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FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTEGRATED ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

English Language and Literature occupy a central role in the Kenyan secondary school curriculum. Recognizing its significance, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has prioritized the development and instruction of these subjects through the Integrated English Curriculum. This study examines the roles played by key stakeholders – teachers, head teachers, and government agencies – in implementing this curriculum in Kenyan secondary schools. Employing a qualitative case study approach complemented by basic quantitative methods, data were gathered using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The study found that despite the efforts of schools and government agencies, actual classroom integration between English Language and Literature remains limited. Contributing factors include inadequate training, lack of teaching materials, and insufficient support. The study recommends continuous professional development, curriculum review, and increased stakeholder collaboration to bridge the gap between policy and classroom practice.

KEYWORDS: *Integrated English Curriculum; Curriculum Implementation; Stakeholder Roles; Teachers; Head Teachers; Government Agencies; Kenya*

1. INTRODUCTION

English plays a vital role in Kenya as the official medium of instruction (from Standard 4 onward) in all subjects except other languages. It also serves as the language of national examinations and is widely used in governance, commerce, and international forums. Given its importance, the Ministry of Education has emphasized the integration of English Language and Literature in secondary schools. However, translating this policy into effective classroom practice requires the coordinated efforts of teachers, head teachers, and government agencies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, education systems have increasingly embraced integrated approaches to language instruction, reflecting the need for learners to develop not only grammatical knowledge but also communicative and critical thinking competencies. The shift from discrete language skills to holistic pedagogy is rooted in communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction, contextual relevance, and learner-centered methodologies. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT promotes the functional use of language in real-life situations, encouraging students to develop fluency and confidence alongside formal accuracy. This philosophy has influenced curriculum reforms across continents, including in the Global South, where governments seek to align education with 21st-century skills and global standards.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, similar trends are observable, although they manifest unevenly due to contextual challenges. Scholars such as Brock-Utne and Alidou (2006) note that despite curricular reforms advocating for learner-centered and communicative methods, many African classrooms remain dominated by traditional, teacher-centered pedagogies. This disconnect is exacerbated by systemic issues such as under-resourced schools, limited teacher training opportunities, and high student–teacher ratios. Moreover, language of instruction policies in multilingual societies often complicate the delivery of integrated language curricula. The result is a persistent gap between progressive curriculum ideals and the realities of educational practice across the region.

Focusing on Kenya, the integration of English Language and Literature into a single subject reflects both international pedagogical shifts and national efforts to improve literacy outcomes. Historically, English instruction in Kenya's secondary schools was fragmented, with grammar and literature taught as distinct entities. Barasa (2005) argues that this compartmentalized approach limited learners' ability to engage meaningfully with language in real-world contexts. In response, the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC) was introduced in 1985 and later revised in 2002 to unify language and literary instruction. This curriculum emphasizes the development of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills through thematic and cross-cutting content (KICD, 2002).

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The IEC draws its theoretical foundation from communicative language teaching, as Bunyi (2003) points out. It encourages interactive, student-centered pedagogy and the contextual use of language, enabling learners to make connections between form and function. However, the implementation of this curriculum has faced substantial obstacles. Many classrooms remain entrenched in didactic practices, where the teacher dominates discourse and learners are passive recipients of information. Bunyi (2003) attributes this to a mismatch between curriculum design and classroom realities, a problem also highlighted by Fullan (2007), who asserts that successful curriculum change requires the full involvement of teachers, head teachers, and government agencies.

One of the critical factors affecting the implementation of the IEC is the capacity of teachers. Kafu (2011) underscores that many teacher training programs in Kenya have not adequately prepared educators to deliver integrated content. In-service and pre-service training often fail to equip teachers with the pedagogical strategies necessary for implementing the IEC. Wangui (2014) found that many English teachers in public secondary schools continue to treat Language and Literature as separate subjects, demonstrating resistance to or confusion about the integrated approach. These findings suggest a need for more targeted professional development and curriculum support.

The role of government agencies in curriculum implementation is also significant. Institutions such as the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) play central roles in designing, supporting, and assessing the IEC. However, the effectiveness of these agencies is frequently hampered by inadequate funding, insufficient coordination, and limited follow-up on implementation processes (KNEC, 2006; MoEST, 2003). Furthermore, Shiundu and Omulando (1992) argue that successful curriculum implementation requires clear communication, consistent policy guidance, supportive leadership, and sustained professional development—elements that are inconsistently applied in the Kenyan education landscape.

In conclusion, the literature reveals a persistent tension between curriculum policy and classroom practice in the context of the Integrated English Curriculum in Kenya. While the IEC is grounded in sound pedagogical theory and reflects international best practices, its impact has been undermined by limited teacher preparation, resource constraints, and inadequate institutional support. This study seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge by exploring how teachers, head teachers, and government agencies influence the implementation process, with a view to identifying practical strategies for bridging the policy-practice divide in English education in Kenyan secondary schools.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore the roles of key stakeholders in implementing the Integrated English Curriculum in Kenyan secondary schools. The case study approach was chosen for its strength in providing in-depth, contextual analysis of complex educational phenomena. To complement the qualitative data and enrich interpretation, basic quantitative techniques such as frequencies and percentages were also employed.

Data were collected through a triangulated approach involving questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Questionnaires were administered to English language teachers and head teachers to gather broad insights into curriculum implementation practices and challenges. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sample of head teachers, teachers, and officials from the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). These interviews aimed to capture nuanced perspectives on the roles of government agencies and school leadership in the implementation process.

Classroom observations were carried out to document real-time teaching practices and assess the extent to which English Language and Literature were integrated in instructional delivery. An observation schedule was used to ensure consistency across schools.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that information-rich cases were included. Data analysis involved thematic coding of qualitative data, while quantitative responses were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages. Ethical considerations—including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality—were upheld throughout the research process.

4. RESULTS

The implementation of the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC) in Kenyan secondary schools reveals a landscape marked by policy-practice inconsistencies, teacher capacity gaps, and systemic constraints that impede effective curriculum delivery. While interviews with teachers and head teachers indicated a widespread awareness of the IEC's objectives, classroom observations revealed a considerable gap between reported practices and actual pedagogy. Specifically, although most teachers and all 20 head teachers claimed to adopt an integrated approach to teaching English Language and Literature, the observed lessons showed minimal, if any, meaningful integration. The subjects were often taught in isolation, with teachers treating grammar and literary analysis as separate domains rather than mutually reinforcing components of language competence. This dissonance suggests that teachers may be adopting the language of policy without fully internalizing or operationalizing its pedagogical implications.

One critical finding was that teachers often structured their assessments in accordance with KNEC's integrated examination format. This alignment indicates that high-stakes assessments exert a strong influence on classroom practices. However, despite this convergence at the assessment level, teaching remained

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traditional and fragmented. This mismatch implies that while teachers may feel compelled to "teach to the test," they lack the conceptual clarity, training, and resources required to authentically implement integrated pedagogy. When asked why they did not practice integration, teachers offered several explanations. Chief among these was a limited understanding of what effective integration entails. This knowledge gap was compounded by time constraints imposed by a congested syllabus, inadequate teaching and learning materials aligned with integrated content, and a general fear that blending grammar with literature could confuse students and undermine comprehension.

Professional development emerged as a critical area of concern. Although most head teachers reported facilitating in-service training, many teachers had never attended formal sessions specifically targeting the implementation of the IEC. Those who had not received training had to rely on informal professional development mechanisms. These included collaborating with colleagues within and across schools, self-directed learning using multimedia resources produced by the former Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), and engaging in school-based or cluster-level discussions. While these adaptive strategies reflect commendable initiative and resilience on the part of teachers, they also point to an underlying systemic failure to provide structured, sustained, and curriculum-specific professional support.

The role of head teachers in the implementation process was multifaceted. Beyond administrative oversight, head teachers contributed by ensuring the provision of textbooks and teaching materials, promoting continuous teacher learning, monitoring curriculum implementation, and encouraging teamwork within English departments. Some also made efforts to foster a school-wide culture of English usage. Furthermore, teacher motivation was nurtured through both tangible and intangible means—ranging from verbal praise to formal recognition and promotion recommendations. However, the study found that even the most supportive head teachers were constrained by systemic limitations such as insufficient funding for in-service training and a lack of coordination with external agencies.

Access to professional development was not only limited but also uneven. Most teachers reported having attended only one seminar or workshop per year—far from adequate given the curriculum's complexity and the pedagogical shift it demands. Several barriers to training participation were cited, including financial constraints, workload pressure, and poor communication from the Ministry of Education regarding available opportunities. These findings underscore the inadequacy of current professional development models, which are neither systematic nor equitably accessible across schools and regions.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), as the principal curriculum development body, was found to play a supportive role by providing syllabuses, recommended book lists, and periodic training sessions. It also developed supplementary materials such as educational radio programs to enhance teacher capacity. However, these initiatives were often insufficient in scale and irregular in frequency, limiting their effectiveness. The Ministry of Education (MoE) also contributed by approving teaching materials, conducting some training sessions, and participating in curriculum review processes. Yet, like KICD, the Ministry's interventions were fragmented and lacked sustained follow-up mechanisms to ensure teacher readiness and compliance.

Finally, while the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) holds significant influence over how English is taught through its exam structures, its role in supporting teacher development was notably limited. KNEC contributed to IEC implementation through the provision of assessment resources such as sample papers, performance reports, and exam syllabuses. However, it did not offer pedagogical support to help teachers align their instruction with the integrated format of its exams. This absence of instructional guidance further widened the gap between curriculum design and classroom delivery.

In summary, the results demonstrate that while there is policy-level support for the Integrated English Curriculum, its actual implementation is undermined by conceptual misunderstandings, inadequate professional development, poor inter-agency coordination, and limited material support. Teachers and head teachers remain central actors in the implementation process, but their efforts are constrained by systemic factors beyond their control. The findings call for a holistic reevaluation of implementation strategies to bridge the gap between curriculum intent and instructional reality

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine the roles of teachers, head teachers, and government agencies in the implementation of the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC) in Kenyan secondary schools. The findings point to a significant disconnect between curriculum policy and classroom practice. While the IEC was introduced with the intention of unifying the teaching of English Language and Literature to promote comprehensive linguistic competence, critical thinking, and real-world communication skills, its implementation has been inconsistent and largely ineffective in most of the observed schools.

A key conclusion of this study is that many teachers and head teachers were not adequately prepared for the transition to the integrated approach. The majority began implementing the curriculum without formal in-service training or sufficient exposure to the pedagogical underpinnings of integration. As a result, most teachers continue to teach English Language and Literature as discrete subjects, a practice that undermines the very essence of the IEC and perpetuates fragmented learning experiences for students.

Moreover, the study reveals that the structural support needed for effective implementation is largely inadequate. Institutional challenges—such as limited access to teaching and learning materials, infrequent and poorly coordinated professional development, and minimal classroom supervision—further

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hinder teachers' ability to embrace and deliver the curriculum as intended. While some head teachers demonstrated efforts to support implementation by facilitating peer collaboration and resource provision, these efforts were often constrained by budgetary limitations and insufficient guidance from national agencies.

Government bodies like the Ministry of Education (MoE), Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), and Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) have played important roles in developing policy and offering sporadic training. However, their efforts have not been sustained or widespread enough to catalyze systemic change. The result is a curriculum that remains theoretically sound but practically under-implemented.

In conclusion, the IEC has the potential to enrich English education in Kenya by promoting interconnected learning and deeper student engagement with language. However, for this potential to be realized, there must be a deliberate and coordinated effort to bridge the policy-practice gap. This entails targeted in-service training, regular classroom support and supervision, robust teacher preparation programs, and improved resource allocation. Without these structural reinforcements, the Integrated English Curriculum will continue to be more of a policy aspiration than a pedagogical reality in Kenyan classrooms.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The successful implementation of the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC) in Kenya's secondary schools requires a comprehensive and sustained approach involving all key education stakeholders. The findings of this study suggest that while the policy framework for integration exists, the actual translation of that policy into classroom practice is hampered by a combination of pedagogical, institutional, and systemic limitations. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed to address these challenges in a structured and sustainable manner.

To begin with, the Ministry of Education (MoE) must take the lead in enhancing teachers' pedagogical capacity to implement the integrated approach effectively. Many teachers currently lack formal training in integration strategies and continue to teach English Language and Literature as distinct subjects. The MoE, in collaboration with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), should ensure continuous professional development programs that are specifically tailored to the demands of integrated instruction. These programs should not only be more frequent but also context-sensitive, addressing the realities of resource-limited rural classrooms. Moreover, the TSC must ensure adequate staffing of English teachers in all schools, particularly in remote rural areas, where teacher shortages exacerbate workload pressures and hinder curriculum innovation.

Further, MoE field officers should be more actively engaged in school-based curriculum support. Regular school visits, instructional coaching, and monitoring of IEC implementation would provide teachers with timely feedback and motivation. Such supervision should shift from a fault-finding model to one of mentorship, capacity building, and collaborative problem-solving. In this way, teachers would be more inclined to embrace new instructional approaches and seek clarification where needed.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD**)** has a central role in refining the structure and delivery of the IEC. This study highlights the need for curriculum revisions that reflect practical classroom realities. KICD should revisit and update the curriculum, ensuring that it aligns with the experiences and concerns raised by classroom teachers and school leaders. In addition, there is a need to increase the number of lessons allocated to English, which is currently insufficient for comprehensive integration. Equally important is the training of curriculum specialists who are responsible for cascading the integrated pedagogy to educators. These specialists must be adequately equipped both in content and delivery methods to inspire confidence and competence among teachers.

Meanwhile, the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) should extend its role beyond assessment to include teacher empowerment. While KNEC has made efforts to reflect the integrated approach in its examinations, this study found that many teachers do not fully understand how to align their instruction with this format. KNEC should therefore initiate and scale up capacity-building initiatives that demystify integrated assessment and help teachers develop aligned instructional and evaluative practices.

In the longer term, universities and teacher training colleges must institutionalize the integrated approach within their pre-service teacher education programs. Embedding integration within teacher preparation courses ensures that new graduates enter the profession with the theoretical foundation and practical skills necessary to implement the IEC effectively. It also reduces the need for extensive retraining later on, saving time and resources.

At the school level**,** head teachers and Boards of Management must prioritize the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials that support integration. Many teachers currently rely on outdated or unsuitable resources, which undermine their ability to implement the curriculum as intended. Schools should also foster collaborative professional environments where teachers can share strategies, co-plan lessons, and reflect on their practices. Moreover, school leaders must recognize and reward innovation and best practices in curriculum delivery as a way to motivate and retain committed educators.

In conclusion, these recommendations are grounded in the realities reported by teachers, head teachers, and education officers involved in IEC implementation. They address the systemic, pedagogical, and institutional barriers to effective integration. By fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, enhancing

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training, and ensuring that both policy and practice are aligned, stakeholders can collectively actualize the transformative potential of the Integrated English Curriculum in Kenya's secondary education system.

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