

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Towards a model of integrated English language curriculum for secondary schools in Kenya

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**Design of the Integrated English Language Curriculum has been blamed for falling standards of students' competence in the subject. Teacher input in the curriculum design has rarely been considered in the centralized curriculum development approach used in Kenya. However, it is now recognized that teacher input is critical if curriculum is to be effective. The purpose of this study was therefore to evaluate the implementation of the integrated approach to the teaching of English in secondary schools in Kenya and provide a proposal for a revised programme that takes into account teacher input which is often ignored in centralized curriculum development systems such as the one in Kenya. Data was collected from curriculum developers using an interview schedule and from teachers of English using a questionnaire. The study revealed that stakeholders perceived the integrated approach in conflicting terms and Teachers were not well prepared to implement the integrated approach. Curriculum developers advocated for the continuation of the integrated practice while teachers of English called for separation of English and Literature. A new shared integrated model is proposed.**

**Key words:** English language curriculum, integrated curriculum, challenges and opportunities.

## INTRODUCTION

English language plays a vital role in the language situation in Kenya. It is the medium of instruction in Kenya from primary four, through secondary education, colleges and universities. This means that English is a service subject across the entire school curriculum. As a result of being the medium of instruction, English language is also the language of examinations. It is the official language in Kenya and, a language of regional communication, used in East African regional forums. Moreover, English is an international language. It is one of the leading media for communication in international conferences and meetings.

In spite of the important role played by English language in Kenya, there have been persistent complaints about falling standards of both written and spoken English since the late 1950s (Hawes, 1979; Oluoch, 1982; Iyomagomya, 1989). Since 1985, substantial blame at secondary school level is put on the integrated approach to the teaching of English designed and implemented in schools (K.I.E., 2002).

According to the integrated approach, the following are pursued as the objectives of ELT for secondary schools in Kenya'. At the end of the secondary school English course, the learner should be able to; listen attentively for comprehension and respond appropriately; use listening skills to infer and interpret meaning correctly from spoken discourse; listen and process information from a variety of sources; speak accurately, fluently, confidently and appropriately in a variety of contexts; use non-verbal cues effectively in speaking; read fluently and efficiently; appreciate the importance of reading for a variety of purposes; develop a life-long interest in reading a wide range of subjects; read and comprehend literary and non-literary materials; read and analyse literary and non-literary works from Kenya, East Africa, Africa and the rest of the world, and relate to the experiences in these works; appreciate and respect own as well as other people's culture; make an efficient use of a range of sources of information, including libraries, dictionaries, encyclopedias and the internet; use correct spelling, punctuation and paragraphs; use a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary; communicate appropriately in functional and creative writing; write neatly, legibly and effectively; use

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**Table 1.** Structure of the English examination and score distribution between 2000 – 2006.

Year	Papers	Areas covered	Score distribution
2000	Paper 1A	Composition	40
	Paper 1B	Summary, Comprehension and Grammar	80
	Paper 2	Literature in English	80
2001	Paper 1	Composition	40
	Paper 2	Summary, Comprehension and Grammar	80
	Paper 3	Literature in English	80
2002	Paper 1	Composition	40
	Paper 2	Summary, Comprehension and Grammar	80
	Paper 3	Literature in English	80
2003	Paper 1	Composition	40
	Paper 2	Summary, Comprehension and Grammar	80
	Paper 3	Literature in English	80
2004	Paper 1	Composition	40
	Paper 2	Summary, Comprehension and Grammar	80
	Paper 3	Literature in English	80
2005	Paper 1	Composition	40
	Paper 2	Summary, Comprehension and Grammar	80
	Paper 3	Literature in English	80
2006	Paper 1	Functional Skills	60
	Paper 2	Comprehension, Literary Appreciation and Grammar	80
	Paper 3	Imaginative Composition and Essays Based on set texts	60

Source: Kenya National Examinations Council.

correct grammatical and idiomatic forms of English; think creatively and critically; appreciate the special way literary writers use language; appreciate the universal human values contained in literary works (K.I.E., 2002).

These objectives spell out the competencies required of learners at the end of secondary education. In other words, the objectives set out the required standards of English at the end of secondary education. The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) examination is expected to measure whether the learners have reached the required standards or not. Objectives are important because they define what the syllabus sets out to achieve and create unity in emphasis among the teachers involved in the teaching. The objectives of teaching English language are stated alongside those of teaching Literature. There are however, objectives which are integrative in nature. Examples of objectives that cut across the two subjects are; appreciate the importance of reading for a variety of purposes; develop a life-long interest in reading a wide range of subjects. These objectives are integrated to either cut across both English and Literature or to aim at transfer of learning by focusing on acquisition of functional skills.

As observed by Beeby (1969) examinations have a pervasive influence upon the curriculum. The type of examinations administered in ELT would, therefore, influence the teaching approach. Table 1 below indicates the

structure of the 'O' level examinations administered by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) for a period of seven years ranging from 2000 to 2006.

Over this period, English and Literature were examined differently in separate papers. One would rightfully suspect that the teaching approach in preparation for these examinations hardly adopted the integrated approach. Examination item analysis for the year 2006 papers however revealed a deliberate shift to use of the integrated approach to the evaluation at the functional level and the curriculum level.

The integrated curriculum organization is rooted in the progressive education movement of the 1930s (Vars, 1987) and is lauded as a move away from the memorization and recitation of isolated facts to a more constructivist view of learning which values in-depth knowledge of subjects. This is seen as a curriculum organization geared towards teaching for transfer and thoughtful learning (Perkins, 1991). Oxford (2001) advocates for an integrated skills approach to language teaching. The advantages of the integrated skills design as contrasted with the purely segregated approach is that it exposes learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a picture of the richness and complexity of language as employed for communication. Integrating the language skills also promotes the learning of real content and is

**Table 2.** Curriculum developers' conception of the integrated approach to the teaching of English by analytical categories.

S/No.	Conception of integrated approach by analytical categories	No of curriculum developers	Percentage
1	Using Literature to teach English and vice-versa	2	100
2	Language across the curriculum	1	50
3	Integrated skills approach	1	50
4	Development of functional skills	1	50
5	Transfer of learning	1	50

highly motivating to learners because that is how language occurs in real life.

In the face of the advantages of integrated curriculum and the reservations on its implementation in Kenya, the purpose of the present study was to evaluate the integrated approach to the teaching of English in secondary schools in Kenya. This was further motivated by the fact that most of the reservations raised on this approach have not been based on any documented studies. The expected output of this study was to propose an integrated English language design based on both the initiators' and the users' perspectives.

This study was structured by the Fullan (2001) theory of change. According to Fullan, the way educational theory is introduced, and especially the lack of opportunity to involve teachers in reform creates a discrepancy between the teachers' (subjective) understanding of change and the initiators' (objective) intended change. In order to bridge the gap in understanding, Fullan (2001) suggests arriving at shared meaning across a group of people working in concert. Indeed this gap in understanding that leads to incoherence in classroom practice has attracted research attention in many countries including Thailand (Segovia and Hardison, 2009). The curriculum development approach in Kenya is based on the top-down paradigm in which teacher input is rarely considered.

The specific objectives of this study were to;

1. Find out stakeholders' conception of the integrated English Language curriculum for secondary schools.
2. Assess the preparation of teachers of English to implement the integrated curriculum.
3. Find out the challenges and opportunities available in improving the use of the integrated approach in English teaching and Learning.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted survey research design and was conducted in Busia district and the Kenya Institute of Education in Nairobi. It was conducted in Busia district for the purpose of finding out teachers' conception of the integrated approach to the teaching of English as well as the challenges and opportunities available in the use of the integrated approach in teaching English. It was done at the Kenya Institute of Education for the purpose of finding out from the initiators of the integrated curriculum their understanding of this approach as well as the challenges and opportunities available for

improvement.

The study intended to cover an area experiencing difficulties in implementing the integrated approach to the teaching of English. Stratified random sampling gave Busia as the venue of the study. Saturated sampling was used to select teachers of English totaling 120 in the sample schools. Saturated sampling was again used to select two full-time English language curriculum developers at the Kenya Institute of Education. Data was collected from teachers of English using a questionnaire, and from curriculum developers using an interview schedule. Qualitative data was analysed by establishing analytical categories from the statements of the respondents. For quantitative data, cross tabulation of responses and calculation of percentages was done. Some responses from curriculum developers and teachers of English were reported verbatim so that the respondents could speak for themselves. The respondents are identified by pseudonym to conceal their identity.

## RESULTS

### Stakeholders' conception of the integrated approach to English language teaching in secondary schools

The way people perceive change determines their ability to institutionalize it. If they have different (subjective) understanding of it from that intended by their initiators, then their efforts will be misdirected. If they have similar (objective) meaning of change, then they are likely to facilitate its implementation (Fullan, 2001). In the context of teaching and learning English, it was important to find out what the stakeholders involved in curriculum development at K.I.E. and teachers of English in secondary schools understood integration to mean.

The two full-time curriculum developers in English language available at the Kenya Institute of Education were asked the question in the interview schedule: What is the integrated approach to the teaching of English in secondary schools in Kenya? Their responses to this item are summarized in Table 2.

The following verbatim comments reflect what two curriculum developers at K.I.E conceived the integrated approach to English teaching to be. The two respondents are indicated as R1 and R2:

The integrated approach to the teaching of English involves using Literature to teach English and using English to teach Literature. The two subjects have a symbiotic relationship. The teaching of English cannot be separated from that of Literature because Literature is the material

**Table 3.** Teachers' conception of the integrated approach to the teaching of English by analytical categories.

S/No.	Conception of integrated approach by analytical categories	No of teachers	Percentage
1	Using Literature to teach English and vice-versa	69	57.6
2	Integrated skills approach and integration at teaching techniques level	35	28.8
3	Do not know	16	13.6
	Total	120	100

for English and English is used as the medium of writing Literature. The two subjects complement each other. In order to teach language, one has to use scientific, journalistic and other materials. It also means that the teaching of English should be done across the curriculum. In our education system, English is the medium of instruction. Other subjects in the curriculum use English to communicate their ideas. Every school teacher should be a teacher of English. The integration of language therefore, cuts across the entire subject. (R1).

Integration means that candidates have to master the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. They should use these skills at the same time. Listening and speaking effectively helps the learner to receive and respond to information. Once a learner is able to receive and respond to information accurately, then she can develop the skills of receiving the information by reading and responding to information through writing. Learners are expected to master the skills used in daily life like report writing, etiquette, writing of minutes, and letters. The syllabus requires learners to relate what they learn in English and Literature to what happens in life. In examinations, candidates may be asked to write on the dangers of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS (R2).

Teachers of English were asked the following question in the teacher questionnaire; explain your understanding of the integrated approach to the teaching of English? Their responses are summarized in Table 3.

Some of the following were typical comments that reflect the teachers' conception of the integrated approach to the teaching of English. The letters X, Y and Z are pseudonym different teachers.

... it is the teaching of English and Literature together. It involves cross reference that is, drawing from literature to teach language, for example, use of an extract from a play or poem to teach comprehension, grammar and other language aspects. It also involves combining the skills in both grammar and Literature in an attempt to make the subject enjoyable and understandable (Teacher X). The integrated approach to the teaching of English is the intermarrying of skills in the teaching of English, that is, the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. These language skills are put together into a complete whole in the teaching of English by various teaching techniques such as questioning, use of examples and demonstration (Teacher Y).

It involves the infusing of objects (Teaching aids) related

to English from other disciplines so as to enhance the relatedness in the disciplines to the immediate environment to content matter (Teacher Z).

### **Preparation of teachers of English to implement the integrated English curriculum**

In order to elicit information on the preparation of teachers to implement the integrated curriculum in their pre-service teacher education, the following question was posed in the teacher questionnaire; what subjects were you trained to teach? Table 4 indicates the number and percentage of teachers trained to teach different subjects;

Responses from teachers of English indicated that they had not been prepared to teach English and literature using integrated methods in their pre-service teacher education. A total of 72 teachers (60%) specialized in the teaching of English and Literature as separate subjects. The remaining 40% specialized in the teaching of either English or Literature with other subjects.

A further question in the teacher questionnaire read; In your pre-service teacher education, were you trained to teach English and literature as integrated? Table 5 summarizes the responses of teachers.

In order to collect data on the involvement of teachers in in-service education, they were asked the question; have you had in-service training on the teaching of English using the integrated approach? Table 6 indicates the involvement in in-service education.

### **Challenges of using the integrated approach in the teaching of English**

Data on the challenges of teaching English using the integrated approach was obtained from curriculum developers and teachers of English and reported differently.

### **English curriculum developers, perspective**

English language curriculum developers were asked the following question on the challenges of using the integrated approach; what are the problems faced in the implementation of the integrated English syllabus in the secondary schools? Table 7 shows their responses.

According to curriculum developers, the teaching of

**Table 4.** Number and percentage of teachers of English trained to teach different subjects.

S/No.	Subject trained to teach	No. of teachers	percent
1	English and Literature	72	60.0
2	English and Kiswahili	15	12.5
3	English, Business Studies and office Practice	14	11.5
4	English and C.R.E.	7	5.8
5	Literature and French	5	3.8
6	English and French	3	2.5
7	English, History and P.E.	2	1.9
8	English and Geography	2	1.9
	Total	120	100

**Table 5.** The number and percentage of teachers trained to teach English and Literature as integrated.

S/No.	Nature of training	No. of teachers	percent
1	Trained to teach English and Literature as integrated	0	0
2	Not trained to teach English and Literature as integrated	120	100
	Total	120	100

**Table 6.** Number and percent of teachers involved in in-service education.

S/No.	Involvement	No.	Percent
1	Involved	83	69.2%
2	Not involved	37	30.8%
	Total	120	100%

**Table 7.** Challenges of the integrated approach from curriculum developers' perspective.

S/No.	Problem	No. of curriculum developers	percent
1	Irrelevant Teacher education	2	100
2	Lack of adherence to the syllabus	2	100
3	Absence of constant practice	1	50

English and literature as an integrated area in the current set up is not a challenge in itself. The challenges lie elsewhere. They, (100%) saw one such a challenge as the preparation of teachers for secondary schools which was not based on the integrated approach. The state universities prepare teachers for English and Literature as separate disciplines. Besides, some teachers are trained to teach English or Literature with other subjects. When posted to schools, they are expected to teach the two as integrated.

Lack of adherence to the syllabus was cited as another constraint in implementing the integrated language curriculum. The curriculum developers (100%) pointed out that in some schools, the current syllabus was not available and as a result, teachers in such schools went about the business of teaching by using the course books without making references to the syllabus. This made teaching to be out of gear with what was required because the teachers followed the objectives of the course books rather than

the objectives of the syllabus.

Absence of constant practice was cited as another constraining factor. One (50%) curriculum developer argued that language mastery depends much on constant practice. This practice would lead to the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary through a language programme geared towards intensive and extensive reading. This had failed in many secondary schools due to the fact that the necessary reading materials and even sufficient copies of course books were hardly available. These schools did not have well equipped and stocked libraries.

### Teachers' perspective

Teachers were asked again; As an English teacher, what are the challenges of teaching English and Literature as integrated? Their responses are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Challenges of the integrated approach from the teachers' perspective n = 120.

S/No.	Problem	No. of teachers	percent
1	Teaching together separate subjects	108	90
2	Learners talented in either Literature or English	36	30
3	Lack of sufficient time	31	26
4	Literary language is different from conventional language	16	13

**Table 9.** Number and percentage of curriculum developers suggestions for improvement.

S.No.	Suggestion	No. of curriculum developers	percent
1	Tailoring teacher education to secondary curriculum	2	100
2	Acquire the syllabus	2	100
3	Acquisition of reading materials	1	50
4	Constant practice	1	50

Most of the teachers (90%) argued that English and literature were different subjects and that there was a strong need to separate the two. Others (30%) explained that some learners were naturally talented in English while others were good in Literature. But the final score in examinations was just one which did not reflect what the learners were good at. Some of the teachers (26%) said that because of the integrated approach, there was lack of sufficient time for studying and examining aspects of English and literature in a more practical way. Another group (13%) said that sometimes literary language may not conform to the dictates of conventional language. Poetic license for example, allows a writer to distort concepts, meanings, word order and sometimes new word coinage to achieve a desired poetic effect. Many aspects of oral literature are also literal translations from the original oral traditions and may not fit into conventional English language. These may not serve as exemplifiers of correct language in use.

#### **Opportunities available in improving the use of integrated approach according to stakeholders**

##### **Opportunities according to curriculum developers**

In this context, curriculum developers were asked; As an expert, what practical suggestions would you make for improvement? Table 9 contains data on this item.

According to curriculum developers, (100%), one of the first steps towards the better offering of the integrated English curriculum is the tailoring of teacher education curriculum for secondary schools to the needs of the secondary schools. English and Literature should not be taught to the teacher trainees as separate subjects. The approach of allowing students while in schools of education to take either English or Literature with other subjects should not be allowed. To address the issue of lack of adherence to the syllabus, the Curriculum Developers (100%) suggested that schools should ensure that they

immediately have copies of the Kenya Institute of Education current syllabus for use by the teachers which should be faithfully utilized in guiding teaching and learning.

One (50%) curriculum developer recommended the acquisition of the necessary reading materials in sufficient varieties and that the teachers should help the learners to develop the skills of intensive and extensive reading. This would, according to him, lead to the acquisition of the necessary language structures and vocabulary. The final suggestion from one (50%) curriculum developer entailed advice to teachers of English to constantly use exercises whose results would be given to the students for improvement.

#### **Opportunities available according to teachers of English were also revealing**

Teachers of English were asked; what suggestions would you make for improvement? Their suggestions are shown in Table 10.

The majority of teachers of English (99%) strongly advocated for the separation of English and literature in the secondary school syllabuses. This separation was seen as a way forward in addressing the problems of the two subjects being different, learner needs, teacher preparation and allowing more time for each subject to be studied and examined in a more practical way.

Another proportion of teachers (29%) suggested that after the separation of English from literature, English should be allocated sufficient time to the various aspects of it and have enough practice in its usage. The same teachers suggested that in this new arrangement, literature would be made an optional subject so that the students who would do well in it and would show interest in it would be allowed to take it.

It was the recommendation of 3.5% of the teachers that there was need to update the teachers in the latest methodology of teaching English and literature to cope with

**Table 10.** Number and percentage of teachers' suggestions for improvement n = 120.

S/No.	Suggestion	No. of teachers	percent
1	Separate English and Literature	119	99
2	Allocate sufficient teaching time after separation	35	29
3	Update teachers on the latest methodology	4	3.5

the latest innovations in these subjects. They said that as things were, there were very limited in-service courses and that these in-service courses reached only an almost negligible proportion of the English language and literature teaching fraternity. They further stated that the in-service courses conducted lasted a very short time like one day. They suggested that these should be extended over a longer period and should be conducted during school holidays.

## DISCUSSION

An examination of the views of curriculum developers reveals conception of the integrated approach to the teaching of English at four levels, namely, in terms of using literature to teach English; in terms of the integrated skills approach; in terms of language across the curriculum; and in terms of transfer of learning. This conception by the initiators would be the objective meaning of the integrated approach to English language teaching in secondary schools in Kenya.

The understanding of teachers ranges from some understanding of what is involved to no understanding at all. This has serious implications for the integrated English curriculum. It means that teachers implement this syllabus to varied degrees depending on their conception. There is no unity in emphasis. Malle and Waters (1984) point out that integrating the curriculum is a challenging activity. This view is supported by Waters (2009) who points out that new language teaching methodologies such as those in the integrated approach are alien to language teachers. This implies that teachers must understand this curriculum well before implementing it in order to meet the challenges. For the teachers who do not understand the approach, the challenges must be greater. Comparatively, the conception of curriculum developers of the integrated approach was more comprehensive than that of teachers. It is evident that a gap exists between the objective meaning of integration by the initiators and the subjective meaning by the teachers. This ultimately leads to incoherence in the implementation of the integrated approach to English language teaching in secondary schools.

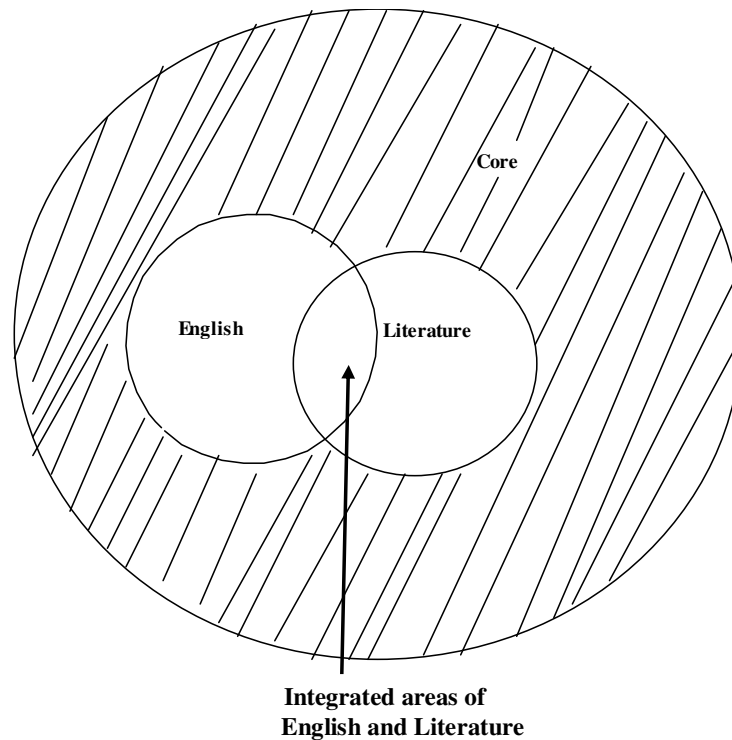
Data in Tables 4 and 5 that indicate lack preparation of teachers to implement the integrated English curriculum is supported by Muya (1996) who states that the training of teachers at state universities in Kenya have for many years taught English and Literature as separate subjects. However, when the Teacher Service Commission often

posted those who specialized in Literature using the integrated syllabus in schools they could not handle the subject competently as they never learned it. What happens is that many teachers who are not prepared to teach both English and Literature spend more time in their area of competence and overlook the other (Kaina, 1996). The In-service that would have come in handy is indicated not to reach all teachers of English in Table 6. As it has been pointed out by DelliCarpini (2009) teaching practices are influenced by teachers' prior experiences and beliefs. If pre-service teachers are not exposed to effective models of teaching in their teacher education programmes, it may be unrealistic to expect them to engage in effective models in their own classrooms. The same is true of use of the integrated approach in classrooms.

A difference of opinion was revealed between curriculum developers and teachers of English with regard to the suggestions that were made about opportunities available for improvement. Whereas curriculum developers emphasized fidelity to the correct pedagogical approaches to the teaching of English and Literature in an integrated format, the teachers of English strongly advocated for the separation of the two as a starting point. There was again a difference between the views of English language curriculum developers and those of teachers of English as regards the challenges of teaching and learning using the integrated approach. Curriculum developers found no problem with the integrated approach itself. They saw the problem as coming from the preparation of teachers which was not based on this approach, lack of adherence to the syllabus, unavailability of the syllabus in schools, absence of constant practice and exercises, insufficient number of textbooks and other reading materials.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

There are two major conclusions based on the findings of the study. First, there is evident lack of consensus among the teachers of English in so far as the concept of integrated curriculum in the teaching of English is concerned. There is no uniform understanding of the integrated approach to the teaching of English in secondary schools in Kenya in so far as the teachers are concerned. This lack of uniform understanding has negative implications for the curriculum. It means that there is no unity in emphasis in implementing the integrated English curriculum since different teachers implements it in their own different ways, depending on their perception of it. Second, English language teacher education is out of



**Figure 1:** Shared Integration of English and Literature.

tune with the classroom needs of the teachers. The integrated English language curriculum for secondary schools has been with us for the last 22 years and yet English language teachers graduating from universities and colleges of education are not educated to teach using this approach. The closest we get is having teachers educated to teach both English and literature but as separate subjects. We still have teachers prepared to either teach English or Literature with other subjects. The implication of this for the curriculum is that there is no link between curriculum developers and faculties or schools of education and teacher education colleges. Five key recommendations emanate from this study:

1. There is need to review the integrated curriculum to take into account the teachers' views about it. The reservations of the teachers raised should be taken into account in all the stages of curriculum development so that there is easier movement from the planning stage to the stage of use of the curriculum in the schools.
2. Teacher education colleges and faculties of education should be properly related and linked. This would ensure that the curriculum developers work as partners with Teacher Education Institutions so that both parties initiate innovations in the curriculum. This would lead to easier adjustments in the curricular of teacher education institutions to be in line with changes in school curricular.
3. In the process of curriculum review suggested, curriculum developers should address the issues of maintaining the integrity of both English and literature. The implication

of this for the curriculum is that there is a challenge for curriculum developers to design an integrated English language curriculum that would respect the separate identities for both English and literature. Such a curriculum design would provide for natural integration in the suitable areas of the two subjects rather than 'forcing' integration across the board.

4. In the design of the syllabus, equal attention should be given to both English and literature in terms of content and learning activities. This would work towards ensuring that the teaching of one subject is not compromised for the sake of the other.

5. The 'O' level examinations used for the evaluation of students learning at the end of form four should be designed in such a way that they reflect student achievement in English and literature, and in the integrated areas of these two subjects. There should be a score for English, a score for literature, and a score for integrated areas of English and literature.

#### **A model for Integration of English and Literature is proposed below**

Based on data on both the conception of the integrated approach the teaching of English by stakeholders and on suggestions for improvement a shared integration model is proposed. Figure 1 depicts this model.

In the proposed model English and Literature should be taught as separate subjects using the integrated approach; both subjects would be core in the secondary school



curriculum. In order to establish the natural fits or potential areas for integration, teachers would scan through both English and Literature syllabuses, learning experiences and content, and then cluster such areas. They would only include those concepts and skills that would fit together naturally and validly in an integrated unit. Teachers should never 'force' integration or choose activities that are superficial and do not address important concepts within the two disciplines. This model takes into account teacher input.

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