

# THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW CURRICULA: THE CASE OF INTEGRATED APPROACH IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN KENYA

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## Abstract

Since its introduction in 2002, the integrated approach of teaching English at secondary level is an innovation that has received little praise and a lot of blame as the poor performance of the subject continues to occupy linguists, educators, policy makers and general public given that students exiting the school system have challenges communicating in English. A lot of research has been carried out on factors impeding and influencing uptake of the approach and very little research done on the contribution of universities; the institutions that train the teachers. This study therefore aims at establishing the role and contribution of universities in the implementation of this new syllabus. In order to achieve this, the study adopted the descriptive survey method. Its main objective was to examine universities' involvement in preparing student (future teachers) in the use of the integrated approach. The data entailed both secondary data obtained from publications and primary data obtained through questionnaires administered to lecturers. Purposive sampling was used to select lecturers and to select Kenyan universities that train teachers. Data was then analysed using descriptive statistics. The study established that university lecturers were not sufficiently prepared and involved in the implementation process. Reviewed university curricula vary in content, proof that the understanding of the approach varies among university lecturers. The study recommends a review of teacher pre-service training curricula by universities and harmonization of content.

**Keywords:** Innovation, syllabus, curriculum, integrated approach, teacher training, universities

## Introduction

The world is changing and so must education. Curriculum changes in Kenya have seen a number of innovations introduced in the form of educational reforms motivated by various reasons. The major aim of the educational reforms in Kenya has been to achieve national development. The first curriculum change took place in 1964 a year after Kenya had attained independence. The reforms overseen by the Ominde-led commission were aimed at Africanizing an education system inherited from the colonial government to make it more responsive to the needs of independent Kenya (GoK, 1964). English and Literature were taught as two different subjects during the colonial era with the literature content taking no account of the African context.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 1968 memo on the abolishment of the department of literature (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 1995) could be taken as the first instance of agitation for recognition of African literature, and most importantly to this paper, the place of literature in language teaching. Kenyatta University, Kenya's,

second university was the first teacher training institution to make mandatory training of teachers in English and Literature in 1978 followed by the University of Nairobi (Rotumoi, 2006).

Under the education system inherited from the colonial government, students spent 6 years in high schools divided into two levels: O-levels and A-levels. English was mandatory at O-levels while Literature was optional. In A-levels, students had the possibility of specializing in literature. This implied that students would proceed to university to study teaching English without a thorough grounding in literature.

The introduction of the 8.4.4 in 1986 made English and Literature, mandatory subjects, taught and examined as one subject but still taught separately. The first integration was done in 1992 and the major change entailed the re-organization of content in terms of coverage and structure (MoE, 2006). In 2002 there was a revision of the integrated approach (KIE, 2002) all this in effort to improve the students' performance in subject.

In spite of all these curriculum changes, there is continued poor, if not deteriorating, performance



in the English subject at both primary and secondary levels. Barasa, Oseno and Omulando (2014) point out that the performance of the pioneer candidates who sat the KCSE English Paper 1 in 2006 was dismal. Despite the lack of improvement in the subject after all these curriculum reforms, the integrated approach earns praise while other stakeholders apportion it blame (Okwara, Shiundu, & Indoshi, 2009).

A considerable number of researchers have dwelt the factors affecting its implementation (Wanjala & Luchu, 2010; Manyasi, 2014; Magoma, 2015) and established that teachers' unpreparedness is a major hindrance to its success. After carrying out a study on the implementation of the approach in Nairobi County, Magoma (2012) established that 86.1 % of teachers taught English language and Literature as separate subjects. 57.4 % of them had not undergone any type of in-service training before they started the actual teaching of integrated English curriculum. 90 % of teachers still teach the English and literature separately. All these studies point accusing fingers at the universities for the inadequate preparation of teachers to appropriately use the integrated approach.

This study aimed at establishing the role of universities in the implementation of the Integrated Approach in teaching English. It aimed at establishing the lecturers' role and the adaptation of the university curriculum to the new approach.

### Related literature

#### The Integrated Approach and its Implication in Curriculum Change

The integrated approach in Kenyan curriculum is similar to the one Richards and Rogers (2001) refer to as the whole language approach used in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language. The approach entails working on all skills of language (writing, reading, listening and speaking) hence its name the integrated approach. While reading Margaret Ogolla's novel and a set book, *The River and the Source*, a teacher would, for example, facilitate a discussion on how marriage in the students' culture differs from that of the Luo people and by so doing speaking skills would have been worked on. Writing skills would be taught by asking students to write an essay on a topic drawn from the novel and reading skills would be polished by reading excerpts in class which would present opportunities for expanding the students' vocabulary and working on

pronunciation. KIE (2002) summarizes this integration by stating that learners will improve their skills through exposure to literature.

#### Monitoring and Evaluation of the Curriculum Implementation Process

Implementation is the set of processes after the programming phase that are aimed at the concrete realization of public policy (Knoepfel, Larrue, Varon, & Hill., 2007). It is more than two and a half decades since the integrated approach was introduced and evidently, there has been continued dismal performance by students. Monitoring and evaluation is often necessary to collect empirical data to establish and support whether the curriculum is producing the intended outcomes.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development's core function is to conduct research and develop curricular for all levels of education below the university. The institute therefore oversees the development print and electronic curriculum support materials, initiates and conducts curriculum based research, organizing and conducting in-service and orientation programmes for curriculum implementers. This implies that for the implementation of the integrated approach, the universities simply get communication from the Ministry of Education to train the teachers on the use of the approach and are not involved directly in any of its other stages.

Morris (1995) argues that the extent to which schools (and teachers) can adopt and implement a top down curriculum change depends upon the extent to which those responsible for managing the change acquire informed understanding about the educational theory and knowledge underpinning the change. Universities, the institutions, training the teachers, are of importance in the implementation process and their involvement as important as those of the teachers.

#### Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theories: Goodson's theory that articulates the interactions of factors associated with the curriculum and Fullan's Top-Down theory: Mandated Change whereby a government policy is adopted at the top and passed down for implementation (Fullan, 1994). Goodson (1991) argues that curriculum practice as a multifaceted con-

cept involves construction, negotiation and renegotiation at a variety of arenas.

Curriculum is at the core of any educational change implying that fundamental changes occur in the teachers and students' behavior. Educational reforms in the Kenyan curriculum, just like all policies in most developing countries are initiated at the top, that is by the ministry of education based in the capital and directives to implement it are communicated down to the, then, provinces.

The introduction of the integrated approach in the teaching of English is a public policy whose implementation deserves as much attention as any other. The implementing actors include teachers, head teachers, quality assurance officers, curriculum development institutes, the ministry of education, the teachers' hiring body, Teachers Service Commission (TSC), universities and teacher training colleges.

The tail end of this implementation process has the teacher who has to adopt the new methodology using material suitably conceived for the new approach. By the time the approach was introduced, most teachers were already in service implying that a thorough sensitization ought to have been carried out through in-service training. Thereafter, teacher training colleges and universities would be expected to review their curricula so as to take into consideration the change. Therefore, it would be expected that universities on their part effect the change in their curricula because they understand the need for the curriculum revision.

Evans (2000) argues that curriculum change should answer both "why" and "how" and further recommend that curriculum reform should only be undertaken once the stakeholders recognize the need for change. The impetus behind the curriculum change, the "why", is the deteriorating standards in the language. Of concern to this study is the "how", the implementation of the curriculum and the role played by universities.

### Methods

The study adopted the descriptive research design which according to Borg and Gall (2003), is suitable for a study that is primary concerned with finding out "what is". This study sought to find out "what is the role of universities in the implementation of curriculum". The study used both secondary and primary data therefore semi-structured questionnaires were used for their suitability in gathering descriptive informa-

tion and the respondents could fill at their convenience (Kothari, 2004). The questionnaires were administered to university lecturers at the university. Purposive sampling was used to sample 10 lecturers directly involved in training of teachers of English (five from public universities and five from private universities). Secondary data were obtained from previously published research studies done on the subject of integrated approach in Kenya and reports from the Kenya Institute for curriculum development and the Ministry of Education.

### Results and Discussion

The questionnaire sought to obtain information on the respondents' qualification, experience, and affiliation. It also sought to establish if they were ever sensitized on the integrated approach and their responses are summarized in Table 1.

#### Qualification and in service training

Students pursuing Bachelor of Education (English and Literature) are taught by majority of the lecturers drawn from the School of Humanities or Arts where the Departments of Linguistics and Literature are found while the rest of the lecturers are from the department of curriculum instruction in the School of education. Lecturers in the Department of Linguistics and Literature do not necessarily have a background in Education unlike those in the School of Education.

Given that the innovation was introduced in 2002 when most of the teachers currently in service already existed, it is expected that sensitization was carried out. 80% of the lecturers interviewed had the experience of teaching in secondary school level but 67.5% responded not to have attended any integrated approach sensitization meetings.

#### University Curriculum and Subject teaching methods

The study sought to establish the curriculum's adaptation to the approach. Trainee teachers do a mandatory unit, subject teaching methods, where they are expected to acquire the



Table 1

*Respondents' Qualification, Experience, Affiliation and Awareness of Integrated Approach (IA)*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Experience in years</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>IA in-service training</b>
<b>1</b>	B.Ed, M.A, M.Ed, PhD	30 : 20 university, 10 high school	Linguistics	No
<b>2.</b>	Dip.Ed, B.Ed,M.Ed, PhD	27 : 8 university, 21 high school	Curriculum Instruction	Yes
<b>3.</b>	B.A, M.A	10	Literature	No
<b>4.</b>	B.ED, M.Ed, PhD	23:13 high school, 10 university	Curriculum Instruction	Yes
<b>5.</b>	B.A, Pgd., M.A, PhD.	22: 5high school, 17 university	Linguistics	No
<b>6.</b>	B.ed, M.A	15: 12 high school, 3 university	Education	Yes
<b>7.</b>	B.A, M.A	11: 3 university	Literature	No
<b>8.</b>	B.Ed, M.Ed	9: 8 high school, 1 university	Education	No
<b>9.</b>	Dip.ed.,B.Ed., M.A, PhD	26: 18 high school, 8 university	Literature	No
<b>10.</b>	B.A, M.A, PhD	28: university	Literature	No

skills to teach using the approach. Different universities have different curricula. In one of the universities, integration featured under a unit titled English-Subject teaching methods where all that is taught on integration is, “the importance of integrating English and Literature”. The study established that integration is handled under “Subject Methods-Literature in English” in eight of the sampled universities while one university has integration under “Methods of teaching Integrated English”.

It is pertinent to mention here that university curricula are conceived by lecturers in their specific departments and universities. Therefore, the presentation of content is dependent on the lecturers' understanding of the subject. Evidently, integration has been included in the teacher training curricula but at varying degrees of focus on content.

### Learners' Proficiency

The subject of learners' proficiency cropped up when lecturers responded to an open-ended question on their opinion of the integrated approach. University lecturers decried the student' worsening essay writing skills and poor speaking skills. They equally blamed the university students' narrowed readership on the integrated approach adding that it inhibits students' thinking. Lecturers lament that when asked to give examples during literature classes, students could only talk about the set books they read in high school hence proof of inadequate reading.

### Conclusion

This study aimed at establishing the role of universities in the implementation of the integrated approach of teaching English. Based on the findings of the study, this paper concludes that universities weren't sufficiently involved in the implementation process. Universities train teachers and the revision of the

teacher training curriculum is the first change that would have been expected. Universities revised but there are disparities in content and presentation of the integrated approach.

Lecturers also were not receptive to the change in curriculum viewing it as an innovation imposed on them and this could have contributed to the reluctance to implement. The lecturers' lack of receptiveness to the approach is as a result of lack of involvement of all stakeholders. As established KICD is charged with the curriculum for all levels of education below university level and therefore universities were simply informed and requested to train the students on the use of the integrated approach.

Lecturers' qualifications vary with some trained to teach English only while others trained to teach literature and some never underwent any training on the integrated approach. Lecturers weren't prepared for the implementation of the integrated approach and just like the teachers at high school level; each individual had an understanding of his own. Even though students are taught by lecturers from different departments, that is linguistics and literature, integration has been understood to be solely about literature integrating English therefore, the course is left to be taught by selected lecturers with a background in curriculum instruction in the school of Education.

### Recommendations

Having drawn conclusions based on the findings, this study recommends a review of pre-service training in colleges and universities so as to better incorporate the integrated approach. Unequivocally universities need to review and harmonize their programmes which could be done through accreditation, a voluntary process of submitting a curricular programme for review by external experts.

Given that after the implementation stage comes evaluation and monitoring, there is need for the regular review of the innovation to ascertain whether it produces the desired outcomes. KICD did an evaluation of the new integrated approach and came up with recommendations that ought to be considered. Among the recommendations are intensified and countrywide training of teachers. We recommend that university lecturers be involved and included in these trainings. Teachers play an important role in the realization of the country's education goals since they are crucial in the learning process. All the stakeholders should be consulted so as to ensure

their participation in the implementation process.

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