

A NOTE ON THE PROPOSED GEOGRAPHY SYLLABUS FOR THE EAST AFRICAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

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(Editor's Note: In view of the general interest in the discussions which have been taking place to formulate a new Geography syllabus for the East African Certificate of Education, Professor R. C. Honeybone, Director of the Institute of Education, Dar es Salaam, has been asked to write on the background of the proposed syllabus.)

In March, 1968, a very important meeting took place in Nairobi to discuss proposals for revising the geography syllabus for the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate Examination. Such meetings have been held before but there were several factors which made this meeting of particular importance. First, the recent meeting of the new East African Examinations Council has given a great impetus to plans for implementing the autonomy which a local examining board will offer; second, the meeting had been prefaced by careful preparation in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania in the panels of the Institutes of Education; third, the breadth of the representation of the three countries was increased by the inclusion of staff members of the institutes and colleges of the University of East Africa; fourth, in all three countries new African graduate teachers, well qualified in modern approaches to geography teaching, are emerging from the university colleges in substantially larger numbers than ever before; and fifth, the institute panels are able, by in-service courses and the preparation of teaching materials, to ensure that any new syllabus stands a good chance of both successful and rapid implementation in the schools.

All these factors contributed to making the Nairobi meeting of special significance and although the proposed syllabus has still to be ratified by the Ministries of Education of the three countries and the Cambridge Syndicate, it is pleasing that delegates of the three countries agreed on a syllabus which marks a big step forward in outlining a geography programme which is modern in basic method and highly relevant in content to the development of East Africa.

The syllabus itself can be briefly summarised. The proposals are for two papers each of 2¼ hours. Paper 1 consists of:

Section A, (one compulsory question): Mapwork and Photograph Interpretation.
Section B (two questions): East Africa (Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania).

Paper 2 consists of:

Section A (two questions): Africa

Section B (two questions): Studies of Development.

This clearly represents a change in emphasis from the present syllabus in that the sections on the elements of physical geography and the elements of world human geography are omitted and replaced by specified regional studies where physical and human geography are integrated. But a summary of this sort fails to express the intentions of the syllabus or to indicate the type of questions which it is hoped will figure prominently in the examination papers. It is these factors which are of more importance from the point of view of the teacher than the list of content.

The writer is a member of the geography panel of the Institute of Education, University College, Dar es Salaam, and is therefore more familiar with the preliminary work which resulted in the Tanzanian proposals to the Nairobi meeting than with the Uganda and Kenya preparatory discussions. The following comments therefore draw for reference on the Report of the Tanzanian Syllabus in Geography for Forms 1-4, compiled by the Geography Panel of the Institute of Education, Dar es Salaam, January, 1967.

This document contains the 1955 Tanganyika Secondary School Syllabus, the 1966 Tanzanian syllabus for Forms 1 and 2 and the 1968 Cambridge School Certificate syllabus. It presents the basis for an interesting comparison, but its major value lies in the answers to the two related questions:

- a. Why do we teach geography? and
- b. Why do we teach geography in East Africa?

The members of the panel regard geography primarily as a field study of real landscapes using certain procedures and skills. They feel that field work in the local area should be the starting point for all possible topics at all levels and that similar but modified field work procedures should be followed in the classroom for the bulk of the teaching. This means that generalised world studies should play a much less important part than formerly and that the emphasis should be placed on the development of useful skills through the study of small specified areas which have special significance to the citizens of the developing countries of East Africa.

All this is spelled out in more detail in the panel report and is reflected in the proposed syllabus. There is discussion of the principles of geography teaching, of the principal skills which should be developed and of the content which is of special significance to the development of East Africa. Perhaps the most important single implication of the discussion is that the panel members firmly reject the concept which has dominated teaching and examining for so long that geography is basically a series of generalised facts about man and his world environments.

The selected areas for Paper 1, Section B (East Africa) and Paper 2, Section A (Africa) and Section B (Studies of Development) are listed in the syllabus. They have been chosen so that pupils will be involved in the study of particular landscapes representing a variety of physical and cultural environments and which are relevant to a thorough understanding of the pupil's own environment and to the factors influencing the development of different landscapes. The development of skills is stressed and the agreed Nairobi syllabus includes statements about methods as well as content. The following extracts from it illustrate the above points:

'Candidates will be tested on their ability to use geographical skills as well as their geographical knowledge of the regions set for study.'

'Questions involving the testing of geographic skills may be set in any section of the papers.'

'Field study of a small area.'

'Candidates will be expected to have studied specific geographical areas that illustrate different types of development' and to have '... an understanding of the factors aiding and problems facing development.'

All this marks a tremendous step forward in theory but no one believes that a new syllabus by itself will achieve rapid and effective changes. Both the panel report and the representatives at the Nairobi meeting recognised this problem. There is an interesting and realistic discussion of the problems of implementation

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EAST AFRICAN GEOGRAPHY SYLLABUS

in the panel report and suggestions about the production of the teaching materials that will be required. This point was taken up at the Nairobi meeting and, as a result, each country has undertaken to produce material suitable for the study of the topics in the new syllabus which are not adequately covered in the existing textbooks. This agreement marks a major development in international co-operation and augers well for the subsequent discussions with the Cambridge Syndicate and the later progress of the East African Examinations Council.

But no examination syllabus can be really effective in modernising teaching and bringing education into line with local, regional, national and international plans for development unless the examination questions themselves are based on the principles underlying the syllabus. The panel report states that:

Hitherto the School Certificate examination has rather over-emphasised the testing of factual knowledge and has thus promoted the type of teaching which encourages memorisation rather than understanding. We would seek to test both the knowledge and the understanding of geographical material. Good geography testing should include the presentation of geographic 'raw material' which the pupils have to study in order to find out the answers to questions. Thus fundamentally there is no difference between the learning process and the testing process." (page 6)

And in Appendix D, the report gives examples of good and bad examining. Clearly drastic changes in the methods of examining cannot be introduced suddenly. This would be unfair to some of the candidates. But changes need to be made as quickly as possible. The Tanzanian panel has already produced a pamphlet on Weather Stations in Schools, and a Map and Photographic Study Book and a Handbook on Fieldwork with many practical examples will be available in a few weeks. This material will help teachers to introduce more practical work into their courses, to offer more practice in developing geographical skills and generally to promote the understanding and interpretation of geographical facts.

The other material which the three countries will produce will also help in the process of adaptation to new examination techniques, but what is needed now is the compilation and circulation of specimen examination papers and their thorough discussion at in-service courses. This compilation is at present being undertaken by the panels in the three countries. It is important to maintain the present impetus and to help the teachers achieve the dual and associated task of emphasising geography both as a discipline and as a potent means of speeding economic and social development; for in the works of the panel report, (page 3) "Geography teaching . . . should concentrate particularly upon making the pupil aware of the characteristics of his own environment both locally and in East Africa. By practical skill programmes of map reading, simple surveying, plan and diagram drawing, soil testing, picture interpretation, local weather reading etc., we should also be providing him with the basic ability to play an active part in local community development. Our teaching should also make him aware of the problems and prospects for development of his own country and continent."