination with the anticipation of 0.0% tolerance in cheating and other exam related malpractices. This is usually made possible through the involvement of education officials within the country such as county directors of education, sub-county directors of education, school principals, teachers and security agencies (Oluoch, O.I. 2021).

Before the beginning of the practical and the theoretical examinations, KNEC officials normally conduct briefing sessions to teachers and security agents to acquaint them on the modalities of administering the examination (Wasike, O.I. 2021). Thereafter, teachers with high competence and skills in exam management are always appointed by KNEC to be supervisors during the KCSE period in any given examination center. Examination centers with high candidature enrolment are usually given two supervisors for smooth exam administration.

Such appointed supervisors are always responsible and answerable to TSC Sub-County Directors and by KNEC’s delegation (*ibid*) and their main duty is overseeing the administration of exam papers in the examination rooms with the assistance of the invigilators. Initially, supervisors used to collect examination paper from the nearest police station under the tight security from armed police officers. They were

also expected to return students scripts back to the police station with armed police escort (KNEC; 2015). However, the rampant examination malpractices in Kenya from 2012 to 2015 heralded into reforms that compelled school heads to be part and parcel of KCSE examination as centre managers. In this role of centre managers, head teachers were given significant responsibilities which included the collection of examination papers from the Sub-County Director of education's office and returning student's scripts to the same office with the escort of tight security (Masenge, O.I. 2021).

The invigilators are also key personnel in the administration of KCSE examination in Kenya. They are virtually the assistants to the supervisors and their significant responsibilities include frisking students before entering the examination room, distributing examination papers to students, ensuring recommended spacing (1.22 meters apart) among candidates, collection of student's scripts among other key roles (Wesonga, O.I. 2021). But it is very paramount to posit that the main purpose of invigilation is to prevent cheating (KNEC, 2017a: 61). The security personnel forms an integral part of the man power that guarantees non-interference of the examination process from any human influence (KNEC: 2019).

Normally, the supervisors, invigilators, center managers and security officials always conduct the rehearsal programmes in all examination centers few days before the commencement of KCSE Examinations (Masenge, O.I. 2021). In these occasions, candidates are always oriented to what is expected from them during the examination period. This is primarily meant to caution the candidates from engaging in malpractices that are likely to jeopardize the authenticity of the results (KNEC, 2017: 55-60).

The theoretical and practical aspects of these tests usually commence in the month of November every year, a slight deviation from the usual month of October up to 2015. Since 2016, schools are normally closed during KCSE examination period and the rationale behind this policy was curbing the alleged cheating that involved collusion between teachers and lower grade students to unfairly assist the candidates to get the correct responses to exam questions. However, the Covid-19 pandemic altered this KCSE examination calendar due to the nine months holiday occasioned by the school closure in March 2020. Hence, the 2020 KCPE and KCSE cohort sat for their final examination in March 2021 while the 2021 group will finish in March 2022. The 2022 cohort will finalize their national exams in December 2022 and starting January 2023, the normal academic calendar will resume implying that KCSE and KCPE exams will be done in November 2023 (Ministry of Education; 2020).

However, subjects such as Agriculture, Building & Construction, Metal Work, and Wood Work among others are examined through project assessment whose completion may take up to nine months. As such therefore, the assessment of projects in these subjects commences early in the year under the strict guidelines and instructions from KNEC. It is the mandate of schools and the subject teachers to supervise and facilitate the completion of project tests and submit student's scores to KNEC at certain stipulated date (KNEC: 2021).

It is indeed realistic and arguably factual to observe that KCSE examinations in Kenya are usually handled and administered under tight security protocols. This has essentially made KCSE examinations to be portrayed as the most significant pillar of success a Kenyan child needs. It is a do or die event in the lifetime of learners hence parents, teachers and the society at large have always emphasized on scoring quality grades that secures an admission slot to pursue a degree course at the university (Aberi, O.I. 2021).

This is contrary to the psychomotor domain of learning which has attracted few individuals in nurturing their talents especially in sports whose financial gain has been very lucrative compared to those who have pursued the cognitive domain of learning in terms of acquiring college diplomas and universities degrees for white collar jobs (Oluoch, O.I. 2021). Perhaps, this must have engineered the decision by the Ministry of Education to develop the competence based curriculum (CBC) which has already been rolled out in primary schools in Kenya with the current grade 5 (standard 5) as the pioneer cohort.

Marking process

This is equally an important task that is accorded due diligence, resources and energy for the results to be realized within the stipulated time. The main human resource contract in the marking process are usually subject teachers who must be engaged in active teaching of the respective subjects they are assigned to mark. However, these subject teachers are normally trained by KNEC to qualify as examiners in their respective subjects (Amisi, O.I. 2021).

It is also important to note that KNEC has developed four main ranks in the marking of national examinations in each subject. The lowest rank is comprised of junior examiners who are always the majority in any marking centre and their main role is marking the live scripts of learners (Kilobi, O.I. 2021). Such examiners are usually answerable to the team leader and they are always divided into smaller teams of around 6 to 10 depending on the marking logistics for each subject.

Each of these teams are assigned a team leader (TL) whose main role is ensuring accuracy in marking by the examiners as stipulated in the marking schemes. To achieve this desire, the TL is always under the obligation from KNEC to coordinate (remark) at least 10% of what the team has marked and any deviation that exceeds plus (+) or minus (-) 2 is always reprimanded and examiners who consistently exhibit huge deviations are sometimes discontinued from marking (Aberi, O.I. 2021). For one to be appointed a team leader by KNEC, he or she must have been engaged in the marking process for at least five consecutive years with a proven track record of accuracy and speed in marking. They are answerable to the assistant chief examiners

Above the team leaders in any marking room with several teams is a senior examiner also called the assistant chief examiner (ACE). ACE's always constitute the senior most benches in marking and they work in consultation with the chief examiner to achieve effective marking process. Their main role is to orient the examiners to the marking schemes through a rigorous process of marking of dummy scripts and relevant consultations to make clarifications before allowing them to mark live scripts of students (Musyimi, O.I. 2021). The ACE's also coordinates (remark) at least 10% of what the TL's have remarked and this is essentially meant to emphasize the aspect of accuracy in marking. Sometimes, teams or examiners are forced to remark scripts for specific centers if the ACE recommends so.

The chief examiner is the contact person between KNEC and examiners and with regard to the marking process he/she makes the final decision whenever a dispute or a disagreement arise among the ACE's, TL's and examiners concerning the validity of a given response from a student (Masenge, O.I. 2021). For one to be appointed the chief examiner, he or she must be a person of enough experience having undergone all the mandatory stages of marking i.e. examiner, team leader and assistant chief examiner.

Marking of student's scripts usually follows a conveyor belt approach in which a single student's script is marked by several examiners. For this approach to effectively work, examiners are allocated specific questions to mark in each student's script. This approach in essence is basically meant to reduce the biases that may be exhibited by the examiners due to hallow effect (Wesonga, O.I. 2021).

Upon completion of marking, student's scores are usually recorded in the mark sheets by the examiners without any erasure after which they are entered in the computer mark sheets for transmission to KNEC's central system for analysis. However, a print out of each center's computer mark sheet is normally given back to the examiners who marked the scripts to

confirm if the scores captured by data clerks are a true record of what was indicated on the student's scripts (Oluoch, O.I. 2021). This process is called the adjudication of the marks and should there be discrepancies noted due wrong entries of marks, the chief examiner must authorize for such corrections to be effected.

Evaluation and grading

Evaluation and awarding of grades to candidates raw marks is basically a preserve of KNEC and it can only be speculation to claim and imagine the grading system adopted in determining the grade of a student in a given subject. However, academicians with outstanding experience in education matters can easily come up with a grading system that is similar to what KNEC use in awarding grades to candidates based on the raw marks scored in any given subject (Wesonga, O.I. 2021).

Essentially, each subject should have a unique grading system to suit the nature of the subject. Sciences and mathematics are generally viewed as complex subjects and as such, very few candidates score high grades (Masenge, O.I. 2021). The resultant outcome in this scenario is scaling down the grading system to enhance the attainment of a normal curve to reflect common features that a fair exam should entail. This is a common academic practice worldwide which constitute the standardization of the students' grades in performance. However, it is unlikely that KNEC undertakes this process due to the fact that results are always released less that one week after marking of the student scripts is concluded (Aberi, O.I. 2021). This is also a very possible explanation that may justify the low performance with very few good grade. Otherwise, a common grading system that has largely been adopted by most schools in the analysis of the internal exams is summarized in the table below;

Common grading system

Table 8: common grading system

Range of marks	Grade	Points
85 and Above	A	12
80-84	A-	11
75-79	B+	10
70-74	B	9
65-69	B-	8
60-64	C+	7
55-59	C	6
50-54	C-	5
40-49	D+	4
35-39	D	3
30-34	D-	2
0-24	E	1

Source: Office of the Academic Dean, Aquinas High School-Nairobi

Regardless of the grading system adopted by KNEC in awarding grades to candidate's raw marks in CRE, it remains unclear the modalities used in determining the student's grades. In fact the sudden change in good results in CRE has made people to develop numerous speculations regarding the purported grading system used in this subject (Amisi, O.I. 2021). In this approach, the speculators have developed a high

grading system that lowers the grades in CRE should student's marks be very low. Refer to table eight, a sample grading system developed by speculators. It should be reiterated that this grading system is speculative and it has no basis of truth in it and KNEC has come out to vehemently refute its alleged use in awarding grades to CRE.

Table 9: speculated grading system in CRE by KNEC

Range of marks	Grade	Points
90 and Above	A	12
85-89	A-	11
80-84	B+	10
75-79	B	9
70-74	B-	8
65-69	C+	7
60-64	C	6
55-59	C-	5
50-54	D+	4
45-49	D	3
40-44	D-	2
0-39	E	1

Source: Academic Social media in Kenya

Policy recommendation

Kenya is a religious state and so are its citizens. This phrase or statement is debatable, especially by those who may hold contrary sentiments in as far as the religiosity of Kenyans is concerned. Be it as it may, the recent trends in the performance of CRE in secondary schools national examinations raises numerous concerns from the stakeholders whose expectations are high especially in the inculcation of moral values and virtues to learners at the end of their High School studies.

In this regard, a few recommendations have been developed herein to assist in policy making especially in the formulation of guidelines by KNEC to regulate the issues around setting of a standard CRE paper. The essence of this is to restore confidence in students and the relevant stakeholders who seems to be much worried with the current trend in the performance of this subject. As noted before, CRE is no longer a 'booster' subject and it is much easier to score good grades in mathematics and sciences than this religious subjects.

Foremost, KNEC should consider setting CRE exams using the Blooms taxonomy guidelines with lower skills such knowledge and comprehension testing more questions unlike the current approach in which high order skills such analysis, synthesis and evaluation are leading in the development of CRE papers by KNEC.

Timely syllabus coverage is another significant policy issue that can be instituted to re-ignite the

performance of CRE. This sentiment does not imply that there is untimely syllabus coverage by teachers in schools but rather an emphasis for teachers to realize the essence of a wholesome coverage of the content. In several occasions, teachers may rush through the syllabus to meet the expected deadlines in their work stations to avoid disciplinary sanctions against them. This results to rote cramming by the students and the outcome of this practice is poor performance due to the use of high order skills in the blooms taxonomy when developing KCSE CRE exam. It is very important for teachers to systematically take the learners through the syllabus without any rush. Infact there is need for lengthening the study period or repeating the concepts to learners to widen their scope of understanding the subject before subjecting them to the national examinations.

Marking of KCSE examination is an important process in the determination of the student's grades hence KNEC should rethink the current approaches adopted during this exercise. The cardinal aspect in marking the student's script is the clear and proper understanding of the marking schemes by the examiners to enhance their intellectual interpretation of the student's answers in line with the demands and the dictates of the marking scheme. Unlike other subjects like sciences and mathematics which needs little interpretation of student's answers, CRE is purely a theoretical subject full of abstractly concepts and ideas that may not be put in practice for verification of truth through practical.

In this regard therefore, KNEC should consider lengthening the period for coordinating the marking schemes to adequately make examiners comprehend the marking scheme. During this period, there should be provision for examiners to debate on various issues pertaining the marking scheme for better understanding and interpreting the said scheme. For this to be effectively realized, examiners should be supplied with question papers soon after the completion of the said paper by students. The motive behind this thought is to make examiners familiarize themselves with questions and the anticipated correct answers or responses.

After a thorough process of coordinating the marking scheme through marking and evaluating of several dummy scripts, examiners and sometimes team leaders who consistently exhibit huge deviations should be discontinued from the marking process. This can only be achieved if KNEC promotes team leaders based on competency, accuracy and speed, being the basic required skills for proper marking process. Team leaders who are promoted on such qualifications will have the desired mental and physical capacity and the capability to perform the duties assigned and expected from such individuals.

The marking timelines put in place by the Ministry of Education are unrealistic and it is unlikely that examiners and KNEC officials have adequate time to accurately mark student's scripts and analyse the scores to give a true reflection of the cognitive understanding of the candidates in specific subjects such as CRE. It only amounts to strenuous encounter to compel an examiner to start marking student's scripts from 4.00am to 10.00pm and expect accuracy in marking. It is recommended that realistic marking should be less tedious and less strenuous and marking times should be fair enough to minimize the essence of overstretching the mental operations of teachers who are engaged in marking.

Marking modalities should also resonate well with the expected standards that entails duties and assignments that befits a teacher of that status. The main mandate of examiners is to mark and activities and issues related to how student's scripts should reach marking rooms must not be the concern of any examiners. This can only come into reality if the marking logistics within any marking center are entrusted to teachers who understand the intricacies that constitute this process. Assigning such duties of managing scripts in the hands of individuals who have no teaching experience and also lack value and respect to teachers will only lead to mistreatment of teachers in marking centers. The role of KNEC officials should only deal with administrative and security logistics to enhance the smooth facilitation of the marking process.

It is also paramount for KNEC officials to implement the idea of fairness in marking student's scripts by the examiners. It is indeed realistic to admit that examiners always accept to be engaged in marking KCSE examinations out of their desire of evaluating their students. However, the monetary attachment to this exercise is an extrinsic factor that motivates examiners to be engaged in this exercise. It is therefore advisable that the idea of distributing students scripts equally among examiners must be encouraged to limit the undue competition for marking more scripts and this may result to a relatively moderate speed in the marking process to minimize huge deviations.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, the performance of CRE since 2016 has not been good and there is very little which subject teachers in Kenya can do about it. Their role is only limited to the dissemination of CRE knowledge to learners and perhaps, may be the little preparations they may undertake to orient candidates to KCSE exams. The issue of bringing normalcy in the performance of CRE is within the mandate of KNEC to restore the lost glory in the performance this subject during national examination. The adoption of the high level skills of the blooms taxonomy in setting CRE questions in KCSE exam is a major contributing factor that can be put forward to explain the current scenario. Should this trend continue, the subject is likely to become unpopular and the religious and moral values intended to be transmitted to learners in this subject may not be objectively realized.

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b) Oral evidence

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4. Ferdinand Situma Waswa, Head of CRE department at Butere Girls High School. Interviewed on 10th November 2021 at Kivaywa High School in Kakamega County.
5. Glory Kathure, teacher of CRE at Gikumene Girls High School. Interviewed on 30th September 2021 at Gikumene Girls High School in Meru County.
6. Isaack Ouko Masenge, Academic Dean and teacher at Our Lady Mercy, Shauri Moyo. Interviewed on 12th December 2021 at Our Lady Mercy, Shauri Moyo in Nairobi County.
7. Kevin Wesonga, Academic Dean and teacher at Parklands Girl High School, Arya. Interviewed on 5th October 2021 at Parklands Girl High School, Arya in Nairobi County.
8. Martha Aberi Obiri, Head of CRE department at Itierio Girls High School. Interviewed on 30th November 2021 at Itierio Girls High School in Kisii County.
9. Nelly Gladys Kimani, Head of CRE department at Aquinas High School. Interviewed on 5th October 2021 at Aquinas High School in Nairobi County.
10. Paul Wasike Kundu, Head of Examination department and CRE teacher at Moi Girls Kamusinga. Interviewed on 15th December 2021 at Moi Girls Kamusinga in Bungoma County.
11. Rhoda Mutheu Musyimi, teacher of CRE at Mutituni Secondary School, Interviewed on 15th October 2021 at Mutituni Secondary School in Machakos County.
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