Getting the Right Books to the Kids: The Inside Scoop on the Textbook Chain in Lower-Income Countries

Curricular Issues in Textbook Development
What is a curriculum

- It is a “contract between society, politics and schools/teachers about the way of organising and providing sequences of learning experiences aimed at producing desired learning outcomes. The curriculum reflects the kind of society to which we aspire”.

UNESCO - IBE
Curriculum Changes

• Curriculums are not stable but always changing. Changes to curriculum can be influenced by a number of factors such as:
  - An over stuffed curriculum = Learning curve for students is too steep from year to year
  - This can be the result of too many core classes required to achieve curricular goals (e.g., social science curriculum with too many core subjects such as: geography, history, sociology, psychology, economics, business, economics etc.)
Once a curriculum is found to be in need of change: there are a couple of ways to go about this:

• 1) Curriculum revision: revision to existing curriculum
   Curriculum revisions happen every 5 or so years. E.g. Kenya’s last curriculum revision was in 2002.

• 2) Curriculum reform: entire education curriculum
   This happens every 10 years or more. E.g. Kenya’s last curriculum reform was in 1985 when it changed its education policy from 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4 system.
Reforms and Revisions and Textbooks

a. Revisions and Reforms are very expensive, therefore, cannot be done often. Publishers usually make their profit from reprints. If curriculum changes often they will try and make profit with the first run this increases the costs of books.

b. Revisions and reforms take time to implement

Revisions and reforms can be done in phases. Example of Kenya’s curriculum revision of 2002. Implemented in 4 phases:
• 2003 grade 1, 5 and form 1
• 2004 grade 2, 6 and form 2
• 2005 grade 3, 7 and form 3
• 2006 grade 4, 8 and form 4
Textbooks for curriculum change
Example of Kenya

1. Tender is put out for textbooks manuscripts
2. Publishers submit manuscripts to Kenya Institute of Education (KIE)
3. Name of publisher should not be included on submitted manuscript
4. Subject panels for each curriculum subject review the books by scoring them.
Criteria for Manuscript Review

1. Conformity to curriculum
2. Content
3. Language
4. Exercises
5. Illustration and design
5. Technical specification

- Books are selected and included in the orange book of selected books.
- Kenya has Multiple Book policy = 6 titles per subject from which schools can choose from.
Who Reviews Manuscript Dummies?

The Kenya Institute of Education's Subject Panels – Consisting of:

• A) non scoring moderator/chair
• B) Subject Specialists
• C) Panel Secretary
• D) Experienced teachers

The panelist cannot be authors of books being evaluated.
Piloting of Textbooks

• Ideally books should be piloted before being printed and distributed. This fixes any problems in books.
• But this is not possible for Kenya because of timeline established:
  - 4 months to prepare dummies after curriculum revision
  - 3 months to print &distribute to about 17,000 primary schools and 3,000 secondary schools
• *In Europe this entire process takes 12-18 months.*
Problem Presented by Tight Book Schedule

- The book reviewed is a dummy. The books published after approval sometimes do not meet the specifications set by KIE.
- Books are not reviewed after approval, so printers or publishers can decide to cut costs, or not to pay attention to quality or content.
- As a result, substandard books are in the market that were approved – grammar & punctuation errors, and substandard graphic design etc.
Another problem Presented by Tight Book Schedule

- Schools spend money to repair poorly bound books by printers.
- Local printers cannot compete because offshore printing is faster.
- Content is compromised to make the deadlines.
Local Capacity for Book Writing

• In Kenya, currently most local authors are practicing teachers who do not necessarily have the skills required to author textbooks.

• The Kenya Publishers Association – training for authors.
Conclusion

- It takes time and money to change/revise curriculum.

- It also take time and money to prepare and deliver good textbooks to support curricula.