

## Developing the Integrated English Language Secondary School Teacher in Kenya; Theory and Practice

Paul Onsare Onchera

Senior lecturer in the department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media, school of Education, University of Kabianga, Kericho, Kenya

### \*Corresponding Author:

Paul Onsare Onchera

Email: [paulonchera@yahoo.com](mailto:paulonchera@yahoo.com)

---

**Abstract:** This paper argues that English language teacher training is central in the teaching and learning process which is widely acknowledged and there is a big link between low student achievement and the skills and competence of teachers. Research examining teacher quality confirms logical conclusions that poor quality of students' learning correlates strongly with poor quality teachers' teaching. Unfortunately, there has been little research into how English language teachers in Kenya are prepared to teach that would inform teacher – training policy and practice reforms. Teacher competence is seen in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice. Practice is central to good teaching and good practice cannot just depend on to unreflective application of techniques. I argue that teacher competence is a complex process which requires *content knowledge* – subject matter; *pedagogic knowledge* – knowing how to engage with learners and manage a classroom; *pedagogic content knowledge* – knowing how to represent and formulate the subject matter. This paper hinges on establishing the different knowledge, understanding and practices that are expected of English language teachers during their preparation and then comparing them with those that they actually exhibit at different points in their training and teaching career. Unfortunately, there has been little research into how secondary school teachers of integrated English language in Kenya are prepared to teach the integrated English syllabus that would inform teacher – training policy and practice reforms. This paper sets to fill the gap in knowledge about how the initial and continuing education of teachers of integrated English language impacts on the practice of English language teachers in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Low student achievement, teacher competence, content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge.

---

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers are key to improving quality education in any educational system. It is often said that the quality of an educational system cannot be greater than the quality of its teachers, and yet often not much attention is paid to understanding how systems that produce teachers can be made more effective to impact on learning outcomes. This paper is an attempt to look closely into the issue of integrated English language teacher preparation in Kenya for clues as to how this gap can be filled.

There is widespread concern about graduates of secondary schools who are unable to: communicate clearly, confidently and appropriately in different contexts; read and understand a range of texts, select essential points and apply inference and deduction where appropriate [1]. The question has been asked - how can this problem be adequately addressed? To which often the answer has been that teachers need more in-service training to improve their skills. Although this is true, this paper offers deeper insights into the problems by investigating what happens in

typical Kenyan universities offering teacher training programmes and the role these institutions can play in improving teacher quality. In this paper I provide a basis for policy dialogue for improving teacher quality and challenge those who make policy to pay more attention to both initial teacher education and continuous professional development, and to target teacher reforms that can ensure that every Kenyan student of English language has access to a teacher with understanding of how to help that student learn effectively and progress to higher levels of education.

The aforementioned therefore justifies the need for investigations into the teaching of the integrated English syllabus in Kenya. Practice is central to good teaching but successful teachers would concur with the great body of research into teaching that good practice cannot just depend on the unreflective application of techniques. It is a complex process which requires a great deal of different knowledge: *Content knowledge(CK)*- knowing about the subject matter to be taught; *Pedagogic knowledge(PK)*- knowing how to engage with learners and to manage a classroom and

*Pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) which involves knowing how to represent and formulate the subject matter. The paper is hinged on establishing the different knowledge, understanding and practices that are expected of teachers during their preparation and then comparing them with those that they actually exhibit at different points in their training and career.

### DESIGN AND METHODS

Quantitative data was derived from a questionnaire administered to 200 trainees from 2 different universities, 115 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and 24 experienced teachers (ET). The Two universities (both public) were drawn from Kericho county- University of Kabianga and Kisii county- Kisii University. These two were sampled for focus because they are among the new universities chartered in Kenya in 2013. The qualitative data came from 19 focus group discussions with teacher trainees from the two universities; in-depth interviews following lesson observations and videoing with 4 teacher trainers, 34 NQTs (17 from Kisii and 17 from university of Kabianga) and 24 continuing professional development (CPD) teachers.

### ASSUMPTIONS AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Integration of language and literature can be realized in significantly different ways. The way 'language' and 'literature', are interpreted also varies. It is not simply a matter of *which* literature or language is taught (African, Caribbean, Asian literature or traditional or functional grammar, and so on) but also the way in which each is conceptualized. Does literature retain its traditional privileged status (or is it seen as just another kind of discourse, with its own (teachable) rules and conventions? Does 'language' involve knowledge *about* language or is it another word for grammar, whether of the traditional prescriptive kind or the functional grammar? Is it, in fact, still useful or meaningful to distinguish between 'language' and 'literature' anymore? Bassnett and Grundy [2] comment:

We have encountered language teachers who think literature is irrelevant, who argue that what students need are texts that are "practical" and "rooted in everyday experience", not works of art. And we have encountered literature teachers who look down on "mere language" work, as though literary texts were made from some ethereal matter and not constructed out of language at all.

It should be recognized that the aim of incorporating literature into language teaching was not to produce literary critics: rather literature was seen as resource for language teaching.

### THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

Unlike the school curriculum, which is developed centrally by KIE (currently known as Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development- KICD), the university Education curriculum comprises of secondary school content subjects, from the school of Arts, teaching methods, professional studies and teaching practice offered in the school of education. Each university develops its own curriculum which is approved by CUE (commission of university education). The trainees are expected to take an approved combination of the following teaching subjects: Kiswahili, Geography, History, Literature, English, Economics and Religion, while Mathematics is offered by School of Science. Those opting to take English must choose Literature in English as the second teaching subject or vice versa.

The 2002 KIE syllabus introduced the integrated English syllabus, which is not in line with practices in most universities, where English and literature are taught as two separate subjects. Content subjects and teaching methods are not integrated in the university curriculum. It is also the case that the teacher competences required for introducing integrated are somewhat different from those of secondary schools. The curriculum pays inadequate attention to acquisition of pedagogical knowledge through practice. Teaching Practice gets only twelve weeks, for the entire programme. During these twelve weeks the trainees are expected to have a hands-on experience of teaching. Of concern, is that aspects of the university curriculum are not aligned to the secondary school curriculum. This is unlike the diploma teacher education syllabus, [3] which adopts the integrated approach to the teaching of language and literature. It is geared towards producing a proficient and effective teacher with a mastery of all the four language skills and exposure to emerging issues and concerns e.g. HIV and AIDS, human rights among others.

### ASSESSMENT

Assessment in the university is heavily examination oriented. A mid-course examination administered at the middle of the semester and end of semester exams which is set by a course lecturer and moderated by an expert in the relevant area from a different university usually at the level of a senior lecturer and above. The university determines whether one proceeds to the subsequent year, re-sits the subjects failed, repeats the year or is discontinued. To be awarded the degree certificate, students must pass in at least forty two units every academic year for four years. On the curriculum is teaching practice and students have to pass to qualify for the degree in education. This emphasis on examinations has a backwash effect on teaching and learning in the universities especially in the teaching of the integrated English

## **FINDINGS**

### **Characteristics of teacher trainers in the universities**

Academic qualifications for teacher trainers at the universities range from masters degree to doctor of philosophy degree in education. However, few of the trainers have the integrated English teaching experience. A Key issue with regard to public universities in Kenya is that each university recruits its own teacher trainers with deans of education faculties having little say on who gets recruited to teach the content areas. According to one of the deans, some of the trainers including some professors have little knowledge on the teaching of the professional area since their training is on arts subjects only. Indeed, one of the universities studied had three such trainers on its staff. Such practices also lead to the trainers to teach English content separate from literature content.

### **Trainers' preparedness to teach the integrated English syllabus**

Teacher trainers in public universities had little (if any) training or experience of teaching the integrated English syllabus. There are those employed to teach English language content, literature subject content different from those employed to teach language methodology. All of the 14 lecturers interviewed indicated that in their initial training, they had been trained to teach English and literature as separate subjects, while others had been trained to teach English and any other subject. Again all the 14 lecturers indicated that they had in fact started their teaching careers in secondary schools. Three of the trainers joined university teaching immediately on graduating from the universities with B. Ed (arts) degrees as graduate assistants. Further, there are no induction programmes for lecturers on integrated English. None of the universities during this study had an induction programme for new lecturers on the integrated syllabus. Consequently, newly recruited lecturers experienced a wide knowledge gap between what they knew about teaching in secondary school and what they were required to teach in the university as recounted by one such trainer:

When you first come to this university, it's a shock. In fact, for the first three months you don't know what you are doing. You go to class and teach your lesson but as you walk out you are asking yourself, did I teach the right thing?

Consequently, lecturers develop their expertise in teaching integrated English by learning on the job, through reading, trying different approaches, and informally from colleagues they found teaching.

### **Teacher trainers' knowledge and understanding of learning to teach integrated English syllabus**

Teacher trainers did say that integration has something to do with understanding literature as a

resource of learning language skills and vice versa. Compared to other meanings of IES found in the literature on IES, teacher trainers' understanding was limited.

This statement, made over twenty-five years ago, is no less relevant today, and 'flagrant anachronisms' still abound. The aim of the INTERFACE series is to examine topics at the 'interface' of language studies and literary criticism and in so doing to build bridges between these traditionally divided disciplines [4].

The teacher trainers had limited knowledge of how to help trainees with IES difficulties. After observing a lesson in which the teacher trainer used a poem to teach integration by emphasizing rhyme and teaching pronunciation, some 'students' were not able to the whole thing. When asked what is to be done in such a case. He explained:

If a trainee is not able to grasp the concept of integration as applied in a classroom .... You just teach; they will understand as they continue reading.

### **Teacher trainers' instructional practices**

Croft & Myers [5] and Keith & Shuttleworth [6], argue that successful Integration of language and literature in the teaching of English as a language seems to be generally an accepted pedagogic strategy to be used by trainees, and provide opportunities for extensive and guided practice with students in their classrooms. Teacher trainers can also simulate or use recorded scenarios of basic lessons as the basis for reflection and further discussion. Teacher trainers used a combination of methods – demonstration of how to teach IES, whole class teaching using question and answer as well as lecturing. A few teacher educators simulated IES lessons with the trainees acting as secondary school students or with a trainee role-playing the secondary school teacher. In all cases, the trainers took a dominant position in the class. They stood in front of the class with the trainees seated in rows facing the front. The trainers considered their teaching to be learner-centered. A teacher trainer explained what they do just before teaching practice thus:

We do a lot of interactions and questioning. You call someone to the front and tell him, "Do this the way you would do it in the classroom situation." You do it yourself and then they will see what you are doing.

However, from the lesson observations, it appeared that the teacher trainers' view of learner centeredness amounted to getting learners engage in physical activities using language and literature content. Trainees' participation in the lessons was in answering mostly recall questions, demonstrating what they had

either been shown or been told how to do and writing down notes. Trainees were not engaged in serious reflection and discussion about what they were learning and neither were they being challenged to think and demonstrate how they would use different methods to respond to particular needs in their future classes. It was apparent that trainees were learning to use set methods and procedures and that in turn, they are likely to have difficulties the actual implementation of the integrated English syllabus.

### **Knowledge and understanding of the integrated English syllabus**

Teacher trainees' understanding of integrated English syllabus (IES) in secondary schools was not different from that of their trainers. Some trainees thought that IES had to do with using words to teach grammar while others said it has to do with integrating listening, speaking, reading and writing. Yet other trainees associated integration with grammar and speaking skills. However, a few did say that integration has something to do with understanding literature as a resource of learning language skills and vice versa.

### **Knowledge and understanding of secondary school IES**

The teacher trainees had limited knowledge and understanding of the integrated English syllabus. The trainees' interaction with the school curriculum and materials was chiefly in preparation for teaching practice during which time one concentrated only on the particular class and topics he/she had been assigned to teach during the ten weeks of micro-teaching.

### **Trainees' pedagogical knowledge**

The trainees' pedagogical knowledge with regard to teaching IES was also constrained. This is because, in the entire 4 year programme, at best, trainees get only one semester of practical teaching of the integrated English syllabus. This means that on the whole, the opportunity to practice what trainees have learnt theoretically in college is very much limited and the development of their pedagogical skills constrained.

### **Teacher trainees' sense of preparedness to teach the integrated English syllabus in secondary schools.**

The trainees were very confident about their preparedness to teach IES in secondary schools. In the questionnaires, 87 % of the trainees rated their confidence as high or very high. Similarly, 84% of the trainees rated their ability to IES as high or very high. However, as discussed in the foregoing sections, the trainees had learnt techniques to use in IES lessons but had not grasped why the techniques would work. A trainee expressed the opinion, "With the use of experience gained during the training, the learning will be simplified and easy to do". Clearly, the trainees had not addressed themselves to how various methods ought

to be used in ways that are effective in helping learners learn integration considering the learner, environmental and other learning factors. This faith in variety of methods is consistent with what was found in the teacher trainer interviews and classroom observation data.

### **Linking Knowledge to Practice**

From the interviews, it emerged that the newly qualified teacher's (NQTs) knowledge, understanding, and practice about teaching IES in secondary schools were mostly derived from their training. Indeed, the principals informed this researcher that they did not have induction programmes for the NQTs since they were trained and it was therefore assumed that they were competent.

### **The NQTs' Knowledge, Understanding and Instructional Practices**

Knowledge and understanding of what IES is - For most NQTs', understanding of IES had not changed. They continued to teach language content separate from literature content in different lessons as the quotes below illustrate:

It's making a student know more rules in English and more literary concepts in literature. The NQTs' fixation on the two separate content areas learnt in the university despite the fact that IES in practice refers to integrating the two disciplines to make it one.

Observations of NQTs teaching integrated English syllabus classes revealed that the NQTs were not making instructional decisions on the basis of their particular learners and the circumstances around them. The NQTs, observed generally, kept to the highly structured approach to teaching the two subjects separately as they had learnt in university and which was reinforced in the teacher's guides on which virtually all of them seemed to depend.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Teacher trainers**

1. On starting to teach in the IES programme, teacher trainers have no training or experience. They receive no induction and have little professional development opportunities. Therefore, their knowledge and understanding of teaching IES is constrained;
2. Teacher trainers' instructional practices put emphasis on trainees' acquisition of theoretical knowledge about IES, teaching methods, language content and literature content than on the practical use of the methods they are learning;

3. The teacher trainers had limited knowledge of how to help learners with IES difficulties in learning to teach then IES

#### **Teacher trainees**

1. Trainees' knowledge and understanding of IES mirrors that of their trainers;
2. They have limited knowledge of the IES as the secondary school syllabus is not a key focus during training
3. Trainees' knowledge and understanding of teaching IES at the secondary school is based on their acquisition of theoretical knowledge about teaching methods, language content, and literature content which gives them what appears to be false confidence and belief about their capability to teach IES successfully.

#### **Newly qualified teachers (NQTs)**

1. NQTs receive no induction on starting teaching and their understanding of IES and teaching the IES continues to mirror that of trainees and trainers;
2. They have technical knowledge of how to teach IES, but they teach IES the same way they were taught in the university – literature content separate from language;
3. A few NQTs start to learn from practice and vary their teaching strategies depending on prevailing circumstances in the class.

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **Language and Literature**

Before we look at the implementation of the integrated English curriculum, perhaps we need to explain what language and literature is. Bloom and Lahey (1978: 23) define language as knowledge of code representing ideas about the world through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication. In the definition language is seen as having 'content', 'form' and 'language use'.

Literature is 'cannons' i.e. all great works of art, all that reflects on society, any critical piece of work. The argument in this paper is whether teachers of English teach language using works of art or use language to teach the great works of art? How does for example a teacher use reading skills to teach a novel?

#### **Background of integration: policy factors**

Before the introduction of the integrated English course in Kenyan secondary schools in 1986, literature and English language were taught separately. Not all linguists favour the integration of English language and literature. People like Carter [7] think that literature and language are distinct subjects of study and that language and literature have different intrinsic values for the learners and the teachers. He (Ibid)

therefore favours approaches, which preserve the distinctiveness of each discipline of study. However everyone does not hold this view. Indangasi [8] says that literature and language are of mutual benefit to each other in the classroom situation since they reinforce each other. This means that English language and literature are of mutual benefit to one another despite their subject boundaries. This mutual benefit might have been the motivating factor for integrating them into one subject -English.

One assumption that is made by language policy is that the integration of literature and English language will be taught by teachers who have a good mastery of language and also a clear understanding and appreciation of literature thus they are able to teach each as a function of the other. This means that teachers are expected to teach English language using literary texts and also to teach literature using the various skills of English such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

#### **The current trends**

The merger of English and literature has meant that the integrated curriculum may not be taught well since some of the teachers were trained in 1970s and 80s when language teaching was separated from that of literature [9]. This provokes our thinking leading to the question as to what is going on in terms of English language training in the universities. Though the case is different compared to the 80s, the fact remains that teachers are trained differently in both literature and English language in terms of content and methodology. Walk into a university classroom and meet a student teacher being trained on how to teach literature (Teaching methods in literature) and English language (English language teaching methods).

Teachers need adequate training in the integrated approach for them to function well in their teaching. Freeman [10], for example says:

First... teachers are central mediators in what and how students learn in their classrooms, strengthening teacher learning will improve student learning... Second, teacher learning occurs both explicitly, through formally organized pre- and in-service teacher training and professional development, and implicitly, through personal and professional socialization of individuals into teaching.

Unless proper training on how to integrate the two subjects is done, teachers who were trained to teach one subject and not both English language and literature may align themselves to their subject of specialization at the expense of the other [11]. Infact, even those trained in both English language and literature may not

implement the integrated English course effectively. When the 8-4-4 integrated English course was introduced in 1984/85, it was felt that there was need for massive in-service training for teachers of English so that they would cope with the demands of the new course which required new approaches to teaching English [12]. The integrated course required the teachers to know how to integrate English language with literature or literature with English language. Teachers are expected to integrate within the various aspects of language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Again, teachers are required to integrate within the literary genres viz: drama, poetry, the novel, short story and oral literature.

#### **New direction/ Intervention**

An important thesis here is that all the teachers of integrated English course have not been trained on how to integrate English and literature including those who have done English and literature as main subjects at colleges and universities. English language and literature are taught independently, consequently, the teachers' initial professional training is inappropriate.

Secondly, in respect to the teaching of the integrated English course, most of the teachers and Heads of English departments do not understand fully the concept of integration. Actual classroom observation does indicate that most of the lessons lack integration. If it does, then it is skewed towards the use of literature material to teach English language only and not the other way round.

Thirdly, keen observations on the English course syllabus indicate that the two are structured differently. On one side are the objectives/expectations of a teacher in English language, on another are the objectives of literature. This indicates a problem that teachers face in integrating English language and literature from a syllabus that is not in itself integrated. This goes on into the course books and set books that are not integrated. The two categories of books; course and set exist in isolation of each other.

#### **CONCLUSION**

If at all the integrated English course is to succeed in secondary schools, it shall be taught integratively in colleges and universities to the teachers-to-be, by qualified staff and who understand the concept of integration. This kind of training will improve the teaching of the integrated course in the secondary schools in Kenya. However in most universities, English departments have traditionally been departments of English literature, with the language/literature divide providing grounds for at times acrimonious debate. In the past decade and a half, however, it has increasingly become imperative to address the teaching of students at tertiary level in a

way at once more "practical" and "relevant" without relinquishing the perceived benefits of a "liberal" education. If universities were to introduce a course to integrate the two then the answers that may be given to above stated questions may reflect the assumptions, whether explicit or implicit, of the syllabus designers. The assumptions are not only about the academic disciplines of language and literature but also pedagogical assumptions about the needs of students.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. Onchera PO, Mwamba R. The effects of classroom language on acquisition of English in Kenyan public primary schools: A case of Kisii municipality; *The Educator*. 2009;2(2).
2. Bassnett S, Grundy P. *Language through literature*. Singapore: Longman. 1993.
3. KIE. *Secondary Education Syllabus*. Vol. 1 Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation. 2002.
4. Simpson P. *Language through literature: An introduction*. Interface series. London: Routledge. 1997.
5. Croft S, Myers R. *Exploring language and literature: A practical guide to AS and A level English language and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000.
6. Keith G, Shuttleworth J. *Living language and literature*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational. 2000.
7. Carter R. *Linguistics and the Teacher*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1986.
8. Indangasi H. *Literature and the Teaching of English'-The Place of Grammar in the Teaching of English*. Nairobi: British Council. 1991.
9. Owino RF. *The Falling Standards of English Language in Kenyan Schools: Myth or Reality?'-Proceedings: The Role of Language And Literature in the School Curriculum*. Nairobi: British Council. 1991.
10. Freeman D. *Doing teacher research: From inquiry to understanding*. New York: Heinle & Heinle. 1998.
11. Sure EK, Arden R. *Compensatory Methodology in Second Language Teaching'-Proceedings: Conference on English in East Africa*. Nairobi: British Council. 1986.
12. Waithaka JM. *English across the Curriculum- The Ministry of Education's Position'- Proceedings of the Conference on English across the Curriculum: The Kenya Context*. Nairobi: British Council. 1993.