

# **FINDING YOUR VOICE: A WORKSHOP ON THE CRAFT OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION**

## **WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE**

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### **Sample for Discussion**

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#### **INTEGRATION IN TEXTBOOKS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH IN KENYA**

##### **(i) Beginning of a paper for journal article**

Any kind of innovation is subject to unforeseen challenges. Innovation in education, however, has far-reaching effects, which are not necessarily immediately noticeable, but can have significant effects on the individual and the society in general. It is essential that innovative practices in education are well thought through, well researched and of value to their recipients. Yet, even when all angles have been covered, the best innovative practices can go wrong if implementation is poor or non-responsive to the challenges on the ground. In this paper, we examine how the 'integrated approach' to teaching English in secondary schools in Kenya was introduced, the problems that limited its acceptance among English language teachers, why it is increasingly important today, and, most significantly, how English language textbooks are uniquely positioned to act as agents of change in the adoption of the integrated approach by teachers.

The current English syllabus for secondary schools in Kenya (KIE, 2002:3) describes integration in two dimensions.

Integration means merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both. Through exposure to literature, the learner will improve their language skills...similarly, an improved knowledge of language will enhance the learner's appreciation of literary material. On yet another scale, integration means that no language skill will be taught in isolation. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should all complement each other.

The latter dimension is perhaps the more commonly understood interpretation of integration among language teachers; however, in 1985 when the Kenya government revamped the education system, the merging of two previously autonomous subjects – English language and literature in English – was one of the most significant innovations at secondary school level. This merger is presented as the first

dimension in the quotation above. Prior to 1985, English language was a compulsory subject in secondary school while literature was an optional subject. Many English and literature teachers did not welcome the transition to a system where both subjects were subsumed under 'English' on the school timetable. Kioko (2003) outlines several reasons for negativity and apathy towards integration.

She quotes KIE (1987: ix) as providing the following unhelpful definition of integration: "The integration of both language and literature in its broad sense implies that the same teacher will teach the same class both language and literature as a compact unit." This book, intended as a handbook for secondary school English teachers, also used language that suggested that integration was an uphill task, such as "the teacher of English will be *forced to...*" and "this onerous and difficulty task placed on the teacher of English is *exacerbated by...*" (our emphasis). In its presentation of language skills and literature content, this book was not, itself, illustrative of integration since it continued the tradition of handling each component separately. Thus, the material that was intended to guide the teacher in implementing the innovation was wanting. Kioko also points out that integration did not permeate teacher training, therefore old practices persisted. In addition, the textbook that was produced for use in schools, *Integrated English*, was not successful in reflecting integration and was therefore unhelpful to teachers. Furthermore, the national examination in English persisted in having distinct papers for testing language and literature, reinforcing their differences.

In the last six years, there has been renewed interest in integration. Teachers now need to pay attention to integration and actually practice it in class. The main reason for this is that with the adoption of the 2002 syllabus, there were two other significant changes. First, the national examination format changed significantly, and became more representative of the ideals espoused in the integrated approach. Secondly, the market for educational textbooks was liberalised, leading to intense competition by publishers to produce high quality textbooks that adhered to the content and methodologies suggested in the syllabi.

Textbooks play a central role in education. Hutchinson & Torres (1994) describe them as agents of change and show their significance in 'reskilling' teachers. Having examined the controversies surrounding integration, we now focus on our analysis of one textbook series, *Head Start Secondary English* (Form 1-4), a product responsive to the 2002 syllabus for secondary school English in Kenya.

**(ii) Stand-Alone piece for a general audience**

What springs to mind when you hear the word ‘integration’? Perhaps most of us immediately think of integration in terms of society – people gaining acceptance, and the promotion of social harmony. Subject specialists will almost certainly, additionally, think of this term in relation to their particular specializations. For mathematicians, differential equations probably spring to mind, while psychologists might have happy visions of people with balanced personalities spreading peace and joy. English language teachers perhaps nod knowingly to one another, assured that their colleagues, like them, are thinking of how to combine the different language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) into a wonderful forty-minute lesson for their learners. However, their Kenyan colleagues might frown, and even if they do nod back knowingly, they are unlikely to be thinking of integration in quite the same light as English language teachers from elsewhere.

When the Kenyan government overhauled the school system in 1985, two subjects that had previously been distinct in secondary school were merged: English language and literature. Prior to 1985, English language was compulsory, but literature was optional. Teachers happily identified themselves as teachers of English language or as teachers of literature. All that changed in 1985 with the ‘integration’ of the two subjects. Proponents argued that the two subjects ought to be studied together since they are closely related and therefore each enriched and informed the other. Opponents argued that integration watered down their individual disciplines.

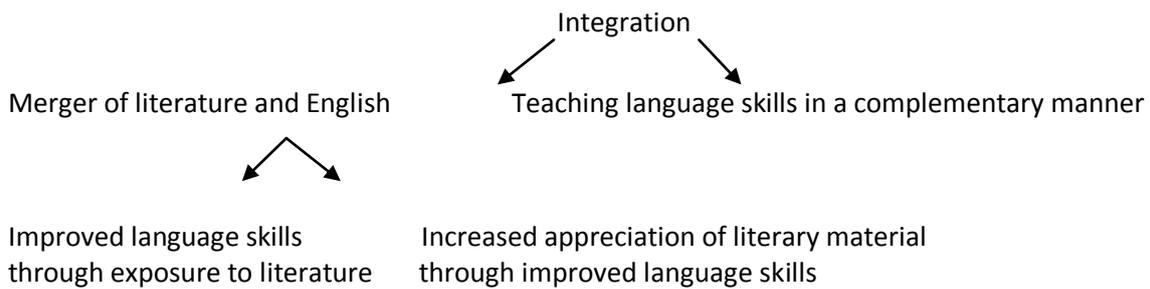
Integration was generally not well received for a variety of reasons, which researchers have explored. The term was not well defined at the outset, and those materials that did define it, often made it appear difficult. Although the slot for ‘literature’ disappeared from timetables across the country, teachers of English and literature tended to continue dividing the slots for English and proceeded with teaching in much the same manner as they had in the past. In addition, universities and teacher training colleges were slow to lead the way in training new teachers and carrying out in-service training for existing teachers.

Though perhaps for some wrong reasons, there is revived interest in integration today. Integration is twenty-four years old, but it is only now that it is likely to be taken more seriously. Why? First, the syllabus changed in 2002, and spelt out more clearly what integration meant. Secondly, a change in the examination format has caused teachers to re-think their approaches to teaching English, since the examination now reflects the spirit of integration. Thirdly, the liberalization of the textbook market has led to fierce competition among textbook publishers, with each competing to publish books that

reflect the content and spirit of the current national syllabus (2002). Approval of textbooks by the Ministry of Education often translates to an opportunity for good profits among successful publishers.

The 2002 syllabus spells out what integration is as follows: "Integration means merging of two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both...on yet another scale, integration means that no language skill should be taught in isolation. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should complement each other. "(p.3)

We see it like this:



Perhaps now, when the term integration is mentioned, teachers of English in Kenya will not have a mixture of frowns and knowing nods. Perhaps now, they shall all nod in unison.