

Students and Teachers Constraints in the Implementation of the Integrated English Syllabus in Secondary Schools in Mumias Sub County, Kenya

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Abstract

The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) and the general public have expressed concern over the persistent poor performance of students in English at the KCSE level and some have attributed this to the integrated approach of teaching language and literature. Despite the shift in the examination structure by the KNEC in 2006 to integrate the four skills of language with aspects of literature, the teaching approach in the preparation of learners for the English examinations has not fully adopted the integrated approach. This study set to investigate the factors that influence the effective implementation of the integrated English language syllabus among teachers and students in Mumias Sub County, Kenya. The study was guided by Fullan's theory of change which postulates that the implementation of any programme depends on resources, teachers' capabilities, preparedness and involvement in educational reform and positive orientation towards the programme by teachers and students. The study adopted a descriptive survey study design. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires, interview schedules and observation guides. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to identify the study sample which consisted of 25 English language teachers and 250 students selected randomly from 15 secondary schools in Mumias Sub County. The analysis of data was done using basic descriptive statistics based on the objectives of the study. Findings from the study showed that there are problems related to teaching methodology, availability and suitability of learning resources, the school environment, effective integration of English and literature, students and teachers' attitudes and other socio-economic factors which account for low student achievement in English. The study suggests ways of designing appropriate teaching and learning resources, improving teachers' pedagogical skills through strategies aimed at coping with the challenges faced in the teaching of integrated English and the provision of avenues for the teachers to play a critical role in designing an appropriate curriculum for the effective teaching and learning of the integrated English language syllabus.

Keywords: Constraints, Teachers, Students, Integrated English and Secondary Schools.

Introduction

English language plays a significant role in Kenya as it is the official language that is used in education, the judiciary, commerce and in parliament (Waithaka, 1993; Sereti, 1993; Teyie and Okatch, 1991). Moreover English is an international language used globally and the leading media for communication in international conferences and meetings (Okwara *et al.*, 2009). It is also the language of wider use in multi lingual settings.

The teaching of English language at secondary school level in Kenya has undergone some changes ostensibly to improve the quality of its teaching (Mwangola, 1993). After independence, English language was taught as a subject from primary school level through secondary to higher education.

The introduction of the 8.4.4 system of education brought radical changes in the educational structure, the curriculum and in the teaching approach (Magoma, 1999). The Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of the 2nd University in Kenya popularly known as the Mackay Commission of 1981 ushered in the 8.4.4 system of education and set in motion the concept of integration of subjects in the Kenyan curriculum. For instance, Kiswahili language and literature in Kiswahili were integrated to form Kiswahili. Clothing and Textiles, Home Management, Food and Nutrition were all offered as one subject under the title "Home – Science." At the primary school level, integrated social studies combining Geography, History and Civics became part of the school curriculum (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). English language and literature in English, initially taught as separate subjects, were combined and taught as integrated English which is the focus of this study. Integrated English was first taught in Kenyan secondary schools in 1986 and the process has undergone a number of vicissitudes in its implementation.

Integration means merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich each of the entities (K.I.E, 2002). Integration has been done across curriculum and in various subjects. Integration is a philosophy of teaching in which content is drawn from several subject areas to focus on a particular topic or theme (McBrien and Brandit, 1997). Blenkin and Kelly (1981) view integration of subject matter as an approach to learning that does not accept or base itself on any notion of sanctity of traditional divisions. Pring (1971), on his part asserts that subject integration is connected to natural inquiry of children, which does not respect divisions. Division of knowledge into discrete subjects is artificial and does not reflect correctly the essential unity of reality. This is the approach adopted in this study.

According to Morris (2003), there are several popular integration models used in the curriculum. Kenya adopted the sequenced model in the integration of English language and literature in English, where units are taught separately, but are designed to provide a broad framework for related concepts. For example while teaching comprehension, one could select a passage from the literature set book.

Manning (1997) states that English is the indispensable means of communication for more than one billion people throughout the world and as an important medium of instruction in the educational system. Goodson and Peters (1990) say that whereas other subjects import into the school knowledge and procedures of disciplines whose centers of practice lie outside, English as part of its responsibility teaches the literacy on which the practice of other subjects

is based. This relationship which English bears on the curriculum makes it an important language in the Kenyan educational system. Hence, adopting an integrative framework in the teaching of English is likely to impinge on other subjects.

The introduction of integrated English was not well received by the teachers. Evaluation in 1989 by the K.I.E reported that the integrated syllabus was too wide to be covered in the allotted time. It also reported that the teachers of integrated English had a negative attitude towards the integrated approach and teaching and learning resources were a challenge. The Commission of Inquiry into the education system of Kenya of 1999 also received submissions to the effect that integration of various subjects had made content too wide and unmanageable. It is thus possible that challenges to integration emanate from both conceptualization and implementation levels

Methodology

The study concentrated on selected schools in Mumias Sub County in Kakamega County in Western Kenya. It adopted a descriptive survey design in order to investigate the constraints of teachers and students in the implementation of the integrated English language syllabus.

The target population was the 49 secondary schools in Mumias Sub County. The researcher concentrated on 15 schools as this was an adequate representation of the schools in the region: 6 county schools, 6 sub county schools, and 3 private schools. The study targeted all the teachers of the integrated English syllabus and selected students in each chosen school. Fifteen schools were selected by purposive and simple random sampling. The research instruments were questionnaires for both students and teachers while the interview schedules were for teachers of English only. Interview responses and responses to the open – ended items in the teacher questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively. The close – ended items in the teacher questionnaire were analyzed using simple statistics like frequencies and percentages. The researcher entered the data into the computer and used Ms Excel 2003 as the analytical tool. All the responses were organized into various aspects of the study based on the research objectives. Tabular description and graphical displays were used to summarize data and present results.

Results and Discussion

Findings from a total of 25 teachers of English language from 15 secondary schools who participated in the study indicated that 13 (52%) of them were aged 21-30 while the other 12 (48%) were aged 31-40 years. None of the teachers were aged over 40 years. This therefore means that a majority of the teachers of English were young teachers in age and newly employed. The teachers were thus teaching under the revised English syllabus introduced in 2003 which lays lots of emphasis on integration. The relationship between the teachers' age and the implementation of the integrated English syllabus using the Pearson's Correlation (r) established a correlation of +0.280. This figure indicated a weak relationship between age and the implementation of the integrated English syllabus. This implied that the variation between age and implementation of the integrated English syllabus was not very closely connected. Thus the age of a teacher may not be relied upon with regard to the implementation of the integrated English syllabus.

Teachers' academic and professional qualification plays an important role in influencing instructional competence and may also determine existence of instructional problems in a specific subject (Kangumia, 2005). The majority of the teachers of English in the schools visited were university graduates with a Bachelor of Education (Arts) degree in English and literature. This category of teachers formed the largest proportion of 13(52.0%) of the total. Those with Diploma in Education were 4(16.0%). Therefore, 17(68.0%) of the teachers in the schools had the basic qualifications for the teaching of English. It is therefore noted that the quality of English language teachers is not a basic problem since most of them had the requisite academic qualifications to teach the integrated English language syllabus.

However, in the schools that were studied, a total of 8(32.0%) of the teachers were not professionally qualified teachers. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) requires that for one to teach in a secondary school in Kenya, they must be holders of a Diploma in Education or a Bachelor of Education degree from a recognized institution of higher learning and must have been trained to teach English and any other subject. Most of them had a minimum Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) certificate, having only completed their secondary school course. They had been contracted by the schools Boards of Management to offer teaching services to cushion the schools against the teacher shortage gap. The schools found it easier to employ and remunerate them unlike the professionally qualified teachers who were yet to be fully employed by the government. 1 (4.0%) had a Bachelor of Arts degree and 1(4.0%) had a Master of Arts degree.

The relationship between the implementation of the integrated English syllabus and the teachers' academic qualification had a Pearson correlation (r) of -0.655. This showed a significant relationship between academic qualification and the teaching of the integrated English syllabus. The coefficient of determination was 34% which implied that 34% of the teachers' qualifications would have been responsible for the effective implementation of the integrated English language syllabus within the classroom.

Kangumia (2005) observes that past academic achievement plays a significant role in the profession of a teacher. A higher academic qualification influenced a teacher's effective implementation of the integrated English language syllabus. Professional training in the integration of English and literature should therefore be considered as a factor towards enhancing the effective implementation of the integrated English language syllabus.

The study sought to establish the teaching experience of the teachers of English and its relationship to the implementation of the integrated English syllabus. 11(44.0%) of the teachers had a teaching experience of less than 5 years; 5(20.0%) of the teachers had an experience of six to ten years, 4(16.0%) had a teaching experience of eleven to fifteen years, and 5(20.0%) had more than sixteen years' teaching experience. It was thus noted that the teaching group had reasonable teaching experience. Teaching experience of the English language teachers is not a basic problem in the study area. The relationship between the implementation of the integrated English language syllabus and teaching experience showed a significant Pearson correlation (r) of +0.497. This implied there was a close connection between the implementation of the integrated English language syllabus and the teaching experience of the teacher. The more experience the teacher had, the more he was likely to effectively implement the teaching of the integrated English syllabus. It is important to note

that teaching experience accounted for a coefficient of determination of 0.294 expressed as 29% which showed a possible relationship between teaching experience and the implementation of the integrated English language syllabus. However, there was still some influence of other variables in the effective implementation of the integrated English syllabus apart from the teaching experience.

The teaching combination is also an important aspect in the implementation of the integrated English syllabus. Seventeen (68.0%) of the teachers had English/Literature as their teaching subject combination. However, there were also other teachers of English with different subject combinations. Two (14.0%) had English/Kiswahili combination; 1(4.0%) had English/History combination; 1(4.0%) had English/Geography combination, 3(12.0%) had English/CRE combination, while 1(4.0%) had English/Secretarial Studies subject combination. This shows that even though most teachers had English/Literature subject combination that is recommended to effectively handle the subject, a number of teachers had other combinations that could possibly hinder them from effectively handling the integrated course. Such teachers need staff development and upgrading programmes to enable them cope up with the changing demands of the curriculum.

The study also sought to ascertain the number of teachers of English in the schools in the Sub County. 17(68.0%) of the teachers indicated that they had between one and three teachers in their schools. 8(32.0%) of the teachers interviewed indicated that they had between four to six teachers in their schools. Asked whether the number of teachers of English in their schools was sufficient 6(24.0%) affirmed while 19(76.0%) stated that the numbers were inadequate. These findings therefore indicate that a majority of the schools are poorly staffed and ill prepared for effective implementation of the integrated English syllabus. According to Leung (2010) roles of teachers are important in curriculum integration without whom the curriculum will not be effectively implemented.

The study also sought to establish the teachers work load and how it related to the implementation of the integrated English language syllabus. Six (24.0%) of the teachers indicated that they had less than 20 lessons per week, 7(28.0%) had between 21-27 lessons in a week, 5(20.0%) had between 28-30 lessons and 7(28.0%) of teachers had more than 30 lessons per week. This shows that more than half of the number of the teachers had a workload of more than 27 lessons per week which is the recommended minimum teaching load by the Teachers' Service Commission. Heavy workload on the teachers is also due to the many exercises they have to correct and hence, little time is left for teachers to attend to individual students and do effective lesson preparation.

The teachers were asked to rate the teaching load. 15(60.0%) indicated that the workload was heavy, 9(36.0%) rated it as comfortable, and only 1(4.0%) were comfortable with their teaching load. The constraint of the high workloads against fewer qualified teachers, presented a challenge to the implementation of the integrated English syllabus within the schools. This could also mean that the quality and quantity of work given to the students was insufficient given the large numbers of students occasioned by increased enrolment with the introduction of Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) in Kenya in 2008.

In conclusion, five aspects had significant contribution to the effective implementation of the integrated English syllabus. These were the number of teachers, the teaching loads, the

teachers' academic and professional qualifications, the teaching experience and the teaching subject combinations. This implies that the effective implementation of the integrated English language syllabus requires an adequate number of teachers who are adequately trained, have a bigger teaching experience, with a lesser teaching load and with the correct teaching combination in order for them to prepare and effectively teach the integrated English language syllabus.

On the other hand, the study also sought to study the constraints faced by students in secondary schools during the implementation of the integrated English syllabus. 176 (70.4%) of the students involved in the study previously studied in primary schools based in the rural areas. 74 (29.6%) of the students indicated that they had studied in primary schools based in urban centers. This shows that the majority of the students had a rural setting where mother tongue is the major medium of communication. This could have some influence on the implementation of the integrated English language syllabus since most students had a relatively poor foundation in English. For students to perform well in secondary schools in the area, the language must be emphasized right from the initial stages of a child's development, preferably at primary school level.

The study sought to establish the learners' use of English language within the school, at home and during the performance of co-curricular activities. Frequent use of a language in activities within the class and in other activities other than classroom activities may have an effect on its learning. The students were asked to state whether they used English while in class. 242 (96.8%) stated that they used English in class while 8 (3.2%) did not. A significant number of students therefore use English in the class. This therefore means that although English was widely used in the classroom environment, a significant number of students spoke other competing languages within the classroom.

The students also indicated that not all of them used English when performing other activities in the school. 99 (33.3%) indicated that they used English mostly in their conversations outside class, while 131 (67.7%) indicated they mostly used other languages. This indicates that a good number of students did not frequently use English in their activities outside the classroom, where it is mainly the medium of instruction.

The study sought to establish how these languages hindered the effective learning of integrated English. 13 (52.0%) teachers felt that learners tended to translate directly the syntactic structures of the other languages into English. 5 (20.0%) stated that the frequent use of other languages denied the students an opportunity to practice the use of English while 7 (28.0%) stated that the use of other languages led to the direct translation of those languages into English. There is need on the part of the teachers to encourage practice in the English language.

Students were also required to state whether they used English during the performance of co-curricular activities. 81 (32.4%) students stated that they used English during co-curricular activities while 169 (67.6%) did not. Other languages were however popular during co-curricular activities. It therefore means that only a small number of students practice the use of English during co-curricular activities compared to the other dominant languages notably Kiswahili and sheng'.

Since most of the secondary schools in the study area were day schools, the researcher also sought to know if there were forums at home for the students to practice the English language. Findings from the students questionnaires indicated that 36(14.4%) of the students used English while at home while 214(85.6%) did not. This shows that English is rarely used by students while they are at home. The rampant use of mother tongue, Sheng and Kiswahili by students in the study area could be a basic constraint towards student achievement in the English language. The learning of a language is heavily dependent upon practice of the taught and learnt skills in an attempt to integrate the language skills within the context of the classroom and beyond.

The learners were also asked to identify other constraints they believed hindered their learning of integrated English. 72(28.8%) of the students cited lack of class texts as a major problem in the learning of the integrated English language. Schools are expected to organize how the class texts are to be availed to the students. Previously, there was a controversy between the schools' management and the parents as to who was supposed to provide textbooks to students. Most parents felt that the schools should provide the learners with all the books required. With the disbursement of FDSE funds to schools by the Ministry of education, most schools are buying key textbooks to alleviate the prevailing shortages. However, with the cost sharing policy in practice, most schools have transferred the burden of buying the key literature set books to the parents, some of whom are too poor to buy the texts. With this kind of arrangement between the school administration and the parents in place, the learners suffer most. Textbooks and other learning resources should be provided if the teacher is to effectively implement the integrated English language syllabus.

Forty-one (16.4%) of the students said that their English language teachers were harsh, unmotivating and violent. Such teachers caned and punished students who could not answer questions in class or those who failed to do assignments in time. Some even ridiculed students who failed to answer questions correctly in class. This made most students shy away from speaking English as they were afraid of being ridiculed. There is need for friendly interactions between the learners and the teachers. The learners should be made to understand that language is learned through trial and error and therefore should not fear to speak English. More practice and exposure of students to English speaking people should be enhanced.

It was revealed that 201(80.8%) of the students had had more than three teachers of English teaching them since form one. Frequent change of English language teachers was mainly as a result of some teachers proceeding for further studies, transfers, maternity leaves, sick leaves or others going for greener pastures. Students suffer whenever their only teacher of English leaves. The immediate replacement of such teachers either by the Teachers' Service Commission or the schools' Boards of Management is never quickly done. This is compounded by the lengthy recruitment procedures by the Teachers' Service Commission which only employs teachers once per year and not upon immediate demand by the affected schools. There is a high English language teachers' turnover and students suffer at every change. Adjusting to new teachers is likely to cause students some problems and some learning time is lost. There is therefore need to reduce the English language teacher turnover by improving their conditions of work, having more English language teachers employed and arbitrary transfers being minimized.

Twenty-nine (9.8%) of the students complained of fewer assignments given to them and that teachers rarely marked the said assignments. A teacher committed to catering for individual differences of students may be overwhelmed by the desire to cover the syllabus at the expense of marking the students' books. Frequent assignments and marking is a very important aspect in language learning. This is because language learning is heavily dependent upon practice of the taught and learnt skills and the frequent correction. Therefore, time is required to practice the communication skills through writing and correction.

87 (34.8%) stated that they had inadequate exposure to out of class activities. While most schools may not afford to provide films to the students, English club activities cannot be considered unaffordable.

The study also sought to identify the areas of English the students found hard to understand and why they posed a challenge to the learners. Findings indicate that 106(42.4%) of the students had difficulties in grammar. Even though the teaching of grammar is emphasized by most teachers in secondary schools, many students still have difficulties in this area. This could most likely be due to the methodology used in teaching. The study also reveals that 60(24.0%) of the students had difficulties in comprehension. Comprehension teaching is mostly hampered by lack of text books. Such inadequacy of the recommended class texts necessitated students to copy other students work. A significant number did not complete the given comprehension tasks and therefore were not being assessed by the subject teachers. In addition, 81(32.4%) of the students cited difficulties in summary writing and composition writing respectively. This could be as a result of most teachers concentrating on other areas of English language at the expense of the written language. The problem was further compounded by the large number of students per class. Findings from this study further indicated that 197(78.8%) students found poetry difficult while 62(24.8%) of the students found oral literature very difficult. This could be as a result of most teachers' incompetence in these areas.

These perceptions of difficulty in various areas of the integrated English language syllabus are a pointer to the fact that the teachers could be having a number of limitations that in essence influenced the learners' attitudes towards the subject. A study by Okwara, et al (2009) indicates that teachers continue to use methods, not in keeping with the principles of the curriculum integration. Table 1.4 is a summary of student ratings on reasons making English language difficult.

Table 1.4
Students Ratings on Reasons making English Difficult

	<i>No. of students</i>	<i>(%)</i>
<i>Topics and texts generally hard to understand</i>	126	50.4
<i>Teacher does not explain well</i>	61	24.4
<i>Teacher does all the talking with no learner participation</i>	69	27.6
<i>Subject not interesting</i>	43	17.2
<i>Teacher doesn't seem to know the subject well</i>	23	9.2

In conclusion students of English in secondary school face a number of constraints which influence the effective teaching and learning of the integrated English language syllabus. The constraints faced by students were based on six areas namely: the location of the learners' previous primary school with regard to the use of English, the frequency of language use in various contexts, namely school, in co-curricular activities and at home, the students' perceptions and attitudes with regard to the use of English, the students' perception of English language difficulty in different areas of the English language syllabus and the students' perception of the problems they experienced in learning English.

Conclusion

The following conclusions may be made based on findings from this study. The study revealed that in most of the schools visited, the teachers were generally inadequate. The impact of such a phenomenon is loss of learning time and an increased workload for the few available teachers. Teacher inadequacy is bound to reduce the students-teacher contact time and consequently affect their mastery of the language structures in an adverse way.

The study also revealed that the students encountered a diversity of constraints. English language class texts in the schools surveyed are inadequate. This inadequacy of textbooks is the major reason behind poor implementation of the integrated English syllabus. Textbooks are important resource materials facilitating effective instruction and learning.

This study also found out that 87(27.3%) of the students did not enjoy English lessons because it was rarely used at home or by their peer groups. Students also lacked sufficient time to practice the use of the language learned in and out of the classroom to develop their communication skills with the guidance of their teachers and to learn the grammatical structures well. A good number of teachers did not organize activities to allow students meet with others to practice and learn the language from one another.

Findings indicated that 86(35.6%) of the students found their lessons boring and 133(53.2%) noted that their English language teachers did most of the talking in class instead of involving the students and in some cases the teachers were unfriendly to the learners.

Recommendations

The teachers of English and students made a number of recommendations regarding the constraints of learning integrated English among secondary school students. These included increasing time allocated for English; having teachers and students use English when performing co-curricular activities; provision of adequate learning resources, development of English language teacher's resource centers; discourage excessive use of other competing languages in school, create forums for students to practice the language; train and post more English language teachers to the understaffed schools in the region; give students more practice in writing, speaking, listening and reading and minimizing frequent changes of English language teachers. Staff development programmes such as workshops and in-service training programmes should be encouraged to enable the teachers to effectively integrate aspects of language and literature.

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