

Integration of Cross-Cutting Concepts in English Language Teaching: An Assessment of Secondary School Teachers' Awareness in Tanzania

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Abstract: *This study sought to assess English language teachers' awareness in integration of cross cutting concepts into the English language teaching curriculum. The research objectives were: to identify the types of integration in English curriculum, challenges encountered in the integration of cross cutting themes in the English language curriculum, and to predict possible solutions. The research used mixed methods approach, therefore descriptive analysis was used. The findings of the study revealed that, the notion of 'integration' is still anonymous to almost all English language teachers in secondary school and thus by default teachers are practicing trans-disciplinary integration type which is the type of integration within the same discipline. It was also clear from the study that English language teachers encounter various challenges in the implementation of integrated English language curriculum such as awareness of integration idea neither the cross-cutting concepts, inadequate teaching/learning resources, teachers are not used to team teaching among others. The study also recommends teachers to have self-initiatives and schools to conduct indoors and outdoors in-service training among others. The study also recommends further study for a large population.*

Key words: Integration, Cross-Cutting, Concepts, English, Language, Curriculum, Teachers, Awareness.

1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign or second language in Tanzanian secondary schools is a contested issue that continues to raise concerns and debates questioning its singular curriculum, soundness and its professional delivery. It has been argued in various studies that have addressed themselves to these issues that the English curriculum taught in Tanzanian secondary schools is lean and narrowly focused on content thus giving prominence to language skills at the expense of other equally critical issues of social, economic and ideological significance. This is a concern considering that the focus on content in English language teaching is wide spread as noted by Roy-Campbell (2014) in Kenya and Nsereko (2011) in Uganda. Assertions have also been made that it is delivered by teachers whose innovative creativity is doubtful and their professional training is open to question. According to Kusumoto (2014), the teaching of English demands to be handled by professional teachers who are trained and equipped with the necessary methodologies and skills to teach English as foreign

and/or second language. Professional teachers are, as it were, trained and soundly equipped with skills, methodologies and strategies on the teaching of language skills and the content which is imbued with varied interest such as learner-centered interests as well as national and/or country ideologies-politically, socially and economically. The teaching of English language therefore, depends much on the creativity of the teacher to find authentic content to suit the life of the learners and match with the prescribed content in the curriculum to unlock the knowledge obtained in the classroom for solving real world. This kind of teaching helps the learner to link life experiences bound with the gained knowledge in order to help in solving social, political and economic problems encountered in the real world. Consequently, subject content complemented by cross cutting concepts is of much importance to be looked at in teaching subjects in this case English language before the actual teaching takes place in the classroom.

There are different cross cutting concepts that can be integrated in English language teaching depending on the need of a particular phenomenon, project or situation. This

study focuses on particular cross-cutting concepts notably: HIV/AIDS, environmental issues, sex education, gender equality, capacity building, learning disabilities, communication and information sharing in the teaching of English language in secondary schools in Tanzania. These themes in this study are societal challenges that teachers need to integrate in their teaching of English in order to help students use the acquired knowledge and skills in fighting back the challenges in their real life situations.

That 'Integration of cross-cutting concepts in English language teaching needs to be very clear to English language teachers for efficient selection and implementation of English language teaching content. They should in addition be aware of the different types of integration such as those based on; multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary models of integration.

Integrated curriculum is all about making connections across discipline, real life, skill-based and or knowledge based curriculum (Magoma, 2016). A basic definition is offered by Humphreys, Post, and Ellis (1981) who state, "An integrated study is one in which children broadly explore knowledge in various subjects related to certain aspects of their environment" (p. 11). The learners are exposed to different experiences which haul permanent understanding and implications of the concept. It is with this light that this study assesses teachers' awareness of integration of aforementioned cross-cutting issues in the teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools curriculum in Tanzania.

The aspect of integration has been practiced in many fields in the education system. Although, the integration of the cross cutting themes has been experienced in various departments, programs and sectors, less has been done on the integration of cross cutting concepts in the teaching of the English language in Tanzania secondary schools. Similarly, the researches based on teaching of the cross-cutting concepts are limited, and therefore, the progression described in this study should be treated as one part of the hypotheses that require further empirical investigation. Thus, this study assesses secondary school teachers' awareness only on cross cutting concepts implementation in the English language curriculum in Tanzania secondary school level. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the types of integration English teachers practice in the teaching of English language curriculum in secondary schools.
2. To examine challenges encountered in the integration of cross cutting themes in the English language teaching.
3. To predict possible solutions for the integration of cross cutting themes in English language teaching.

2. Literature Review

Curriculum integration is not a recent phenomenon; it has been advocated for more than a century. In 1930s, it was

established as a problem centered curriculum which had semblance to the present day curriculum integration (Etim, 2005). John Dewey (1956) in his writings called for the balancing of three curricular sources: needs of learners, demands of society living in a democratic way and subject content; all these are parts of the current understanding of curriculum integration (Etim, 2005). Dewey's theory of learning connects learners' needs, society needs and subject content to support each part and show the importance of integrated curriculum to cater for improvement of life. This theory also shows the connection between what happens in class and the outside reality where by learners use the classroom knowledge for problem solving (Peterson & Gutstein, 2006). Etim (2005) emphasizes that Boyer (1986) criticized the fragmentary nature of presentation of school subjects and called for an integrated curriculum that could allow students to see relationships of school to real life situations. This emphasis shows the benefits of integrated curriculum to students, teachers and the community at large. Thus John Dewey's theory of learning is one of the theories which directly show the integration process between subject's content, learners' interest and community priority which is the focus of this study. The theoretical challenge therefore, focuses on the English language teachers' implementation of cross-cutting concepts in teaching English language curriculum in secondary schools in Tanzania.

Teachers are critical in influencing teaching and learning processes in schools and especially in particular disciplines. However, the contribution of teachers' to student learning in secondary schools continues to draw mixed reaction amongst education stakeholders. Egbo (2011) explains that although teachers are an important resource to student learning, in some instances, teachers are to blame for poor students' performance. The Report of the Center for Public Education (2013), based on a large-scale study of English classes, established that amongst 85 percent of the 8th and 9th graders, the instruction used included recitation, lecture and seat work activities which served to enhance memorization of the facts. In addition the report indicated that in spite of teachers having well behaved students in their classes, most of the teachers were not engaging students in meaningful learning activities including; investigation, reasoning, problem solving, and questioning. Thus, teachers are urged to use standardized activities which support students' interests, critical thinking and problem solving skills for instantaneously assignation to the lesson.

Moreover, Darling-Hammond (2012) opined that realization of student achievement gains requires teachers to have; strong content knowledge; pedagogical knowledge and skills of how to teach others; understanding learners and their development; general abilities for organizing, observing, explaining ideas, thinking diagnostically and adaptive expertise for making judgment in light of student needs in a given context. Stakeholders expectations is for teachers to; teach students impartially, support student learning, adapt instruction to

help students succeed; aim at continuous learning and improvement while striving to collaborate with professionals and parents in helping students. The importance of teachers' awareness of the integrated curriculum is of paramount importance for effective integration of cross-cutting concepts.

A number of scholars have studied students' performance in the context of factors affecting students' performance in several or single subjects and the results of the findings in many studies have shown that the role of the teacher in determining students' performance is significant (OECD, 2014). Teacher credentials remain one of the necessary conditions for teachers to practice teaching and are a mandatory requirement during teacher registration and recruitment. Kuenzi (2012) explained that although teacher credentials such as teacher qualifications and certification have been proven by research to influence students' performance, this effect is weak. Teacher credentials remain important consideration for a teacher to be recruited to teach in secondary schools.

Thus, successful programs and projects entail the participation of all education stakeholders in one way or another because the notion of integration may imply the participation of every program and individuals fully involved. In the same vein, Campbell (2010) argues:-

Many international organizations and agencies concur that participation is regarded as a civil and political right (i.e. participation in political election) and as an economic, cultural, and social right (i.e. the participation in the design and implementation of development agendas including health, housing policies, and poverty reduction strategies such as youth employment).

Thus, the study calls for English language teachers' participation in integrating cross-cutting concepts in the teaching of English language in secondary schools since the teachers are the main implementers and perfectionists of curriculum in its dynamic form. For the society to reflect the knowledge, skills, and ability taught in schools; learners' competence should be equally paramount, reflected in solving societal problems in current and future generation. As said already, teachers seem not to be preparing the future for the youth rather preparing youth for the future and endeavors in all spheres for sustainable development.

3. Methodology

This study was based on qualitative research approach where data and information were collected from the participants' natural setting and analyzed qualitatively by qualifying words (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). It employed a descriptive survey research design where the researcher was concerned with describing the nature or condition and degree of the current status of a phenomenon as they naturally exist in present (Mangal,

2013). The current status of this case was the extent of teachers' awareness of integration of cross cutting themes in the teaching of English language in a Tanzanian secondary school.

Based on descriptive research design, the researcher collected data and described the behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes of representative sample of individuals (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher studied English language teachers' awareness of integration of cross cutting themes in the teaching of English language, thus leading to analysis of their thoughts, attitudes and their behavior towards the phenomenon.

This research approach was suitable to this study as sample size was small and the study dealt with one phenomenon that is English teachers in their natural setting that is in their school. The sample of the study was drawn from teachers of English and students who studied the English language. The total number of sample was 32 where by 10 were Teachers who taught English in a secondary school and 22 were Secondary School students who studied English language.

Purposive and simple random sampling were used to get teachers of English in the selected secondary school. Purposive sampling technique was appropriate since the study focused just to teachers who teach English not any other subject. According to Ary et al (2010), a purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Simple random sampling was also used to get the number of students who participated in the study. Simple random sampling technique was considered appropriate to this study since all students in o-level secondary school study English language. Therefore, each member of the subset had an equal probability and opportunity of being chosen (Singh, 2003).

In this study, focus group discussion, questionnaires, class observation and documents were used as methods for data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). These are typical qualitative research methods for data collection to qualify this study as a qualitative research and particularly a descriptive research design. These instruments were appropriate to the study since the researcher was able to collect the information required. A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The FGD was conducted with teachers where English language teachers and students discussed together and reminded one another on the teaching of cross cutting themes in English language curriculum. These teachers had different background experience because some had two years of experience and the rest had five to eleven years of experience in teaching English language. FGD helped the researcher to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and

reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods(Singh, 2003).

Unstructured questionnaire was another method used for data collection. Questionnaires were administered to randomly selected students from different levels; that is from form one to form four. Using questionnaires was a simple method to capture students experience on the cross cutting themes studied in their English lessons taught by their English teachers. In addition, everyone was free to respond to the questionnaire since neither their names nor their classes were mentioned anywhere in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was thus a very suitable method to capture students' experiences.

Lesson plans, lesson notes and books and students work books were systematically reviewed to validate the information given in FGD and Questionnaire about the integration of cross cutting themes in the Teaching of English language curriculum. These documents provided the background information and behind-the-scenes look at the integration of cross cutting themes in the English language curriculum teaching(Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Documentary review brought up issues that were not noted by other means such as previous integration of cross-cutting concepts and suggestions from the reference books about the integration(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Data were collected when questionnaires were administered to students. Also English teachers were engaged in FGD to discuss their experiences and understanding of the cross cutting themes in the English language curriculum teaching. The researcher also reviewed documents such as lesson plans; lesson notes reference books and students work book to get the ready-made information about the integration of cross-cutting concepts in English language teaching.

Validity was achieved through the use of method triangulation i.e. the use of questionnaires, document review and FGD. These data collection methods helped to ensure reliability of the information collected. The information gained from the questionnaires, FGD and documents were coded according to research objectives and analyzed descriptively.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 First Objective

Objective one sought to find out types of integration that the teachers of English practice in the teaching of English language in secondary schools. It was found out that, there are some few integration elements of the cross cutting themes in the teaching of English language. During FGD, almost all teachers reiterated that they integrate many cross cutting themes in their teaching of the English language. All the teachers claimed to draw their content from English text books and in some instances from the

internet and magazines. For example T₁ showed about three books with topics that integrated cross cutting themes in the English language curriculum. A small number of students equally demonstrated a variety of cross cutting concepts that their English Teacher taught during their English lessons.

This is a type of integration within the same subject content area. As argues intrans-disciplinary integration, teachers expect students to understand the connections between the different sub-topics and their relationship to the real world. It was surprising that even the teachers were wondering how that is possible as T₇ said; "... I draw my content from the English books that are recommended for teaching English by the Ministry of Education" Teacher T₂ added that, "Usually am not told to teach other teachers' subjects, every teacher should teach what she/he studied in Colleges."

The above discussion shows that teachers are not aware of any type of integration and that they are perhaps doing whatever is already prepared in their reference books and allocate in the English language curriculum. These findings are similar to National Research Council ((U.S.), 2012) which found out that the researches about integration of cross-cutting concepts in limited, that might be the reason of limited teachers awareness. Similarly, students seems to bump by default into the cross cutting themes because it is just found in their English books.

4.2 Second Objective

Objective two sought to find out the challenges that face teachers in integrating cross cutting themes in teaching English language curriculum. The findings show that teachers are not aware about the integration of cross cutting concepts in the teaching of the English language curriculum. The study sought to establish if teachers understood the meaning and importance of cross cutting concepts and integration. They felt these were new things but which could be interesting to the students. For example, one teacher said "students would benefit because every teacher will be insisting on the same topic and therefore, students are likely to retain the knowledge for the examination but also discover the implication in their real world problems. The retention of knowledge due to integration of cross-cutting concepts is vital because it helps the learners to easily practice the same in real life situation as it is believed that education is what remained in the mind of the learner for real life implications (Willard, Andjelkovic, & International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2005).

Further, teachers added; students would feel good if the concept is taught already in a particular subject and if s/he did not get the concept clearly in the first discipline the repetition of such a topic in the English lesson, with a different teacher with new activities to engage in would really make them feel owning the lesson and develop interest of the subject which would result to better achievement. These findings also are similar to what Kitzes et al. (2007) contended integration influence

permanent retention of knowledge and understanding which influence easier application to particular situation in real world problems.

However, teachers pointed out challenges facing the integration of cross cutting concepts in the English curriculum. Teachers got engaged in hot discussion finding about hindrances of the implementation of the idea of integration in their class teaching at their school; participating teachers came up with the following challenges. Firstly, teachers were of the opinion that there was lack of awareness of this kind of integration because if teachers for instance from other subjects are not aware they will not be ready for team teaching. They added that, this kind of integration needed team teaching but since teachers were not aware of the benefits of integration as one of the challenges, they complained of time limit.

The results on benefits of integrating curriculum is similar to what Beane (1995) found that it is “an educational approach that prepares children for lifelong learning”. As stated in the literature review there is much more in integrated curriculum. Secondly, inadequate teaching and learning resources for example, power point, internet connection, TV, VCD of which teachers claimed would simplify the teaching of cross cutting themes like environmental issues, gender inequality and sex education among others. However and surprisingly, participating teachers reported that they have enough books for teaching English curriculum comfortably. They also added that the deficiency of these resources is majorly caused by financial problems. This perhaps calls for authentic learning situation to connect to the outside world with classroom knowledge which has always been the case to many educational philosophers’ theories who advocate for the improvement of education and who believe in authentic learning. It is also linking the typical knowledge of integrated curriculum which advocate for meaningful learning that connect skills that students have learned in the classroom to solve real world problems and challenges.

Furthermore, participating teachers posed another challenge that may hinder the integration of cross cutting themes which is language barrier. Teacher T₃ said: “I usually get a problem of how to introduce new ideas because many times students do not understand what is being said. Sometimes I code switch and code mix English and Swahili for students to understand” (FGD with teachers 28th September, 2017). Generally language barrier is a challenge and teachers just use it as an excuse for lack of integrated teaching in the Tanzanian context. This is because cross cutting concepts are taught just like any other subject and does use almost same methods of teaching. Therefore, the case of language barrier should be a big challenge for integration of cross cutting concept in English language curriculum.

4.3 Third Objective

In objective three participating teachers were of the opinion that for the successfulness of integration of cross cutting themes in the teaching of English curriculum the following should be considered. There should be in-service training for the teachers who are already in the field of teaching. That the schools should invest in improving the integration of crosscutting themes in the teaching curriculum. Teacher T₂ sympathized with other teachers and said;

“The schools’ administration should support the teaching staff in organizing and prepare indoor and outdoor workshops, seminars and forum where all teachers are involved and not just mathematics and science teachers. This is because there is a tendency that all seminars and workshops are for the science and mathematics teachers where Art and language people left behind the scene” (FGD With teachers 28th September, 2017).

Teachers added that the training of teachers to integrate cross cutting themes in their teaching should be for veteran teachers who have at least five (5) years of experience in the teaching profession. They argued veteran teachers know better on the needs of the learners, society and required knowledge for sustainable development, than novice teachers. Fitting it all is an idea that schools and teachers should have the notion of fitting it all in one curriculum is the way to in helping the 21st generation into this fast moving world in science and technology (Kitzes et al., 2007).

Furthermore, they added that cross cutting themes should also be integrated in pre-service training whereby student teachers in colleges and universities should also be trained on this integration so that when they engage in the teaching profession they can achieve the intended goals of the millennium and link the real world and classroom knowledge.

Perhaps teachers are now eager and excited about the integration of cross cutting concepts in the teaching of English curriculum because one of the participating teacher T₂ showed the feeling when she said;

‘I can now see that this idea is a good idea; our learners will not fail the exams again because the learners will learn the concepts everywhere and in this way for students who like, it will influence better achievement, retention of knowledge due to a lot of repetition and even arouse the interest of other certain concepts. Teachers also would learn more from their fellows in a different discipline’ (FGD with teachers, T₂, 28th September, 2017)’.

Another view provided by participating teachers was to bridge the gap in language of communication since students in primary schools use Kiswahili as their medium

of communication, but when they join secondary school level, the language of communication changes to English.

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5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Based on findings of this study, researchers came up with the following conclusions:

1. Although integrated curriculum is beneficial to both students and teachers, teachers are not fully aware of the integrated curriculum.
2. Although there is trans-disciplinary interaction kind of integration of sub-discipline within the same discipline; teachers are doing it unknowingly and amidst a myriad of school based and out of school obstacles.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on conclusions of this study, it is therefore recommended that:

1. The school administration systems to find ways of helping English language teachers to create awareness of innovative approaches to education delivery. This can be conducted through organizing seminars as well as indoor and outdoor workshops for improvement purposes and meeting educational goals.
2. English Language teachers should do the so called self-initiative to get knowledge and improve their teaching skills. They should go for further studies and sometimes join in seminars and workshops in order to equip themselves with current pedagogical issues.

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