



HIGHS AND LOWS OF CURRICULUM INTEGRATION: AUTHORS' THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

This paper used a desk review approach to deal with the move towards and emphasis given to integration of curriculum content, not only in Kenya but also world over. The purpose of the paper is to bring out the meaning, rationale and arguments about the concept of curriculum integration. The discourse about curriculum integration is important to the policy makers, all those involved and working as curriculum developers, and for the curriculum implementers.

Keywords: integration; curriculum integration; interdisciplinary curriculum; integrated syllabus; integrated approach; integrated instruction; curriculum design; subject-based curriculum; curriculum organization; English language; language skills; literature

Views against Curriculum Integration

Venville et al. (2001) argue that although subjects constitute the foundation of curriculum structure, a movement called integration is threatening the compartmentalization of the school subjects. Integration is not a new phenomenon (Furinghetti and Somaglia, 1998; Wraga, 1997; Vars, 1991; Hirst, 1974) and it has endured alternate waves of popularity and ill repute over the past century. There is considerable breadth to the literature base, including classroom testimonials and research reports, as well as theoretical attestations of avid supporters and equally avid opponents.

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Notwithstanding the push for integration as a way of enhancing pupils' engagement, Venville et al (2001), in their work, found that examples of integration were piecemeal and idiosyncratic. Few of the examples of integration they observed were sustained over time. Indeed, much of what happens in secondary schools appears designed to protect subject interests (Siskin, 1994), and this may explain why curriculum integration and collaboration across subject boundaries are so hard to achieve (Venville et al, 2001).

Schools play a role of upholding prevailing moral and political values and parents may be concerned that integrated programs reduce the level of academic discipline or change the traditional relationship between teachers and pupils (Kaplan, 1997; Marsh, 1993). An integrated curriculum does not accord with the ongoing expectation in many countries that the school curriculum should be academically oriented, emphasizing written work and individual study and focusing on the examinable aspects of the syllabus (Kaplan, 1997). The co-existence of more conventional curriculum requirements and university entrance examinations at a higher level of the school is a common argument against the implementation of an integrated curriculum. Pupils are expected to participate in middle school subjects that prepare them for study later in their academic career (Hargreaves et al, 1996; Clark and Clark, 1994).

The persistence of traditional patterns of assessment, parental pressure for traditional academic standards and subject-based qualifications, instructional periods, textbooks, and curriculum guides hamper effective teaching and assessment of integrated curriculum (Helms, 1998). On the same note, staff who are trained in distinct disciplines and have developed longstanding attachments to them and the lack of a culture of school collaboration, all pose significant barriers to the implementation and continuation of an integrated curriculum (Hargreaves et al., 1996; McBride and Silverman, 1991).

George (1996) gives the most passionate criticism against integrated curriculum when he claims that all the accolades about integrated curriculum are "*unfounded, unsubstantiated, or both.*" George, in his article, concludes that little evidence exists to show that integrated curriculum is more effective than good teaching of a traditional curriculum.

A Strong Case for the Integration of English Language and Literature

The approach to English which relies on a sharp division between Literature and English language and between the component parts of the latter cannot succeed in practical classroom teaching (Brumfit, 1985). Brumfit feels that teaching of English

language and Literature, as one subject will make the teaching of language more practical than when the two areas are taught separately. Literature, according to Brumfit, is a vital component of English language teaching. This is because Literature as an appropriate vehicle for language learning and development since the focus is now authentic language and authentic situations. Brumfit further states that Literature provides learners with a convenient source of content for language teaching by making language learning practical.

According to Radhika (1991), literature is an activity involving and using language. It is an example of language in use, and is a context for language use. Thus, studying the language of literary texts as language in operation is seen as enhancing the learner's appreciation of aspects of the different systems of language organization. Carter (1986) insists that English language and Literature teaching should be more closely integrated and harmonized so that Literature would not be isolated, possibly rejected, on account of "literariness" of its language.

Radhika (1991) further argues that some of the language activities and work with models on the literariness of texts can aid such development, and that responses can best develop with increased response to and confidence in working with a language using a variety of integrated activities, with language-based hypotheses and in classes where investigative, student-centred learning is the norm. He feels that if students are encouraged to use language imaginatively, their interest and motivation for learning English language will increase, and eventually lead to improved use and performance. For him, to assess or to examine literature in an integrated way, demands teaching strategies that also integrate language and Literature, allowing activities which require language, which involve students in experiencing language, playing with language, analyzing language, responding to language and enjoying language.

The use of literature promotes language acquisition (Sivasubramaniam, 2006). It provides interesting contexts for students to generate input, negotiate meaning and develop motivation. Literature thus becomes an efficient vehicle for language acquisition. As literary texts contain multiple layers of meaning, they can promote classroom activities that call for exchange of feelings and opinions (Sivasubramaniam, 2006). Literature develops a sense of involvement in the students (Lazar, 1993; Carter and Long, 1991; Collie and Slater, 1987).

The study of literary genres develops language awareness in students. The interesting contexts provided by literary texts serve to illustrate the noticeability of lexical and syntactical features (Sivasubramaniam, 2006). Sivasubramaniam further argues that prolonged exposure to literary texts not only familiarizes students with the numerous interesting features of the written language but also develops the response potential in them. As students respond to literary texts, they begin to realize how

meaning as an outcome of response can open up contexts for imaginative use of language (Gibbs, 1994; Collie and Slater, 1987).

Povey (1972) argues that literature increases all language skills because it extends linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax. Therefore, it can be concluded that Literature contributes to knowledge of language use. Literature, by fostering an overall increase in reading proficiency, may well contribute to promoting the students' academic and or professional goals (Sivasubramaniam, 2006).

Savvidou (2004) suggests that rather than perceiving literary discourse as separate and remote from non-literary discourse, we ought to consider the variety of text types along a continuum with some being more literary than others. According to Savvidou, the separation of Literature from language is a false dualism since literature is language and language can indeed be literary. She points out that it is not difficult to find instances of standard transactional forms of discourse which make use of a whole array of literary devices. Savvidou further says that the boundaries that are thought to exist between literary and non-literary discourse are not so distinct. Indeed, as Widdowson (1979) suggests, the procedures, which are used to interpret literary discourse, are essentially the same for interpreting any type of discourse.

Literature, according to Savvidou (2004), offers a distinct literary world, which can widen the learners' understanding of their own and other cultures, and it can create opportunities for personal expression as well as reinforce learners' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure. She adds that an integrated approach to the use of Literature offers learners strategies to analyze and interpret language in context in order to recognize not only how language is manipulated but also why. An integrated approach to the use of Literature in the language classroom offers learners the opportunity to develop not only their linguistic and communicative skills but also their knowledge about language in all its discourse types. Therefore, the use of literary texts in the language classroom can be a potentially powerful pedagogic tool in the learners' linguistic development.

According to Salih (1986), student surveys show that language skills seem to develop through studying literature in English. The positive impact of Literature upon language skills is by no means novel, since students exercise or practice all of the skills in Literature courses. During Literature class, students are required to listen to what an instructor is saying, jot down notes, ask or answer questions, and to read passages relevant to the idea(s) under consideration. Obeidat's (1997) observations of his students in a Literature classroom showed that Literature helped them:

1. Acquire a native-like competency in English;
2. Express their ideas in good English;

3. Learn the features of modern English;
4. Learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication;
5. See how idiomatic expressions are used;
6. Speak clearly, precisely, and concisely, and
7. Become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical, and analytical learners.

John (1986) says that a student of linguistics learns about language, while a student of Literature learns language as used in poetry, drama, fiction, or any other genre. Literature should not and cannot be taught solely for a linguistic purpose as people prefer to propose (Obeidat, 1997). Obeidat argues that Literature has more to offer than language would normally do, since it has greater freedom and since it acknowledges no linguistic barriers that restrain our ability to use language. Therefore, students gain a lot from its quality and excellence.

Indangasi (1988) opines that integration of English language and Literature will compel learners to appreciate the special relationship between the two subjects and consequently the special way in which literary writers use language. Integration of language and Literature aids the learning of vocabulary and reading skills since the latter has a lot of materials (Omollo, 1990; Brumfit, 1985). Indangasi (1988) further asserts that effective teaching of English language can be done through the use of literary texts.

An integrated syllabus, according to Muthiani (1988), can help teachers to teach their learners all the possible meanings of polysemic words using relevant texts such that when they meet the same words again, they are able to discover their meanings in the new contexts. He is of the opinion that a teacher of Literature and English language should teach language and usage, not as ends in themselves, but as tools for understanding and expression. Mwanzi (1987) points out that Literature is language in context; language used creatively for aesthetic purposes.

For Carter (1986), literary texts are a fertile ground, which allows mutual supportive integration of areas, which are often kept distinct in the English language classroom. He adds that creative writing can spring from the involvement with literary aspects especially when English language and Literature are taught complementarily. Omollo (1990) says that skills such as narration are best enhanced when learners read and appreciate literary works where such style of writing is used. Thus, through constant writing practice, the teacher of English language can ensure that the format of writing is mastered.

Oxford (1996) argues that the integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a

picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. This approach allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time. Integrated-skill approach can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.

Welleck and Warren (1949) point out that language forms the raw material for or the vehicle through which Literature is passed. They also assert that in reading literary texts, learners have a lot to cope with the language intended for the native speakers. They gain familiarity with the different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode. They further emphasize the importance of extensive reading and indicate that learners develop the ability to make references from linguistic cues and deduce meaning from the context. In this context, KIE (1987:15) recommends that the reading component of the English syllabus should expose the learner to applied language by stating:

'Reading plays a pivot-point role without which the integration of language and Literature becomes impossible. A lot of quality reading (intensive and extensive) must therefore be undertaken and sustained throughout the course.'

The integration of English language and Literature is also supported by Senanu and Drid (1995). They propose that the teaching of English be more closely tied to the teaching of Literature. Hence, English language must be taught through Literature written in English to provide students with 'live' and communicative situations in the classroom through dramatization and discussion of literature texts. Muchiri (1986) talks of the inseparability of language and Literature in that the study of one would facilitate the teaching of the other. Therefore, Literature should form the central core of English language.

For Evans (1984), drama contributes to the realization of the aims for English teaching through:

1. Providing opportunities for learners to practice a wide range of language registers, thus extending vocabulary, particularly that which is demanded by unfamiliar contexts
2. Encouraging particular kinds of language use, essential in drama process, but too often neglected in English teaching
3. Building confidence, particularly through group co-operation and sharing of ideas
4. Furthering appreciation and interpretation of the written word and stimulating the learner's own writing work

5. Allowing the less conventionally academic pupil learner scope for success, thus re-orienting all the learners' notion of areas for success
6. Helping to explore and destroy stereo-types (particularly sexist and racial ones).

Thus, drama has far more to offer English language than simply a shared interest in the script play, which is where the relationship has too often ended in the past.

According to Broughton and Brumfit (1978), poetry teaching stimulates language learning. Through poetry, all the four skills of language learning can be taught and learnt (KIE, 1987). On the other hand, in an integrated language course, the ideas that come from reading a story become a catalyst for listening, speaking, reading and further writing (Morganthau, 1998). Reading, according to Collie and Slatter (1987), exposes the learner to many functions of the written language and makes the learner gain familiarity with the many features of the written language and different ways of connecting ideas.

According to Davies (1973), Literature is seen to develop the learner's own use of language, aids reading ability, stimulates the learner's imagination which will enrich activities in other fields and offers the child enjoyment. Huck (1987) also sees Literature as having educational values such as language development, improving reading, improving writing, developing fluency, providing opportunities for reading and introducing our cultural heritage. Indeed, integration of English language and Literature can be of great benefit to both the teachers and their learners if the two subjects' relationships are exploited well.

Views against Integration of English Language and Literature

Obeidat (1997) points out that linguistics and Literature are two different fields which illuminate one another in limited ways. Each discipline cannot substitute for the other. Savvidou (2004) regards literature as inappropriate to the language classroom. Savvidou's views reflect on the historic separation between the study of language and the study of Literature, which has led to the limited role of Literature in the language classroom.

According to Or (1995), teachers, course designers and examiners have a general perception that Literature is particularly complex and inaccessible for the language learner and can even be detrimental to the process of language learning. Savvidou (2004) adds that it is indeed difficult to imagine teaching the stylistic features of literary discourse to learners who have a less sophisticated grasp of the mechanics of English language. This perception is also borne out by research (Akyel and Yalcin, 1990) which shows that the desire to broaden learners' horizons through exposure to Literature usually has disappointing results.

Savvidou (2004) points out that the following common beliefs held about Literature and language are the reasons why teachers often consider Literature usually inappropriate in the language classroom:

1. The creative use of language in poetry and prose often deviates from the conventions and rules which govern standard, non-literary discourse, as in the case of poetry where grammar and lexis may be manipulated to serve orthographic and phonological features of the language.
2. The reader requires greater effort to interpret literary texts since meaning is detached from the reader's immediate social context, one example is that the "I" in literary discourse may not be the same person as the writer.

The result is that the reader's "*interpretive procedures*" (Widdowson, 1975) may become confused and overloaded. What this means is that the reader has to infer, anticipate and negotiate meaning from within the text to a degree that is not required in non-literary discourse (Savvidou, 2004). Savvidou asserts that there is a perception that the use of literary discourse deflects from the straightforward business of language learning, that is, knowledge of language structure, functions and general communication.

Linguists argue that literature impedes the students' progress in language learning (Obeidat, 1997). Literature uses language which is considerably different from the "normal" or "everyday" conversation of the common members of a speech community; it clearly uses language with greater care and complexity than the average user is able to produce. This makes it extremely difficult for teachers to explain literary texts of all kinds - poems, short-stories, novels, and plays- when exposed to linguistic techniques which are supposed to simplify, reveal, or explain meaning.

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