

USING HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN RWANDA AT SCHOOL AND IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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My name is Jean Pierre Tuyisenge and I have a Bachelor degree in Education and History from the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) currently University of Rwanda-College of Education. I have been teaching for 4 years. As a professionally trained teacher, I have been exposed to a range of History textbooks written in either English or French and I was eager to exploit them all because I use both English and French.

When I finished my studies in 2011, I started teaching History in Standards 3 and 4. The following year (2012), I was employed by the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) as History Subject Tutor in its Distance Training Programme. From this time (2013) I have experience of 'two faces of educational practices'. At the Kigali Institute of Education, there are abundant resources and learners are conversant with them (2007-2011 at the university) but then in school, History textbooks are scarce in comparison to the number of learners who also have difficulty using them.

While planning my lessons, I take two or three books and compare how much the writer has extended the length of each topic to be part of my course to teach (History). The analysis is made to assess whether or not it will be of use to the learners.

While preparing a lesson (to be taught on a certain day), I take the arranged topics (from their different sources) and start making notes by adapting text length and language. In the classroom, History textbooks are also used. We do need our students to be conversant with various resources for a range of reasons, some of which I mention below:

1. Some students will become History teachers. So, they need to be exposed to various resources including History textbooks.
2. For some classes (for instance Standard 1-3) in Rwanda, History is a compulsory and examinable course during national examinations. Thus, all students need to access History resources to be able to pass it in National Examination in standard 3.
3. To appease students curiosity and sustain understanding of certain facts.

Not every learner has the prescribed textbook as very few prescribed textbooks are available. I am obliged to make my own notes and worksheets from a variety of History textbooks and online sources. In a typical lesson, I expect learners to use textbooks to analyse facts and provide ideas about what they have understood in essay form. In the classroom, I also use videos to illustrate some topics such as World War I or World War II documentary movies and movies about the Slave Trade etc. In assessment, textbooks are very helpful because at the end of various topics in certain textbooks are questions for topic summary or section assessment. I often do them to familiarise learners with reading and increase their researching capacity.

There are many reasons which influence me in selecting textbooks and I have outlined these below:

1. Legal frame work: I do select textbooks approved by the Rwanda Education Board (REB) because they are likely to be available on the market. Again I select textbooks which are not in conflict with the History of Rwanda (mainly textbooks not challenging current facts about 1994 Tutsi genocide).
2. Academic richness: A certain number of textbooks are detailed to provide rich content to be taught or learnt for example when using textbooks from a famous writer, publisher or from famous learning institutions like Oxford, Cambridge, McGraw Hill, Jomo Kenyatta Foundation Publication, UNESCO, Presence Africaine, etc.
3. Illustrative suitability: some textbooks are printed in black and white, others in colour. Textbooks printed in colour are more likely to be more effective in terms of picture analysis and display.

4. Accessibility: I know suitable textbooks but lack means of accessing them. For instance the books I used at university when I was a student may not be available for the school to purchase.
5. Date of publication: An updated book is likely to provide more detail than its earlier version though as a History teacher I am obliged to confront both sources.

As History subject tutor at University, there are other elements I want to mention. Due to the maturity of students at University, I bring some textbooks which students share in groups or individually because I train future History teachers for ordinary level (13-16 years) in secondary schools. History text books are not sufficient for learners and even in some schools teachers do not have a variety of History textbooks. The following are some of the textbooks that I use in my teaching:

- General History of Africa Volume 1-8 by UNESCO / PRESENCE AFRICAINE
- A History of Africa Volume 1 – 1800-1914
- A History of Rwanda – Teachers’ Guide for Secondary Schools
- New Junior Secondary History Book 1
- Basic Themes in African History – 1855-1914
- Peoples et rois de L’Afrique des Lacs