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Teaching Patriotism: History Teachers' Perceptions of Kenya's National Symbols

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Semiotics.

The study's main purpose was to analyse the meaning attached to Kenya's national symbols by History teachers. The study was guided by two theories: Social Semiotic Theory (SST) and the Multimodal Discourse Analysis theory (MDA). The study adopted a qualitative paradigm and descriptive survey design. The purposive sampling method was used to sample three symbols of national unity used for the study. Seventeen (17) teachers of History were purposively selected, and a questionnaire was administered to them. The questionnaire contained seventeen (17) items that were both open and closed-ended. This was done to enable the respondents to give their perception on the Kenya national symbols. The questionnaire focused on the three national symbols sampled, which were the national anthem, national flag and national emblem. The results were presented using themes. The study revealed a divergence between some teachers' personal views and the official narrative prescribed in the curriculum. The findings indicated that teachers understood the official meanings of these symbols but often contextualised them based on their experiences. The findings also highlighted various tools and approaches used by teachers to instruct students about national symbols. However, findings showed that time constraints and a lack of training limited their ability to engage students in deeper discussions. To ensure that curriculum content reflects Kenya's diverse ethnic and historical realities, making national narratives more inclusive. The data obtained would be useful in developing training programs that focus on semiotic pedagogy, peace education, and multicultural instruction to equip teachers with tools for meaningful symbolic education. The data obtained will further encourage teachers to engage in reflective practice, allowing them to reconcile personal beliefs with professional responsibilities. The findings of this study would further contribute new knowledge and information in the area of applied linguistics.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of national symbols as tools for fostering unity, patriotism, and national consciousness has been widely recognised in nation-building efforts across the world. In Kenya, the national anthem, flag, and emblem are entrenched in the 2010 Constitution as symbols meant to reflect shared values, aspirations, and identity among a culturally diverse populace (ROK, 2010). Despite their symbolic significance, Kenya continues to grapple with recurring ethnic tensions and post-election violence, especially in regions such as the Rift Valley (Beja, 2013). These persistent conflicts raise critical questions about the effectiveness of national symbols in promoting peace and unity.

The role of educators, particularly History teachers, in mediating the meaning and impact of these symbols is thus vital but remains underexplored. While the symbols themselves are officially celebrated and institutionalised, the meanings ascribed to them are not static but rather socially constructed and interpreted through various lenses. Among these lenses is the educational environment, where teachers of history serve as key intermediaries. The teacher's understanding and transmission of the symbols significantly influence how students perceive national identity and cohesion (Wairimu, 2019).

Yet, little empirical work has been done to examine how teachers of history interpret these symbols within the classroom setting, and what messages of peace, identity or nationalism the teachers believe the artefacts communicate. The gap is particularly evident in areas with a history of ethnic conflict, such as Rongai sub-county in Nakuru County, where national symbols could serve as either unifying tools or sources of contestation depending on their representation. This paper investigates the perceptions held by teachers of History in Rongai sub-county toward Kenya's national symbols. The specific objective is to analyse the meanings that Teachers of History attach to the Kenya national symbols.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Symbols are more than ceremonial emblems, where they function as channels for expressing identity, unity and civic pride among citizens. The need to identify the symbols and examine what they represent is crucial. Symbols can be mobilised as tools of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding refers to interventions designed to prevent or resolve conflict, ideally through inclusive and cohesive national narratives. This paper evaluates national symbols using Social Semiotics and Multimodality as interpretive lenses through which Kenya's national symbols may be more deeply understood. The two theories provide the scaffolding for a richer

analysis of how symbols are constructed, transmitted and internalised.

Symbols of the Nations: Their Meaning, Role and Functions

In understanding national symbols, we must first engage with their core nature of symbols. Symbols, as Turner (2018) posits, are not simply signs for intellectual consumption. They are embodied experiences that summon memory, emotion and value. Unlike metaphors, which typically rely on comparison, symbols have the power to engage the individual both at a cognitive and affective level, shaping attitudes and actions in profound ways (Hanna et al., 2017). This is especially relevant in the context of national flags, anthems and emblems, which serve to evoke patriotism and reinforce belonging. Appreciating the essence of symbols is critical for grasping their role in national identity and peacebuilding.

As Mahmuluddin (2024) suggests, symbols hold the unique ability to transcend language and cultural boundaries, offering a universal shorthand for shared values. Sullivan (2018) echoes this sentiment, emphasising that when harnessed effectively, symbols can craft collective narratives that unify rather than divide. In social semiotic terms, a symbol comprises a *sign* and a *signifier*, the former being the object itself, the latter its interpreted meaning (Dunleavy, 2020). Interpretation is not uniform; it is mediated by personal and contextual factors. Still, in social contexts, symbols often carry consensual meanings, as Owens (2016) points out. These shared interpretations form the basis of symbolic cohesion within a society.

However, it is important to acknowledge that meaning is not inherent. Bonvillain (2019) argues that the link between a symbol and its meaning is learned and not natural. Individuals internalise symbols through cultural socialisation, though sometimes explicitly and often unconsciously

(Ohme & Boshoff, 2019). This makes symbols incredibly potent, but also highly variable in their reception. The intricacies of meaning-making are further illuminated by Hutchins (2020), who situates symbolic interaction within a multimodal landscape. He asserts that cognition emerges not only from mental processes but from complex interactions between people and their environments, which include culturally embedded symbols.

Recognising this complexity allows one to navigate the tensions and possibilities that come with symbolic interpretation. Symbols evoke different meanings depending on the viewers' experiences and social conditioning. As Ting-Toomey et al. (2018) emphasise, the experience necessitates a reflective and culturally sensitive approach to using symbols in peacebuilding and communication. Also, complex representations tend to hold personal meaning for people. Quinn et al. (2018) show that the same symbol may hold vastly different meanings for different individuals. Hatch (2018) suggests that symbols can become tools of inclusion or exclusion, depending on how they are mobilised by those in power, a theme echoed by Hall (2019) in his analysis of symbolic control and political messaging.

In exploring the political utility of symbols, Heersmink (2018) and McGregor (2020) bring a critical perspective. They work to unite people and also help a group become more powerful. When they construct narratives or promote certain views, the way these narratives and views are used often demonstrates the bigger patterns of power in society. This study affirms that in Kenya, symbols like the flag and anthem function as multi-dimensional representations of collective identity (Onditi, 2018). They are used by people from diverse backgrounds, though not always in the same effective way. What unites a community for some may be what divides it for others. These divergent meanings, especially in times of conflict, intensify the symbolic stakes, as Lipset (2018) observes.

The National Anthem Representing National Unity

One of the strongest national symbols is the national anthem, which carries a lot of historical value and emotional power. The first verses of the Kenyan anthem show that it's not just a song for ceremonies; it is a request for unity, justice and peace. The anthem is designed to reflect the nation's aspirations and core values. It encapsulates a sense of shared destiny and moral responsibility, aligning personal conduct with the ideals of nationhood (Muturi et al. 2025). Yet, the extent to which the anthem's symbolic messages translate into everyday national consciousness remains contested. Wairimu argues that the repetitive use of anthems in school assemblies and state functions may lead to symbolic fatigue, especially when these rituals are not accompanied by critical discussions or reflections (Wairimu, 2019).

When young citizens engage with the anthem purely as a routine rather than a meaningful expression of national purpose, the anthem's potential as a unifying and peace-promoting tool is diminished. Nonetheless, the anthem retains its status as a performative expression of unity. It creates moments of collective identity, particularly during national events and sports competitions, where citizens momentarily suspend their differences in favour of a shared symbolic space. The way teachers frame and interpret the anthem within the classroom can significantly shape students' understanding of what it means to be Kenyan (Muturi et al. 2025).

Communication and the Use of Symbols in Promoting Peace

Symbols are powerful communicative devices. Symbols are not only visual or auditory cues but vehicles through which messages of unity, identity and reconciliation can be transmitted, often more effectively than words alone. Within the field of peace communication, national symbols play a

crucial role in framing narratives that encourage social cohesion and mutual respect across divisions. It matters to look at how symbols function in the midst of and after war. Symbols like the flag or the anthem become more important when there is tension in the nation, as in election or civil unrest periods. They become rallying points or, conversely, flashpoints depending on how they are used and by whom (Muturi et al., 2025).

Symbols of peace can be protected or broken by what political actors choose to do. For symbols to work, people must use them intentionally. Doing something small, like displaying a flag or singing a song, isn't enough. They should be incorporated into a wider set of teaching methods and social actions involving conversations, thoughtfulness and everyone in the classroom. In this way, symbols become tools for transformation, not just tradition (Wairimu, 2019).

The Impact of National Symbols on Creating a State's Identity

It discusses the usage of symbols like flags, anthems and emblems by states to ensure loyalty, a sense of identity and a solid continuity. Edensor (2020) and Elgenius (2018) emphasise the capacity of national symbols to communicate shared history, values and collective aspirations. States use national flags, anthems and emblems to help their citizens feel they are part of a group and proud of their homeland. Patriotism involves both emotions and beliefs about a country, which is often fostered by being involved in society. Edensor (2020) emphasises that these symbols encapsulate national values and collective memory, fostering emotional connections to one's country.

Similarly, Elgenius (2018) notes that national symbols promote positive national identification by highlighting the distinctiveness of a people. Having national symbols is important for building unity and national identity, mainly in post-colonial countries such as Kenya. The symbols are the constitutionally

named artefacts such as the Kenyan flag, national anthem and national emblem, each having a significant history and culture behind them. The main purpose of symbols like the flag, anthem and emblem is to unite people, remember the past and encourage civic pride. The symbols are constitutionally enshrined in Kenya and intended to serve as vessels of national unity (ROK, 2010).

However, the gap between symbolic representation and lived realities, which are marked by recurring ethnic strife and socio-political discord, raises questions about the actual impact of these symbols, especially in educational settings. Kenya's national symbols, particularly the flag, anthem and emblem, are enshrined in the Constitution and are meant to serve as expressions of peace, unity, and national pride (ROK, 2010). However, Kenya's history of ethnically charged violence, especially in the Rift Valley, raises concerns about the effectiveness of these symbols in fulfilling their intended functions (Beja & Gitau, 2012; Kirimi, 2018; Miller et al., 2018).

Nationalism in Curricula

National Symbols as Pedagogical Tools

It is important to explore how governments incorporate national symbols into educational programs to shape civic identity. Education systems often play a central role in shaping national identity, with schools acting as key sites for instilling patriotic values. The case of Kenya is contextualised with examples such as the recitation of the loyalty pledge and singing of the anthem in schools. During the second president of Kenya's regime, the late president Moi, patriotism was actively promoted through practices like the loyalty pledge, where students declared their devotion to the president and the nation of Kenya (Mackay, 2020). However, with time, such practices have diminished, prompting questions about how patriotism is currently cultivated in schools.

Such practices aimed to ingrain civic values in students from an early age. Yet, with the decline of these rituals, the symbolic literacy of Kenyan youth may be weakening, suggesting a disconnection between formal instruction and emotional resonance. Educational platforms, in particular the teaching of History, are emphasised as key avenues through which national identity can be promoted (Wairimu, 2019). However, as observed in the study, many teachers of History approach national symbols through a strictly factual lens, focusing on the symbolism of flag colours or anthem lyrics without encouraging critical or emotional engagement. This ritualistic pedagogy risks reducing these powerful symbols to textbook trivia, rather than dynamic tools for unity and reflection.

Wairimu (2019) emphasises that civic platforms, including History education, offer powerful opportunities for reinforcing national cohesion through the deliberate use of symbols. Yet, if these are handled superficially, as is often the case with rote recitation of the anthem or unexplained flag-raising ceremonies, the symbols may fail to meaningfully engage students (Guibernau, 2013). Mkhize et al. (2010) discuss how History curricula are often instrumentalised to construct national identity, with an emphasis on shared struggles and unity.

Pedagogical Semiotics and Visual Literacy

Semiotics provides a framework for understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted through signs and symbols. Semiotics is used as the analytical lens to interpret the signs and meanings associated with these symbols. Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) assert that visual communication is as critical as verbal language in contemporary societies. Through visual semiotics, national symbols are not only seen as static icons, but also as evolving signs that are interpreted differently depending on cultural, social and individual contexts (Danesi, 2020; Krippendorff, 2018). An

elaborate framework is offered by semiotics, particularly the social semiotic theory and multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Krippendorff, 2018).

The semiotic perspectives underscore that symbols do not carry meaning inherently, rather, meaning is produced through social interaction and cultural context. In this light, teachers become not just conveyors of curriculum but interpreters of cultural meaning. Yet, as the study reveals, few educators are equipped with the semiotic training necessary to navigate this complexity effectively. (Muturi et al., 2025). Teachers serve as crucial agents in shaping students' semiotic literacy. However, the lack of training in multimodal discourse analysis and semiotic pedagogy often leads to shallow teaching of symbolic content. Supsakova (2020) and Kędra (2018) emphasise the importance of equipping educators with visual literacy skills to foster meaningful student engagement with visual and symbolic texts.

Teachers' Role in Meaning-Making

Teachers' personal interpretations and cultural backgrounds influence how they teach national symbols. Owens (2016) suggests that socially shared symbols rely on consensus meanings, but in practice, these meanings can vary significantly. In conflict-prone contexts, symbols may be perceived through lenses of marginalisation or resistance, rather than unity (Lipset, 2018; Arato et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions is vital in assessing the real impact of symbolic education. As Quinn et al. (2018) explain, symbols often hold deeper emotional and historical associations, and educators are instrumental in mediating these meanings for students.

Even though the Kenya flag and anthem are filled with historical meaning, the ways people understand them are very different in different areas and among different communities. Belonging to a

community that was not included in national leadership may encourage teachers to see and teach these symbols from a critical point of view. The question now is: If members of ethnic and political groups look at such symbols differently, can national unity really be formed? As a result, History teachers become important drivers of what being American means. Having certain perceptions and sharing these perceptions with students can shape patriotism, identity and how much a nation feels united. Thus, a critical and culturally relevant way of teaching symbolism could help transmit patriotism in Kenya today.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study relies on Semiotics, in particular Social Semiotic Theory developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, as well as Multi-Modal Analysis. It contended that every meaning comes from society and is affected by its surroundings. It points out that the effect of symbols is due to people agreeing on their meanings as time goes by. Social semiotic theory, as elucidated by scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), explores the relationship between signs, meaning, and social practices. It investigates how signs and symbols are used to communicate and construct meaning within specific sociocultural contexts. By drawing on social semiotic theory, this study sought to analyse the role of national symbols as communicative tools in shaping perceptions of nationhood, identity, and communal bonds.

In addition to social semiotic theory, the study incorporated multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA). This framework, developed by scholars such as Jewitt (2014) and Kress (2009), recognises that communication involves various modes beyond just verbal or written language. MMDA examines the interplay of different semiotic resources, such as images, gestures, sounds, and spatial arrangements, within a given discourse. By employing MMDA, the study aimed to analyse the multimodal nature of

national symbols, exploring how visual, auditory, and other non-verbal elements contribute to their meaning and impact on communication.

The combination of social semiotic theory and multimodal discourse analysis provided a comprehensive framework for investigating the role of national symbols in communication. These theories allowed for an understanding of how symbols operate as social and communicative resources, while also considering the multimodal nature of symbolic communication beyond linguistic dimensions. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aimed to shed light on the complex dynamics between national symbols, meaning-making, and the construction of collective identities.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a descriptive survey design, as it was deemed appropriate for gathering relevant and comprehensive information regarding the semiotic interpretation of Kenya's national symbols in communicating peace in Rongai sub-county of Nakuru County. The descriptive survey design allows researchers to collect data from a large sample size and draw conclusions based on the information gathered (Orodho, 2009). By selecting a descriptive survey design, the study aims to gather comprehensive information that will contribute to a better understanding of the semiotic interpretation of national symbols and their role in communicating peace in the specific context of Rongai sub-county.

The study focused on teachers' views and experiences, and a qualitative paradigm was chosen to suit the research aim. The study also fits with the ideas in semiotics and cultural studies, which focus on understanding meaning that is shaped by culture. The study was performed in Rongai Sub-county, which is part of Nakuru County. Many different ethnic groups live in the sub-county, so it is a good place to study national unity and the use of symbols.

The target population included teachers of History in public secondary schools within this region, given their central role in teaching content related to national identity, history and civic values.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants. This technique ensured that only those with direct experience in teaching History in the school curriculum at secondary level and national symbols were included in the study. A total of 17 History teachers were selected, with an effort to represent a range of school types (e.g., day schools, boarding schools) and teacher demographics. The primary data collection method was administering a questionnaire. A standardised questionnaire was developed, consisting of both open and closed-ended questions. Analysis of the content showed the main themes and the symbols that teachers used when addressing the national anthem, flag and emblem.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section looks at how teachers in Rongai Sub-county view and explain the national symbols of Kenya: the flag, anthem and emblem. Questionnaires were administered to the respective teachers of History in person. All the findings on the questionnaire responses are combined and further supported by tables. The study found that teachers of History in Rongai sub-county hold diverse and often critical views toward the national symbols of Kenya, namely: the national anthem, flag and emblem. While all teachers acknowledged the constitutional and cultural significance of these symbols, their personal interpretations and teaching practices reflected both alignment with and divergence from the official narrative.

Teachers' Symbolic Associations with the National Symbols

The teachers recognised that national symbols were designed to promote unity, peace, and patriotism. However, doubts were expressed about their current

relevance and power to unify the nation, given the recurring ethnic tensions and inequality. The symbols were viewed as "idealistic constructs" that fail to reflect lived realities. Teachers generally recognised the national symbols as carriers of ideals of unity, peace, sovereignty and collective identity, as articulated in the constitution. However, the teachers questioned the extent to which these symbols continue to resonate in a society marked by

ethnic fragmentation, political rivalry and economic disparities.

For example, the symbolism of peace in the colour white on the flag was often contrasted with Kenya’s history of electoral violence. This disconnect created a cognitive and emotional tension in how teachers engaged with the symbols: they valued the ideals, but struggled with the authenticity of their application in everyday Kenyan life.

Table 1: Teachers’ Symbolic Associations with the National Symbols

Symbol	Common Symbolic Associations	Contrasting Teacher Views
National Flag	Unity, struggle for freedom	Represents ideals not realised in society
National Anthem	Prayer for peace, loyalty	Considered repetitive; lacks emotional engagement
National Emblem	Authority, national heritage	Abstract; less understood by students

Teaching Methods Used for National Symbols

It was found out that the teachers adhered to a formal, curriculum-driven approach to teaching about the national symbols, relying mostly on textbook content and school rituals such as anthem recitations and flag-raising. There was a lack of critical discussions or student-centred interpretation exercises. Most teachers of History approached national symbols as content mandated by the curriculum, teaching them as factual knowledge, explaining the flag’s colours, the anthem’s

structure, or the historical context of the emblem. However, only a few of the teachers of History viewed the symbols as *pedagogical tools* for promoting critical thinking, civic engagement, or peacebuilding.

Those who did adopt a reflective approach encouraged students to question what these symbols meant in their personal lives or communities, aiming to bridge the gap between state ideology and local reality.

Table 2: Teaching Methods Used for National Symbols

Teaching Method	Frequency of Use by Teachers	Observed Strengths	Noted Limitations
Textbook explanations	High	Covers official content	Often shallow, lacks engagement
Flag-raising & anthem singing	Medium	Builds routine and symbolism awareness	Seen as symbolic only, no discussion
Comparative symbolism (e.g., global flags)	Low	Encourages reflection, broadens perspectives	Rarely used due to curriculum constraints
Student reflections/discussions	Low	Promotes critical thinking	Requires time, not formally evaluated

Alignment between Teachers' Personal Beliefs and Curriculum Narratives

It was found out that the teachers admitted to experiencing internal conflicts when teaching national symbols. The respondents demonstrated a clear understanding of the official meanings attributed to Kenya's national symbols. While the teachers understood the curriculum's emphasis on unity and peace, there was a feeling of personal disillusionment with Kenya's political and ethnic divisions. The gap influenced how enthusiastically or critically they delivered the content. The flag was commonly described as representing unity, struggle and peace. The anthem was seen as a national prayer promoting unity and moral responsibility, while the

emblem was acknowledged as a representation of authority and national sovereignty.

However, while teachers were able to articulate these textbook definitions, the study found that many expressed a more sceptical view of how effectively these symbols function in real-world settings.

"We teach the students that the colours of the flag represent unity and peace, but honestly, I wonder how much peace these symbols bring, especially during elections," remarked one teacher.

This quote illustrates the tension between curriculum content and personal perception, a tension that permeated most of the responses.

Table 3: Alignment between Teachers' Personal Beliefs and Curriculum Narratives

Teacher Response Theme	% of Respondents	Interpretation
Strong alignment with national ideals	25%	Emphasised patriotism, hope for unity
Partial alignment (symbolic but not real)	50%	Taught symbols formally but doubted real impact
Disillusionment or detachment	25%	Viewed symbols as ineffective or outdated

It was found out that the teachers expressed the need for better training on how to teach the national symbols meaningfully. The study recommended integrating visual literacy, national discourse, and peace education into History pedagogy. There was a consensus that symbolism must be connected to real civic experiences for students to internalise its meaning. The findings reveal that teachers of History often operate in a liminal space, tasked with promoting patriotic values through symbols they perceive as both meaningful and flawed. The teachers of History perspectives highlight a critical need for curriculum innovation, professional development, and more authentic, context-sensitive methods of teaching patriotism.

Alignment between Teachers' Personal Beliefs and Official Narratives

The study found a significant ideological gap between what teachers are expected to teach and what they believe. While all participants acknowledged the importance of promoting unity and patriotism, half expressed doubts about the authenticity or impact of the national symbols in achieving these goals. The study revealed a significant disconnect between the personal beliefs of History teachers and the official narratives surrounding Kenya's national symbols. While the curriculum portrays the national anthem, flag and emblem as tools to promote unity, patriotism, and peace, as envisioned in the 2010 Constitution, teachers of History often approach the symbols with critical distance.

Teachers of History in Rongai sub-county expressed concerns that the symbols, though rich in ideological value, fail to fully capture the socio-political realities on the ground. For example, the choice of black on the flag is to symbolise African people and togetherness, but History teachers found that it does not always succeed in doing so because of remaining ethnic conflicts and injustices. Such tension was seen in how teachers chose to teach. Some chose to present the national symbols "as they are," focusing on constitutional descriptions, while others encouraged students to reflect critically on whether these symbols still hold meaning amid Kenya's recurrent conflicts and politicised ethnicity.

As mediators, teachers find space for themselves between what the state asks them to teach and their views—this influences how students see nationalism and unity. Besides, teachers' beliefs about education were affected by their personal and ethnic identities, plus how much they were involved in politics or the process of national unity. Many teachers from communities impacted by conflicts or marginalisation felt sceptical about how much the national symbols represented everyone. This changed the level of passion they had for motivating students on patriotism and unity.

Table 4: Relationship between Teachers' Personal Beliefs and the Stories Told by the State.

Alignment Category	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Strong alignment with curriculum ideals	4	24%
Partial alignment (symbolic but abstract)	8	47%
Conflict with the official narrative	5	29%

Many teachers with misaligned responses said political influence on Kenyan identity and excluding various Kenyan communities from representation were factors in their disagreement with the statement.

Common Teaching Methods for National Symbols

The ways schools taught national symbols were not the same. Whereas some teachers taught just from the textbook, others made symbolism easier to grasp by using images, real-life examples or recent news. The ways teachers taught national symbols were mostly old and did not have many new or creative approaches. Most teachers taught by using textbooks and made students memorise facts like the significance of flag colours and the words to the national anthem. Where some schools maintain

ceremonies of flag-raising and singing the anthem, these were hardly ever discussed in deeper terms. Therefore, symbols were usually regarded as fixed pieces of tradition, instead of things whose meaning could change over time and be disputed.

However, a few educators adopted more dynamic approaches, including comparative discussions about symbols from other countries, linking symbolism to current national events (e.g., elections or independence celebrations), and asking students to share what the anthem or flag meant to them personally. Even though these approaches increased interaction, they were not used widely. Various techniques and materials were used by teachers to explain why certain symbols are used as national ones. Schools did this through lessons in the textbook, flag-raising, singing the national anthem and having discussions with students. But there were differences in how much these tools helped.

Table 5: Lists Common Strategies for Teaching National Symbols

Method	Frequency of Use	Strengths	Limitations
Textbook-based teaching	High	Aligns with the syllabus	Often lacks depth or engagement
Flag-raising ceremonies	Moderate	Reinforces visual symbolism	Ritualistic, rarely analysed in class
Student reflection/discussion	Low	Promotes critical thinking	Time-consuming, underused
Comparative symbolism	Rare	Encourages broader perspectives	Requires advanced planning

A few schools integrated symbolic literacy by organising rituals and other public events, but some schools did not provide much structured help. A few instructors encouraged deep thought in students by bringing in current topics, using visual images or comparing Kenyan cultural symbols to symbols in other nations. Even so, because not all teachers were trained in pedagogical semiotics, many simply explained the material in a fixed way rather than asking students to reflect or interpret how national identity affects them.

Those who encouraged students to share their views and reflect encouraged better engagement with themes of national identity and symbols. Most of the time, these methods were not followed by other religious groups. Several teachers pointed out that additional information on national symbols, which is both current and connected to daily life, is required. They stated that simply singing the anthem or raising the flag at school events is not enough to build real patriotism unless these events are accompanied by talks, personal reflection and involvement. The results can be summarised as showing that History teachers are aware of the meaning of Kenya's national symbols, though their opinions depend on their duty, personal feelings, social views and teaching limits.

Having varied understanding is important for making educational strategies that truly teach what

patriotism is, emphasising diversity and thoughtful reflection, rather than just asking for loyalty.

Challenges Faced in Teaching National Symbols

It was found that History teachers in Kenya faced conflict between the beliefs they had and the stories officially required in the curriculum. Although the Constitution and Ministry encourage the use of national symbols, especially the flag, anthem and emblem, to unify and soothe, some teachers still doubt their effectiveness now. Many participants mentioned that aspiring symbols such as those for national unity and patriotism do not remain powerful as people experience divisions among ethnic groups and lose hope in political matters, mainly in election campaigns. Some teachers viewed the narrative promoted through national symbols as overly idealistic, often ignoring the lived experiences of marginalisation and ethnic favouritism that contradict the unity they are supposed to represent.

This dissonance led teachers to either reinterpret the symbols in locally meaningful ways or avoid extensive emphasis on them altogether. Nonetheless, most acknowledged their symbolic importance and continued to teach them as constitutionally mandated. Teachers cited several challenges in delivering symbolic content effectively. These included:

- Lack of training in semiotic analysis or peace education
- Ethnic tensions within classrooms that hinder open discussion
- Limited classroom time for non-examinable content

“Sometimes I want to go deeper into what these symbols mean to us today, but I have a syllabus to finish,” one teacher noted.

This challenge reveals systemic constraints that limit critical civic education and symbolic interpretation, despite national goals of fostering peace and unity through the curriculum.

In summary, it was discovered that among teachers who teach History:

- There appears to be a gap between what people believe and the teachings at schools.
- A lot of time is spent on standard teaching to avoid any in-depth discussions.
- Issues like a lack of proper training and not having enough time prevent further studies of patriotic symbolism.
- They may understand the country’s symbols very well, but their ideas about those symbols are often separate from what they represent to others.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that teachers of History in Rongai Sub-County generally understood the official meanings of Kenya’s national symbols but held varying personal beliefs about the symbols’ effectiveness in promoting unity. The study concluded that teachers of History in Rongai Sub-County adhered to curriculum guidelines in teaching the symbols, and therefore, no minimal use of interpretive or reflective teaching approaches. The study concluded that teachers of History in

Rongai Sub-County noted that learners often engage with the national symbols routinely and may not fully grasp their deeper significance.

The study concluded that teachers of History in Rongai Sub-County play a critical but under-supported role in shaping students’ understanding of national identity through symbols. The teachers’ of History’s beliefs and pedagogical choices significantly influence whether these symbols are perceived as meaningful or performative. The study concluded that the national symbols, while constitutionally embedded, are not inherently effective in promoting unity or patriotism unless accompanied by reflective, inclusive pedagogical strategies that address contemporary realities.

It should involve more than the performance of religious rituals. A lack of analysis and an inability to relate to these symbols may distance students from the patriotic ideas they try to communicate.

Recommendations

The research suggests that initial training for teachers needs to include deeper thinking about the role of signs and symbols in education. Courses for future and practising teachers ought to teach how symbols work and inform educators how to teach their meanings in a variety of ways. It is important for professional development to support teachers in thinking through their views, spot when different narratives do not match what they experience in the classroom and practice leading inclusive discussions.

Collaboration is particularly necessary when there are many cultural backgrounds to ensure fairness. In the end, national education policy ought to add visual literacy and critical civic education to the curriculum, so that people learn to appreciate national symbols in the context of peace, community unification and becoming involved citizens.

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