Putting into Perspective the Integrative Approach to English Language Teaching in Kenya

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Abstract

Worldwide, the field of language teaching has in the last decade been going through a revolution with the quest to come up with methodological approaches that can be regarded as efficient to effectively facilitate the language instructional process. This has borne an on-going debate regarding which is the most effective method and in which direction should language educators go with regard to enhancing the language learning process. From this perspective, an examination of language teaching methods points at a period in the world of language teaching methodology where there was a move away from the concept of "methods" deemed to restrict the teacher to a particular set of instructional practices. Born from this awakening, the concept of "eclecticism" is taking root. Eclecticism advocates focus on language teaching procedures rather than language teaching methods. Among the approaches that are taking root in language instruction is the "integration approach" to language teaching. This approach has now taken deep root, a philosophy that informs innovative classroom practice of the language teacher. Given this orientation, our paper presents a conceptualization and an analysis of the integration approach to teaching language. The paper draws its thread of thought from literature on methodology and authors combined experience of ELT of 26 years. The aim of this paper is to provide direction toward successful and informed implementation of the integration approach at all levels of learning as provided for in the education system in Kenya. We offer a description of various forms of integration levels which we believe are likely to enlighten teachers of English in handling problems arising during the implementation process. We are certain that the perspectives raised here will provide a sound background to the understanding of language teaching practice in Kenya borne from the communicative approach, communicative language teaching and notional-functional approach syllabi and philosophies, and the advocacy for post-method approaches in language teaching which all form the basis for the integration approach.

Key Words: Language Teaching Methodology, Integration Approach, Eclecticism, Integration Levels

INTRODUCTION

The most critical issue here is whether we should or should not define integration. Whichever, our next course of action is, define or not, there would be consequences. Assuming that we choose not to define integration, we would only be accepting the status-quo. This we cannot and must not be our point of departure. It is imperative that we provide a platform upon which the teacher of English can build cognition about their practice within the English language classroom in Kenya. This is crucial

because the requirements of the syllabus for teaching English language in Kenya necessitate that the teacher has a sound understanding of the integrative approach. As stipulated in the syllabi and handbooks prepared by Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) then, now Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) - (KIE 1990, 2002a, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a and 2008b) for teaching English language at all levels of learning from Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE), Primary school and Secondary school, the teacher is expected to practice integration during the teaching process, though with variations as stated in each case.

A general look at the available literature on language teaching presents the image that integration in language teaching does not have a unified conceptualization as portrayed among the various labels and descriptions given to the practice and process of integration. It is variously referred to as: content based instruction or teaching, task based instruction or teaching, genre based instruction, English across the curriculum, reading across the curriculum, bilingual education, integrated skill approach, content and language integrated teaching, thematic approach and spiral approach among others, many of which mainly have a history as being informed by the communicative language teaching approach principles. From a broader philosophical perspective, this approach is informed by notions embedded within the integrated approach to teaching as outlined in the tenets of the lexical approach, whole language teaching approach and holistic learning or education.

A historical exploration of these approaches reveals that the concept of integration stems from the theoretical positions of the ideas by Hymes (1971) on communicative competence and its development from authentic communicative situations and materials. It is this theory that informed the development of the communicative language teaching approach which was first proposed in the 1970's (Richard, 2006), and has led to the development of the various language teaching methods based on integration and development of communicative competence among learners.

Given the varied ways in which it has been conceptualized by various linguists and language educators, so what is integration? We choose to define this like we said earlier, as entailing different facets with particular reference to the varied ways in which it is conceptualized as presented above. Ideally, we view integration to take up a multidisciplinary style in which all the transferability of skills enhances language development and consequently its actual use thus moving away from the discrete teaching of each unit or sub-topic. In order to facilitate our analysis we do provide our conceptualization of integration in language teaching, then we further take a historical journey offering foundational knowledge in language teaching methodology that we use to further place our conceptualization of integration within the world of modern teaching methodology as postulated in the post-method era and lastly we offer our view on the future of integration in language teaching in Kenya.

DISCUSSIONS

Integration in Language Teaching

The foregoing presentation demonstrates that language syllabi in Kenya are inclined towards integration in language teaching. In approaching the whole concept of integration we must from the onset acknowledge two positions which will form the points of departure or divergence in our discussion. First, we must admit that English language and literature are two separate disciplines with an epistemology and ontology that is quiet distinct. However, within this distinction we find a convergence in the historicity of the disciplines. Second, that it is in the convergence that we situate the concept of integration. It is in finding commonalities that we encounter our challenge in conceptualizing integration in its entirety. We use the word ‗entirety‘ to imply that there are several facets to integration and in this paper we seek to discuss as many facets as we possibly can with a specific purpose for each stance we take into account.

The whole purpose of this paper is pegged on our considered belief that in failing to understand the varied positions and the process that integration engenders, teachers of English in Kenya have since the inception of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985 when the integrated approach to teaching was adopted, held narrow and restrictive perspectives that have impacted rather negatively on the classroom instructional practices. This is also expressed in the presentations by KICD in the documents (KIE, 1990, 2002a, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b). Teachers of English regard integration as mainly entailing teaching of language using literature, and to a very small extent as revealed from research findings as entailing the integration of the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This has definitely shaped how they have conducted teaching of English at all levels of learning from ECDE through to primary school and secondary school levels.

In discussing teacher cognition and language education, Borg (2003 and 2006) expressly suggests that what a teacher knows, thinks and holds as belief towards what teaching and learning of a language is and entails, will shape the manner in which the teaching and learning activities in each of their classrooms will be handled. Indeed he raises this argument to the level where he suggests what and how the teacher teaches in the classroom is specifically determined by their cognition. So our most immediate task becomes to define the teachers understanding of integration, which in effect we believe should be able to shape the manner in which the entire English instructional process will be handled at whichever level of learning as designed within the Kenyan educational system by the set syllabi.

The first position is integration at content level which will entail a consideration of content from various sources of information. This information will vary depending on the source and purpose of teaching any specific English language content area. Therefore the sources could include: newspapers, magazines, television and radio broadcasts, encyclopaedias, atlases or maps among others. This in our view should be able to introduce a wide range of information based on lexico-semantic references and

cultural contexts to the learner in understanding their diverse social, economic and political settings based on similarities and differences ingrained therein.

The second is integration at methodological level which is a fairly broad area. It gives rise to integrating at language teaching methods, techniques, learning activities and teaching resources level, thus the practice of eclecticism in language teaching. In such a situation, the teacher provides for diversity in the methods and any forms of classroom teaching and learning procedures used therefore increasing learner interaction, participation and motivation in class. In this case, learner autonomy is enhanced and teacher's role as facilitator of the learning process up held. *Method integration* in language teaching means that, in the process of instruction the teacher should not only concentrate on using one method during instruction; this is mainly because each method seems to address the teaching and learning of one particular language aspect leaving out the others which are also very important if language competence at whichever level is to be attained. Therefore a mix of several methods will aid the teacher in being able to cover more adequately certain content areas. Furthermore, the teacher should also integrate the nature and variety of instructional resources and learning-teaching activities used to further enhance language development.

Third, there is integrating at the level of planning for instruction which will entail consideration of a number of facets. These will include and may not be limited to: learner individual difference and characteristics, setting characteristics and environmental differences, languages exposed to the learner and use of a specified language for instruction, teacher characteristics regarding their ability, knowledge and skills, availability and use of resources, objectives of teaching specific English language content and a selection of evaluation modes. All these are done in order to ensure a consideration of the unique contextual and instructional circumstances for each language teacher.

Fourth position is integrating at the level of curriculum and syllabi design, development, and the subject matter. This is done with a view of taking into consideration the various subject and content areas like Literature, Mathematics, Geography, History, Physical Education and Religious Education among others offered in the curriculum with a focus on how this content can be harnessed for the development and improvement of overall and specific communicative and linguistic competence in English. The fundamental objective of the teacher should be to expose the learners to language used in the content from the other subjects. Furthermore, it provides opportunity for relating the various sub-content areas offered in the teaching of English like listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar skills, being considered in combination to enhance learning of English. This is referred to as skills integration in language teaching where in the process of instruction the teacher should be able to, in a very creative manner, have a mix of the various language skills to be learnt in a single learning session. This will further be considered from a more basic level of the various sub-skills that are employed during language processing. Besides, there is also a focus on specific components of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and lexicon finally pragmatics in theoretical and practical language use as they relate to the four skills. This principle is so because in real life situations people

do not exclusively use one language skill at a time; naturally there is always a mix of two or even more language skills during the actual use of the language. This is believed if used during instruction the learners have a better opportunity to learn more sufficiently and to naturally acquire and develop the various language skills. Integration at this level helps the learner view language as a tool that holds together the entire curriculum and the various English language syllabus content areas. Most importantly, all these will be informed by a communicative syllabus, which according to Richard (2006) has two facets to its consideration in the design, these are: skills based syllabus and functional syllabus designs that move away from the traditional syllabus where only mastery of grammatical skills and vocabulary are emphasized as is stated in the tenets of the grammar based approaches.

Fifth position is integration at the level of the philosophy of teaching and learning with particular reference to language, which in essence should be able to guide a teacher's values, beliefs, thinking and attitudes towards the entire process of language teaching and learning. The philosophy is basically shaped by the teacher's knowledge of what language acquisition, learning and teaching entail; thus providing important information on the theoretical perspective which in turn informs the practice.

The five perspectives should be rearranged and considered from the fifth to the first based on a top-down approach to the conceptualization of the teaching and learning process of language, in this particular case, English as is handled within the Kenyan education system. This does not imply that a teacher has a choice to make on whether to integrate only one or all aspects in any single teaching session. We do believe that a well-integrated English lesson should entail a whole consideration of the different facets likely to enhance and encourage language development based on what we earlier on referred to as the entirety of integration in language teaching. Borg (2003 and 2006) perceives language teaching as guided by teacher's cognitions based on their beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives about teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities and the self. This concept is further highlighted by Omulando and Barasa (2013) in their advocacy for the ‗interactive approach' to language teaching and they suggest that in order for a teacher of English to adequately handle the language instructional process they must be adaptable and must put into consideration a number of factors. They note that it is an approach ―that focuses on an amalgamation of various aspects in in the language learning environment with the main aim of approaching the language instructional process from a realistic and practical point of view,‖ (p. 12). Based on this understanding Barasa (2011) describes integration in language teaching and advances the idea that ―the whole concept of integration in language teaching stems from the knowledge that language should be learnt holistically rather than in small and separate portions‖ (p. 176).

Basically, we are presenting a situation where the teacher of English should be able to make the most of any and all opportunities for language learning through the manipulation of the teaching process to enhance authentic communication among learners. We perceive integration as a cycle where the point of departure should logically be informed by the philosophy underpinning the country's choice of

integration in teaching and learning and how this informs our choices in curriculum and syllabus design and development. The impact of these two on the other three positions we hold on integration form the basis of the implementation stage by the teacher. In our conceptualization, the process of evaluation is included because it feeds into the teacher's philosophy of teaching and learning and the treatment of the curriculum and syllabus design and development; however it should be noted that it is evident at every facet of integration. This entire process will give us a conceptual view as described diagrammatically below:
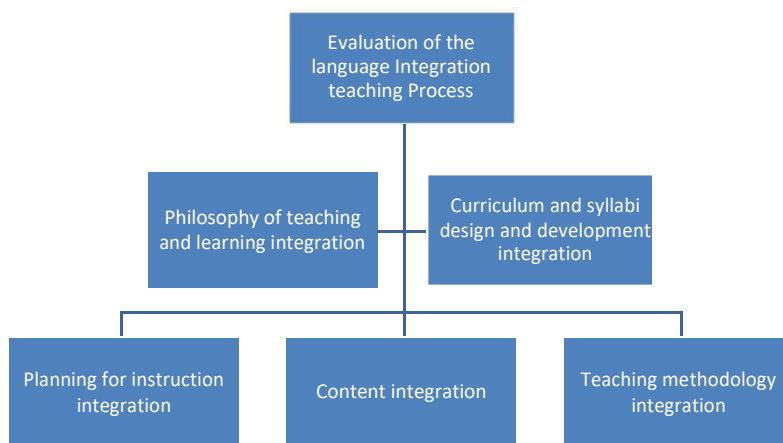

Figure 1. The integration process

Foundational Knowledge in Language Teaching Methodology

In order to adequately understand the journey through which methodology in language teaching has travelled and to rightfully place our conceptualization of integration approach, the understanding of three central concepts is binding. These are approach, method or design and techniques or procedures as espoused by Antony (1963), Rogers and Richards (1986 and 2001) and Brown (2001) who we do consider the fathers of the knowledge base which forms a theoretical basis upon which modern practice in the field of language teaching methodology is constructed. First we present the conceptualization by Anthony (1963) who regards an approach as a set of assumptions concerned with the theories that explain the processes of language acquisition and learning, the nature of language and the nature of language learning and teaching. Method on the other hand is conceptualized as the level at which theory is put into practice with a basic focus on specifications about content and the methodological patterns a teacher of language should take. More specifically it specifies the choices to be made about the particular language skills to be taught, the nature of content to be taught, the order of content presentation among others. Technique is described as the level at which classroom procedures are conveyed. Second, Richards and Rodgers (2001) regard an Approach as a theory of the nature of language and the nature of language learning. A Design on the other hand provides information on the general and specific objectives of the method, specifies the syllabus model, the varieties of learning and teaching activities to be used, the learner roles, the teachers roles and the role of instructional materials. The Procedure

specifies the classroom techniques, practices, and behaviours when the method is used. It also suggests the resources in terms of time, space, and equipment used by the teacher. It also provides for the nature of interactional patterns to be observed in the lessons. Lastly it points at the tactics and strategies to be used by teachers and learners when the method is in use. As indicated in the aforementioned descriptions of language teaching methodology, there exists much similarity in their conceptualization; consequently they have greatly shaped the present-day theory and practice of language teaching.

Cropping from the inclination towards trying to conceptualize the classroom practice of the language teacher, research in language education focusing on teaching methodology based on the principle of innovative instructional processes has revealed a shift and focus in basic language teaching philosophies. It is evident that language educators worldwide are striving to establish instructional practices that would wholesomely cater for both varied learner needs and individual differences and at the same time pay attention to the varied learning contexts to enhance language development. As expressed by Brown (2001) in discussing issues of teaching principles in language:

> A glance through the past century or so of language teaching will give an interesting picture of how varied the interpretations have been of the best way to teach a foreign language. As disciplinary schools of thought – psychology, linguistics, and education, for example – have come and gone, so have language-teaching methods waxed and waned in popularity. Teaching methods, as ―approaches in action,‖ are of course the practical application of theoretical findings and positions. In a field such as ours that is relatively young, it should come as no surprise to discover a wide variety of these applications over the last hundred years, some in total philosophical opposition to others (pp. 17-18).

Essentially, we witness a field of study which is under-going a revolution and trying to find space and relevance in the nature of instructional practices employed, thus the deep rootedness in the concept of eclecticism in contemporary perspectives of language teaching methodology. Ideally, eclecticism is a theoretical approach which draws upon multiple facets to gain equilibrium among varied orientations to provide insights into a given field of study. Based on this description, we could say that it does not hold firmly to a single paradigm or set of presumptions. Therefore, borrowing from this position, research in language teaching advocates the best approach as ―motivated and directed eclecticism‖ a clear shift from the focus on ―method‖. Based on this meaning, eclecticism is not a method in itself but a process of exploitation of assorted methods and/or techniques depending on distinctive and varied teaching and learning contextual factors as would be considered valuable by the teacher, thereby selecting what best suits their unique language instructional contexts. This is a concept which we see implies a high level of flexibility for the teacher of language yet restricting them to effective language teaching that would facilitate productive language learning.

Despite the shift from ―method‖ as highly advocated for by language educators like Kumaravadivelu, (1994 and 2006) and Canagarajah (2006), it is important to note that language teaching methods are all still practised today, principally because they exist. However, they hold diverse strengths and instructional directions regarding language teaching. We would say that there is no ―best‖ or ―worst‖ method; it all depends on the specific teacher's intentions as they present specific language structures and content. In today's language teaching contexts, the teacher is exposed to a myriad features they must consider, including the use of modern technology, focus on the goals and objectives a syllabus in use. The available instructional materials, focus on language learning strategies, factoring learner's varied learning styles, the learners' age, gender and needs, innovations in teaching, concepts of interactive classrooms, affective factors that are likely to influence learning and the teacher's views about what learning and teaching encompasses among others. A survey of the language teaching methodology presents a situation where there is key attention given to all these factors with a variation on instructional application. Due to this orientation, the teacher is faced with situations about deciding upon which method to implement in the face of untold encroaching factors, thus the advocacy for ―motivated and directed eclecticism‖. This contextual instructional circumstance calls for a dynamic language teacher, one able to adequately relate theory and practice in teaching with a conscious focus on the adaptation to the specificity of each learning context. Nunan (1991) expresses similar sentiments when he notes that:

> It has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself (p. 228).

Based on the foregoing discussion there is a clear picture that the debate concerning language teaching has built up during the period 1980's – 2000's. There is a strong emergence concentrated on the fundamentally communicative functions of language and language classrooms characterized by attempts to ensure active learner participation during learning, authenticity of instructional materials, teacher and learner autonomy and realistic, meaningful tasks. This period from our description, has borne the focus on integration in language teaching in Kenya a concept that grows from the communicative language teaching approach as expressed in the content based, task based and the skills integration methods. However, due to the pull towards eclecticism in the mid 2000's to date, much modification in its application has occurred. This is all expressed in the manner in which the syllabi for teaching English at all levels of learning is structured and articulated.

In order to further contextualize the English language syllabi in Kenya in the light of methodology in language teaching, a close look at two main foundations of language syllabi, process and product, is fundamental. The Product-oriented syllabi as expressed by (White, 1988) basically focus on the content and the pre-specification of linguistic or skill objectives; it is a step-by-step procedure to language learning dealing with ‗what' is learnt in a second language situation, the content. The teacher is

the main authority and resource person for the learners. The emphasis is on the product of the language learning, which is on the form and structure of language. Wilkins (1976, p. 2) refers to this type of syllabus as taking up the synthetic approach to language instruction that, ―different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure has been built up … at any one time the learner is being exposed to a deliberately limited sample of language‖. The process-oriented syllabus on the other hand focuses on an experiential, _natural growth‘ approach which mainly aims to immerse the learners in real-life communication without any artificial pre-selection or arrangement of items. The specifications are on the learning tasks and activities that the learner will undertake during the course. It mainly deals with _how‘ a second language is to be learnt; highlighting the learner autonomy, (White, 1988). Wilkins (1976, p. 13) refers to it as analytic syllabus, one which operates ―in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performances that are necessary to meet those purposes.‖

The foregoing exposition of language syllabi and teaching methodology exposes to us the fact that the teaching of English in Kenya has taken up the process rather than the product driven language syllabi perspectives. More specifically, based on the Kenyan educational context, English language syllabi at various levels of learning in our view adopt aspects of the integrated approach which is a variation of the process language syllabi. In order to illustrate this, first in the handbook for teachers at ECDE level (KIE, 2008a) the description of the methodology to be used is expressed in the following terms: heuristic learning, integration, thematic learning method, child centred approach and participatory approach which all render to the process approach content presentation and the conceptualization of integration approach that we take in this paper. Second, in the primary school syllabus (KIE, 2002a) it is noted that emerging issues should be in co-operated and the thematic approach adopted by relating to the learners life experiences in teaching of language skills. Third, at the secondary school level in KIE (2006a), it is noted that the syllabus is reorganised to address integration at various levels: emerging issues, skills integration and literature which form part of our interpretation of integration approach to language teaching. However, our all this levels of integration do not take up our conceptualisation as we regard it with its entirety.

CONCLUSION

The Future of Integration In Language Teaching in Kenya

Based on our arguments in this paper, in the effort to implement the integrated approach to teaching English language in Kenya, we have to rethink the role and place of the teacher and learner in the classroom. We have to define specific responsibilities that would be assigned to each one of them in an integrated classroom. The teacher requires careful reflection and planning in order to bring together the various facets to achieve the entirety of integration in language teaching. Generally, this means that the teacher of English must nurture a culture of developing a personal approach to teaching and integration with primary reference to their personal belief and principles as regards the language instructional process based on their unique

contextual factors. The process will require that we bring on board knew knowledge of how learners appropriate knowledge where the methodology, philosophy of ELT, planning, media, materials, human resource and teacher cognition for ELT draws on the concept of integration. This suggests not just to teachers but also to syllabus for ELT/ELL designers that there is a lot more to be thought about the whole concept of integration; that we will need to create an interface between the elements listed above and learner strategies of learning in ELT classrooms that adopt the integrated approach.

Until issues of curriculum developers, teacher educators, material developers and teachers' understanding of the integrated approach to language teaching are resolved; the future remains disconnected rather than integrated English language teaching. However, the dire need to help our learners acquire and develop both linguistic and communicative competence in English will require a reform in the preparation of teachers of English and teaching approaches, a conceptualization and reconceptualization in some cases of the entire process of integration in language teaching.

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