

Teaching Speaking Skills: Challenges of using Integrated Approach in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract

The integrated approach to teaching English language in secondary schools in Kenya was introduced in 1986 with the inception of the 8-4-4 system of education. One of the aims of this approach in Kenya was to address the problem of poor oral skills among form four school leavers. However, evaluation of the challenges teachers face in using this approach to teach has not been adequately done. Thus a study was carried out in 2010 to identify and suggest solutions to these challenges to teaching speaking skills in English in secondary schools. This study was important because English as used in real life situation is integrated. Additionally, speaking skill is key to effective communication. When one has control of language he/she feels confident and comfortable when talking to other people. Communication is important in any carrier. A descriptive survey was carried out in secondary schools in Eldoret Municipality. This paper is, therefore, an overview of the results obtained from the study. A total of 7 secondary schools, selected using multiple sampling techniques made up the study population. Fourteen Form Three teachers of English language responded to the questionnaires, while fourteen speaking skill lessons were observed and tape-recorded. The study adopted a mixed methods approach and subsequently analyzed the data using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study revealed that all schools, irrespective of their category, faced similar challenges in the use of the integrated approach in teaching speaking skills. The major challenge for the integration of language and literature in teaching speaking skills was its demanding nature in terms of preparation and time requirements. Other challenges included shortage of teaching time, large number of students in the classroom hampering the use of more effective approaches in teaching, and mother tongue interference. From these findings, teachers would want to see the need to organize skill-based workshops and seminars to give teachers necessary capacity on how to integrate the approach in the classroom activities among other solutions. The study makes recommendations to the Ministry of Education to ensure that all schools have adequate human and non-human resources for teaching speaking skills.

Keywords: Speaking Skills, Integrated Approach, Challenges

Introduction

The speaking skill is central to success in life and this is why Obura (1986) blames language teachers for denying their learners chances to learn how to speak in the language classroom. It has been noted with a lot of concern that most students who have completed form four are unable to communicate properly in English (Abenga, 2005) and even some of the first-year students who join Kenyan universities are unable to hold class discussions in English (Barasa, 2005). The poor performance and low proficiency in English have led to dissatisfaction by groups within the education and employment sectors (*ibid.*). Thus, according to Mwamba (2005), many students in secondary schools are shy and prefer remaining quiet in class because they are unable to express themselves appropriately in spoken language. This reflects negatively on the education system because the speaking skill is an important survival skill required at places of work, school and back at home, during job interviews and hence a gateway to employment.

The realization of low proficiency in oral skills among Form Four graduates has thus been an area of concern among educationist in Kenya. In response to this problem, the Kenya government in 1986 introduced the 8-4-4 system of education to address this, among other, problems; the curriculum was later revised in 2002 to further enhance the teaching of English language. With the introduction of this system, English language and Literature were combined and taught as a single subject (K.I.E, 2002) with the basic language skills, listening and speaking, reading and writing being taught together to complement one another in the process of English learning (Oketch, 2005).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education (MoE) modified the syllabus for English by reducing the

content to be taught. Second, MoE made testing of oral skills compulsory in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) and Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) released a new format of examinations for secondary school that recognizes the need for integration of language and literature at all levels (Barasa, 2005). The revised 2002 English Syllabus pioneer candidates sat the KCSE English Paper 1 in 2006. However, the performance in English still remained dismal. This syllabus lays great emphasis on the acquisition of the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing and also emphasizes, practicing English language skills effectively, promoting effective communication, developing critical thinking and promoting life-long interest in reading.

According to the National Curriculum Development Committee (NCDC) (as cited in Gathumbi & Masembe, 2005), the objectives of teaching English language and Literature as a course was to help learners understand the different contexts in which speech is used depending on the topic of discussion, the place and whom one is talking to; be able to understand with reasonable ease rapid standard speech in situations such as class discussions, radio/television programmes, recorded plays, full length speech and everyday speech. In addition, learners were expected to be active and to use their experiences in the learning process through various learning activities. Thus learners would see themselves as actors, unlike in the old system where they were passive receivers of knowledge. The Integrated Approach (IA), therefore, emphasizes a shift from the idea of knowledge as 'given' to the idea of knowledge as 'made' (Adams, 1982; Shiundu & Mohamed, 1966; Neri de Souza *et al.*, 2007), maximizing on meaningful communication and classroom interaction (Gathumbi & Masembe, 2005) and encourages learners to think in order to solve problems (Akabway *et al.*, 1992). Based on the discussion so far, it can be argued that integration was meant to improve the learning and teaching of English, specifically oral skills of secondary school graduates. However, its implementation had problems and the objectives were only partly achieved. Specifically, it did not achieve much in improving the oral skills of Form Four graduates. The debate thus constructed centred on reasons for the partial success.

The first problem was lack of strict supervision and evaluation. Any teaching method to be implemented effectively should be strictly supervised and evaluated for it to achieve its intended objectives (Ayot, 1984). A problem therefore arises because there is little supervision in instructional methods currently in Kenyan Schools. This is because the large numbers of teachers need guidance on how to employ the IA in classroom activities and the instructional resources, yet there are few inspectors to provide guidance. In the Kenyan situation, supervision is only done to teacher students during teaching practice but rarely is it done to fully-fledged teachers (Ayot, 1984). Clinical supervision which puts emphasis on improvement of classroom performance on the use of tools and skills was neglected for the IA to teaching English. In addition, the Ministry of Education; MoE (1992) notes that 'speaking skills' was largely neglected and not taught in many secondary schools since it was not examined at the national level. Teachers believed that acquisition of the speaking skills was a natural process.

Second, there is lack of teachers trained in both English and Literature as a combined course. This problem led the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC) to caution universities training secondary teachers of English to ensure that they are trained in the IA (*Daily Nation*, 2009). This brings to light the problems of teaching the IA especially when the teacher is trained in English and another teaching subject. Rotumoi (2006) observes that Kenyatta University was the first university to make the teaching of English and Literature mandatory in 1978 and Nairobi University followed suit. However, those teachers who had trained earlier did not possess the critical skills of handling both subjects and yet some still teach English as a subject.

Third, the merging of English and Literature causes serious problems that lead to confusion, reduction in time allocation and resistance (Munoko, 1996; Anyanzwa & Otunga, 2007; Barasa, 2005). In addition, reduction in the number of lessons as a result of integration is double tragedy because the content is too much thus completion of syllabus is impossible. The IA results in heavy work load for both teachers and the students. Teachers therefore neglect the weak students and only move on with fast learners. Most teachers of English are in agreement that more hours should be devoted to the teaching of English language in the Kenyan Secondary Schools because it is taught as a second language. Besides, when a new curriculum is introduced, teachers resist change and do not fully embrace the tenets of such a new curricula (Loepp, 1991).

Fourth is the lack of relevant teaching resources. The cornerstone of the IA is the emphasis on extensive use of authentic teaching materials. Anyanzwa and Otunga (2007) and Oketch (2005) point out that resource materials and appropriate instructional settings which include text books, pictures, cards, articles, audio-visual aids, fieldworks, workshops, laboratories and personnel are critical to learning. In addition, Barasa (2005) emphasizes that for quality English teacher training, there has to be an improvement in the provision of language resources in secondary schools; the backbone of any educational system. They facilitate understanding of difficult concepts. Schools such as national and private ones where parents are able to provide resources perform well especially in the speaking skill. This is why the author was convinced to establish if the secondary schools in Kenya have enough materials for use when using the IA to teach a speaking skills lesson. In addition, teaching materials lack in the schools as a result of procurement related problems encountered by the Kenya Institute of

Education (KIE).

Considering all these challenges, the question is: do teachers teach as per the recommended objectives that require methods, materials and classroom activities and tasks that are learner-centred? Thus the objective of the study was to identify and look for solutions to the challenges teachers face when using the IA to teaching English and more specifically the speaking skills.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a descriptive survey design as described by Kerlinger (1969) which reports the state of affairs as it is in the field. This involved measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data. The study used this design because it is a widely used research method in education and can be used to collect data about habits, opinions and attitudes or any of the various educational issues (Orodho & Kombo, 2002).

The study was carried out in Eldoret Municipality, Rift Valley Province. Eldoret Municipality was selected for the study because it has manifested a typical problem of poor speaking skills among secondary school students. In addition, schools in this town are classified into national, provincial and district (categories) that were of interest to the authors who wanted to establish whether or not the schools used different instructional materials depending on their category. An earlier study done by Barasa (2005) had shown that national schools performed better because of the availability of teaching and learning resources.

The participating schools were randomly chosen using table of random numbers without any bias except the national school which was the only national school in Eldoret Municipality. Only those schools within the Municipality were included in the study. The target population comprised all secondary school teachers and Form Three students in the 23 secondary schools of Eldoret Municipality.

Probability sampling was used because it provides equal chances to every sample of a given size in the accessible population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The authors used stratified random sampling to select the three school categories: national, provincial and district. Thirty per cent of each school category was included in the study sample. Eight out of 23 secondary schools were selected. Purposive sampling was used to select the national school because this method is used to select typical and useful cases only; besides it was the only national school. In addition, simple random sampling was employed to sample the provincial and district secondary schools in the Municipality. It ensures that each member of the target population has equal and independent chance of being included in the study sample (Walliman, 2005). Non-probability sampling was used to select teachers. Two Form Three teachers of English from each school were selected purposively, thus a total of 14 teachers were involved in the study.

Two data collection instruments were used: observation schedule and questionnaires. The questionnaire was likely not to elicit accurate and all the data required; therefore, the observation schedule was used to compensate for non-responses and inadequacies; it also provided first-hand information which eliminated subjects bias (Mutai, 2000) in the questionnaires. Tape-recording was used alongside observation so that linguistic data was recorded exactly as it occurred (Donough, 1995). Observation of speaking lessons enabled the author to establish the paralinguistic features, resources, classroom activities and tasks used during the lessons. Furthermore, linguistic environment, learner involvement as well as modelling by the teacher were also observed. All these provided an accurate description of the speaking skill as taught and learnt by the teachers and learners, respectively. The questionnaire elicited information on teachers' bio-data and the challenges they faced while using the IA. The questionnaires were distributed to the 14 teachers of English in the various school categories.

Results and Discussion

The study was carried out in national, provincial and district schools. On the basis of this, 2 teachers from the national school, representing 14.3% of the total number of teachers in the study, 6(42.9%) teachers from provincial schools and 6(42.9%) from district schools responded to the questionnaires and were observed in class.

Teacher Qualifications and Teaching Experience

The results showed that all the teachers were academically and professionally qualified and thus were able to teach English using the IA. The analysis of the data showed that all the 14 teachers who participated in the study were holders of Bachelors' degree in Education (English Literature combination). Six (42.9%) of the teachers had Master of Philosophy in various fields including linguistics, language education and guidance and counselling. The teachers who had B. Ed – English and Literature but without Master of Philosophy were 8(57.1%). Of the teachers who participated in the study, there were no untrained teachers.

In the study, experience in teaching, based on the number of years in the teaching profession, was an important parameter; any teacher who had taught for two and more years was considered experienced, based on TSC code of regulations (Act. 1966, No. 2 of 1967). All the teachers of English were experienced, except one who had taught for less than two years. The findings indicated that 1(7.1%) teacher had taught English for

between 1 and 2 years, 2(14.3%) had taught for between 4 and 6 years, 3(21.4%) had taught for between 6 and 10 years while 8(57.1%) had taught English for over 10 years. It is therefore clear that schools had teachers with different teaching experience. This could imply that these teachers were aware of the classroom activities and tasks, methods and the instructional materials to be used in the impartation of English speaking skills among the learners. The newly trained teacher could have received guidance from the experienced teachers and therefore gained experience by observing their speaking skills lessons. Although most of the teachers were experienced, they could still benefit from attending in-service courses, workshops, seminars and conferences on the IA in order to improve their skills in integration in language teaching.

Challenges Teachers face when using the Integrated Approach

The authors sought to establish the problems that teachers of English faced when using the IA to teaching speaking skills. The teachers ranked the problems from the highest (ranked 1) to lowest (ranked 10) as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Challenges Teachers Face using the Integrated Approach to Teach Speaking Skills

Problem	Percentage	Rank	Total
Integrating language and literature is too demanding	13(92.9%)	1	14(100)
Shortage of teaching time	12(85.7%)	2	14(100)
Large number of students in classroom	12(85.7%)	2	14(100)
Mother tongue interference	11(78.6%)	4	14(100)
Teachers are not adequately trained to handle integration	10(71.4%)	5	14(100)
Problems of teacher choosing the technique	7(50%)	6	14(100)
Speaking skills class is noisy	7(50%)	6	14(100)
Lack of motivation by the learner	6(42.9%)	8	14(100)
Problems of teacher choosing classroom activities	5(35%)	9	14(100)
Students negative attitude	5(35%)	9	14(100)

The analysis and interpretation of data revealed that teachers of English use the IA to teach speaking skills and that the use of IA actually improves the mastery of speaking skills in secondary schools.

The information in Table 1 shows that the problems were ranked from the highest (one) to the least (ten) as follows: integrating English and Literature is too demanding, shortage of teaching time, large number of students in classrooms, mother tongue interference, inadequate training of teachers to handle integration, choice of the right technique to use, speaking skills class is noisy, lack of motivation by the learner, choice of the right classroom activity and students negative attitude towards English.

The most challenging factors according to the teachers who answered the questionnaires were: integrating English and Literature is too demanding, shortage of teaching time and large number of students in class. The next in rank were mother tongue interference and inadequate training of teachers to handle integration. Although in the literature reviewed other challenges including choice of technique, noise in the class, learner motivation and choice of activities and learner negative attitude have been mentioned, in this study teachers felt that these have minimal effect as challenges affecting teaching of English using the IA. A closer look at these challenges is presented here below.

Integration of English and Literature is too demanding

Most lessons observed in all the schools made use of little content from Literature because, according to teachers, it was too demanding to identify appropriate material that fits into the teaching of speaking skills. This observation is similar to that of Barasa (2005) and Rotumoi (2006). Without appropriate literary material the concepts taught become boring and difficult to understand. The findings of the research confirmed that teachers actually had problems and struggle to try to merge the two subjects.

Shortage of Teaching Time

Most teachers indicated that shortage of time leads to poor coverage of the syllabus in that some speaking skills topics are not well taught although they are set in KCSE and this could lead to poor performance in the Examination. Several authors have reported the same challenge (Monoko, 1996; Barasa, 2005; Anyanzwa & Otunga, 2007). The teachers observed that 40 minutes was not adequate when teaching speaking skills using role play, debates and drama as classroom activities. Thus teachers suggested that speaking skills lessons be allocated a double period, taught twice weekly to allow for enough time for the learners to practice their speaking skills in class. This is possible since some subjects in secondary schools have been reduced by collapsing economics,

commerce and accounting into an umbrella subject called business studies.

Large Number of Students in the Classroom

The schools under investigation had large numbers of the students in their classes which made it near impossible for teachers to engage individual learners in speech work within the lesson. The most crowded classrooms were those in district schools, which had up to 70 students in a classroom whose capacity is 35 students. The crowding encouraged idleness and noise making during lesson discussions. It did not give room for adequate practice. The IA to teaching English is learner-centred and therefore each learner is likely to be actively involved in the learning process by in classroom activities (Gathumbi & Masembe, 2005; Neri de Souza *et al.*, 2007). This poses a challenge to teachers, especially when not all students can speak within a lesson.

Mother-tongue Interference

Mother tongue interference was rated number four challenge by teachers. Most students in the schools under study had mother tongue dominance in pronunciation of the words and various sounds of the English language. This was as a result of the difference in the sound system of English verses that of the African Languages: Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Dholuo and Ekegusii that were the most commonly used in the study area. The English language teachers ought to encourage their learner to use localized Kenyan English as they need not to be native speakers in order to communicate effectively. This view is also held by Ayot (1984). Teachers should identify the problematic sounds in order to teach students how to pronounce them correctly and more time should be given to the learners to practice their speaking skills. Classroom activities such as drama, debate, role play, impromptu speeches, story-telling could be used for practice and attain confidence in the use of English language as recommended by Okech (2005).

Teachers are not adequately Trained to Handle Integration

Although all the teachers who participated in the study had Bachelor's degree in Education Arts (English and Literature), they still felt that their training in the IA was not adequate. This observation supports earlier arguments by Rotumoi (2006) *Daily Nation* (2009, March 23). This is due to the fact that skills in the IA are not adequately handled at the university level. Lack of proper training in the IA could lead to poor performance especially in the speaking skills in KCSE.

Choice of the Right Teaching Method and Noisy Classrooms

Teachers were divided on whether or not choosing of the right teaching method and noise in classrooms were indeed challenges to learning speaking skills. During the lessons observed, teachers used traditional methods like explanation, demonstration, discussion and question and answer methods of teaching. They seemed unaware of the new integrated methods of teaching English such as Task-Based Method, Communicative Language Teaching and Situational Language Teaching (Cummings & Davidson, 2007; Liao, 2000). With regard to noisy classrooms, 50% of teachers agreed that it was a challenge. However, this is not a serious challenge as the teachers can easily control it, ensuring the students do not make noise. Students also learn better when there is space for them to practice the speaking skills orally; therefore, this should not be viewed as noise.

Lack of Motivation, Poor choice of the Classroom Activities and Students Negative Attitude

Teachers in the field did not regard these aspects as a challenge. However, according to Weller (2005), lack of motivation, poor choice of classroom activities (Utne *et al.*, 2004) and learners' negative attitude (KNEC, 2007) could contribute to challenges facing teaching English using the IA. Students' motivation for learning English and attitudes towards learning the language are the leading predictors of success in learning English. Therefore, educators and trainers should take these factors into consideration when designing English language training and instruction. To deal with lack of motivation on the part of learners, teachers should explain to their learners the importance of knowing the speaking skills; a mastery of the skills has life-long benefits for example passing interviews and communicating with others. Teachers should also be enthusiastic when teaching speaking skill, although, according to Mwamba (2005), some teachers fear teaching speaking skills because of mother-tongue dominance. The teachers therefore should strive to use methods and classroom activities which are interesting to motivate their learners throughout the lesson. The challenge of choice classroom activities could be addressed by ensuring that three to four activities are used in each lesson.

Although students' negative attitude was ranked the least of the challenges experienced by the teachers, attitude plays a very important role in mastery of speaking skills. The research findings point to positive attitudes toward English as a tool to securing a good job and the importance of fluency in English to become a full participant in English-speaking society. These and other studies of attitudes and motivations for learning English point to a need for instruction that helps students function effectively in occupational settings, as well as society as a whole.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Following the study findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Teachers of English are experiencing some challenges in using the IA owing to their inadequate training in handling the content of integrating English and Literature.
- Teachers of English face five major challenges which include integration of English and Literature is to demanding in terms skills and time on the part of the teachers, shortage of teaching time allocated for teaching speaking skill which is only once a week, large number of students in classrooms, mother tongue dominance and inadequacy in teacher training that failed to equip teachers with the adequate skills to handle integrated approach.

To enhance performance in both teaching and learning of speaking skills using the IA in schools in Kenya, the following recommendations were made:

- There is a need to re-look at the curriculum of English Teacher Trainees at university level to incorporate content on the IA to teaching English as a subject. This should be observed during teaching practice to ensure that the teacher students master the concept in identifying appropriate literary material for teaching speaking skills.
- The MoE should send Quality Assurance Officers to schools to monitor and evaluate the teaching of speaking skills using the IA to teaching English.
- There is need for the MoE to allocate more lessons for speaking skills practice, build more classrooms and to hire more teachers of English to cope with large numbers of students in schools. This will also enable teachers to attend to learners problems individually and provide time for each learner to participate in each lesson leading to improvement in the spoken skills. Students will develop confidence to use the foreign language and improve their skills.
- The government should provide funds to be used for refresher and in-service courses, workshops, seminars and conferences for teachers of English in order to expose them to the IA and enhance their understanding of teaching English in an integrated manner.
- Thus more time should be allocated to English so that it has eight lessons per week from form one to form four with two double lessons for speaking skills to enable the students to have practical speaking skills lessons.
- Content in IA should be developed and be taught to English language students at both undergraduate and post graduate levels. This will enable them to have appropriate skills on how to teach using this approach, hence improve in English performance. There is need therefore to re-organize undergraduate courses for teachers of English to include these teaching methods, as a way of improving teaching skills and competence for the teachers.
- In addition, workshops, seminars/conferences and in-service courses should be organized for teachers in the field in this approach to improve their competence to handle integrated approach for better results in future.
- The attitudes towards the language should be instructive for educators, who should take this factor into consideration when designing English language instruction or training courses. Instruction should meet the needs and motivations of students in order for them to become successful fluent speakers of English language.

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