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ENGLISH-LITERATURE LITERACY AND INTEGRATION IN KENYAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

CATHERINE W. NDUNG’U

Department of Psychology and Communication Technology
Karatina University

ABSTRACT

This piece of work made an evaluation of the literacy and integration of teaching English Language and English Literature subjects in Kenyan Secondary Schools. The two being as one yet different, poses a challenge on how to deliver them in our Secondary School classrooms. This study investigated the advantages and disadvantages of integrating the two subjects and sought for ways of overcoming the challenges. The study delved on the following objectives; advantages of teaching English and Literature together as one subject, and two, the disadvantages of teaching English and Literature together as one subject. The study also posed questions whether the Kenyan Secondary School students are benefitting from this arrangement or are they receiving a raw deal. Teachers in various Secondary Schools teaching English using the integrated approach responded to questions raised by the researcher on the above issues through an interview conducted by the researcher. The researcher being a Lecturer who teaches English Language and Literature subject methods at the university also incorporated university students on teaching practice taking English and Literature and using the integrated approach. The study showed that disadvantages of teaching English language and Literature in an integrated approach outweighed the advantages. It also indicated that the non-benefits outweighed the benefits. Therefore, the study recommended that either, the integration be done away with to allow for specialization or, if it remains, teachers be trained to handle the integrated issues and time for delivering both subjects be equalized.

Key words- English Language, Literature, Integration, literacy.



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What is English Language literacy?

English language literacy is the ability to read and understand and also communicate adequately both in spoken and written forms in English. English language teaching is essential especially in a country like Kenya where it is the official language. Njoroge (2009) observes that there is no effective education without language. Thus language is one of the essential ingredients for nationhood. English language in the curriculum of Kenya is important, not just as an International language, but for the various roles it plays, economic included (Barasa, 2005). The 8-4-4 syllabus for English language also states that English as a medium of instruction in Kenya Schools is indeed a very important subject both in the curriculum and as a service subject (English Language Syllabus 8-4-4, 1984). Since the inception of the 8-4-4 system of Education in Kenya in 1985, the teaching of English and Literature adopted the integrated approach. This is an approach where English and Literature are taught together. Albeit the notion of integration is not clear because it is impossible to amalgamate the content of English language into that of Literature, hence they only divide the lessons in the time-table. Even with the revision of the curriculum in 1992 and 2002, challenges have continued to emerge from this approach.

It is important to define the operational terms at this juncture to understand whether integration is really workable or not. English Language according to Labo-Popoola (2010) is a second or foreign language, as it is not the first (mother-tongue) language that secondary learners learnt. He defines a second language as one that is learnt in addition to another language learnt earlier. Literature, according to the Macmillan English Dictionary (2002) is defined in two ways as, one; stories, poems and plays, especially those that are considered to have value as art and not just entertainment, and two; books or other printed information about a subject. Integration on the other hand is defined by the same Dictionary as the process of combining with other things in a single larger unit or system.

Looking at the above definitions, Kenyan secondary school learners already experience problems understanding English as a second language. Learning literature using the English language that they already have problems becomes even a greater challenge. However, some scholars argue that integrating the two is beneficial to the student as literature and language studies can do 'as much for the language development of the student as for the development of capacities for literary understanding and appreciation' as Carter and Long (1991). There is a general perception that literature is particularly complex and inaccessible for the foreign language learner and can even be detrimental to the process of language learning (Or, 1995). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine teaching the stylistic features of literary discourse to learners who have a less than sophisticated grasp of the basic mechanics of English language. This perception is also borne out by research (Akyel and Yalçın, 1990) which shows that the desire to broaden learners' horizons through exposure to classic literature usually has disappointing results.

Reasons for integrating English and Literature in Kenya

There are a number of reasons that motivate the integration of English and Literature. Duff and Maley (1990) mention linguistic, methodological and motivational reasons. They expound that linguistically, learners use a wide range of authentic texts that introduce them to a variety of types and difficulties of English language. Methodologically, literary discourse sensitises readers to the processes of reading e.g. the use of schema, strategies for intensive and extensive reading etc. And, lastly, motivationally, literary texts prioritise the enjoyment of reading. Savidou (2004)

notes that communicative competence is more than acquiring mastery of structure and form. That it also involves acquiring the ability to interpret discourse in all its social and cultural contexts. Thus, the use of literature in the EFL classroom can provide a powerful pedagogic tool in learners' linguistic development.

According to Morris (2003), there are several popular curricular integration models today. These include the connected model, the nested model, the sequenced model, the shared 3 model, the webbed model and the threaded model. 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. The integration of English language and literature in English was expected to meet some ends that would not be achieved if literature and language continued being taught separately (Macharia, 2011). This is as stated in the secondary school integrated English syllabus;

Literature provides genuine and expressive samples of language in context. This helps students to gain familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode. Reading of literary works provides a rich context in which learners can acquire new vocabulary and knowledge of the rich possibilities of language use. It has been established that teaching language structures in isolation is not only boring, but it also tends to produce learners who lack communicative competence (K.I.E, 2002).'

This study worked towards establishing whether these reasons have been realized and whether the students are really benefitting from this kind of integration. With the numerous challenges experienced in the integration process of English and Literature, this paper sought to see whether

- There are advantages of integrating English and Literature
- There are disadvantages of integrating English and Literature
- Students are benefitting from this integration.

Theory

The piece of work was informed by the socio-cultural learning theory first proposed by Lev Vygotsky and later advanced by Lantolf and Thorne (2006). The theory stipulates that parents, care givers, peers and the culture at large were responsible for the development of higher order functions. Language being a high order function is mediated in a social set-up. Linguistic developmental processes take place through participation in the cultural settings such as family, peer group, institutions like schools, work places and sports groups (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Integrating English language and Literature in a classroom situation blends well with this theory as English language will flourish well with Literature because Literature deals with cultural issues. Learners in Secondary schools setting will interact with their teachers who will teach them linguistic concepts which are bound within their cultures. This theory will work for this paper especially because the learners have the advantage of having a first language that they can refer to and English is being taken as a second language. The learners have therefore a foundation to take-off from.

Methodology

A descriptive design of data collection was used where four English language teachers from diverse secondary schools participated. Two university students on

teaching practice also participated. This was because these respondents have hand on experience with implementing the integration. An interview was administered and responses analyzed as per the objectives. Respondents were coded using R - for respondent and numerals 1-6 to number the respondents. For instance R1 means respondent number one and so on.

Data analysis

Advantages

Respondents had the following to say on the advantages of integrating English and Literature in Kenyan Secondary schools curriculum.

Exposure to literature helps learners improve the language skills for instance reading skills(R1, R2, R4).

Makes learning areas considered difficult by learners like vocabulary, poetry and summary writing easy (R1,R3, R5)

Ensures both language and Literature are strengthened at the same time e.g when teaching reading, one uses a passage from Literature textbook. (R1,R3)

Literature helps make English lessons lively (R2, R3)

Learners are exposed to several cultures thus enabling them to interact freely (R4,R5)

Enriches the knowledge base of those students who would pursue careers outside English and Literature with both language and literary skills (R3)

Important because learners cannot develop literary competence without adequate competence in language (R1)

Disadvantages

The integrated content is too difficult to teach. This is because there are too many segments of English as subject that leaves learners confused. (R1, R4)

The content is too wide and unmanageable to be covered the given time. (R1, R3)

Too many examination papers for just one subject that is tedious for learners. (R1)

Teachers not trained to teach the integrated approach. Therefore, teachers teach in their areas of interest. This compromises learners interests and skews results. (R1, R2, R3, R5)

There is a disconnect between the syllabus and the assessment. For instance, what is taught is not what is tested in the examination. (R1)

Learners not able to balance the two. They concentrate on the one they find less challenging at the expense of the other. (R2, R4)

There is bias in time allocation where Language takes more time, five lessons a week against Literature's three lessons a week. (R2, R4)

Difficult to tell whether a student's strength is in Language or in Literature as the final score indicates English subject. (R2)

Integration compromises specialization for students who want to study these subjects at higher levels, for instance, the content in Literature is too shallow. (R3, R4)

Some forms of literary genres in Literature undo what has been taught in language classes, for instance, poetry does not often follow rules of grammar. (R4, R5)

Confuses learners at this level as there is a mix-up of issues in different aspects. (R4)

As much as Literature makes language classes lively, most learners have a negative attitude towards Literature which involves a lot of reading which

most learners dislike. (R5)

Conflicting objectives. While English language aims at improving acquisition of language and linguistic prowess, Literature aims at mirroring social ills to heal society. (R5)

Benefits or no benefits

This objective aimed at unearthing whether students in Kenyan Secondary schools are benefiting or not benefiting from the integration of English language and Literature. Responses had mixed reactions coming from the same respondents.

Benefits

Learners acquire a wide knowledge and are able to relate Language and Literature. (R1)

Learners get exposed to a variety of concepts in both English Language and Literature. In fact, the two are compensatory. The humour in literature lights the gloom in language. (R3)

Some learners have shown improvement in their overall score due to integration. Those weak in language compensate in literature and vice versa. (R3)

Non benefits

The integrated syllabus does not give adequate time for learners to enjoy the performance aspect of literature. (R1)

Learners spend a lot of time studying for some areas like grammar which account (15) marks in the final exam. (R1)

The learners do not get refined in any of the two. In fact, those who would aspire to study English or Literature as careers get a shaky background. (R2, R3).

The blend of teaching methods that teachers use sometimes locks out the learners. (R3)

Learners not benefiting because some do not read the books and merely rely on guide books just to pass exams. (R4)

These are two different subjects with different objectives. (R5)

Findings

Going by the analyzed data, it is coming out rightly that even with advantages, the disadvantages of integrating English language and Literature outweighs the advantages. The non benefits also outweighs the benefits of integration. Responded expressed dissatisfaction with this arrangement that has been in place for over twenty (20) years.

Recommendations

With the above findings, this study came up with the following recommendations;

Integration of English language and Literature be done away with and each be taught as an independent subject. If the two are separated;

Learners will take each seriously as each will be tested independently as a subject.

A strong basis will be offered to learners who wish to take study them at higher levels.

Learners will take what they feel is their area of interest, hence allow for specialization.

Teachers will be in a position to give their very best by teaching what they are comfortable with.

If integration has to remain, then there will be need to;

Train teachers on the best ways of delivering the integrated approach.
Give equal time to both subjects as there is none that is inferior to the other.
Revise the syllabus to eliminate the disconnect between the content and what is evaluated.
Reduce the content to make it manageable within the stipulated time.
Encourage learners to change their attitudes towards these subjects.

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