

Effectiveness of Professional Development on English and Literature Teachers in Selected Schools in Tharaka-Nithi and Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development programs aimed at enhancing skills for teaching the integrated English and literature curriculum in secondary schools in Kenya. Questionnaires were administered to teachers of English and Literature in selected schools in Tharaka-Nithi and Meru County. The study showed that although majority of the respondents were experienced teachers, not all received pre-service training for both English and Literature, and thus the need for professional development programs. It was noted that all the teachers sampled had attended professional development courses and the content covered in the training was relevant to the demands of the integrated curriculum. There is however a need for such programs to take longer sessions, and follow-ups should be made on the teachers who attend the training so that the educators can note areas that need attention and the difficulties the teachers experience while teaching.

Keywords: Professional Development, English, Literature, Integrated curriculum, Meru, Tharaka-Nithi

1. Introduction

The English and Literature curriculum in Kenyan secondary schools had been designed by the British colonial government for the two subject to be taught separately. This colonial education system was subsequently inherited by the independent Kenyan government in 1963. The two subjects were examined at two levels, i.e. at O level (form four) and at A level (form six). This meant that a student would choose to study Literature or English, and proceed to specialize in either of them at higher levels. However, since 1984 this syllabus has undergone a series of revisions. The current English and literature secondary school syllabus is a result of the syllabus review in 1984/85 which was later revised in 1992 and 2002. These revisions were done in an attempt to first, adopt an integrated approach in teaching English and Literature in secondary schools, which was prompted by the introduction of the 8-4-4 system, and secondly, to meet new challenges discovered in teaching the subjects and therefore improve the performance in English in Kenyan secondary schools.

The integrated approach was designed in a way that the two subjects would be taught simultaneously. It involves using Literature to teach English and using English to teach Literature in a symbiotic relationship (Okwara, Shiundu & Indoshi 2009). For instance students are presented with a reading comprehension in the form an oral narrative or a passage from the literature set books, and then they are required to respond to both literature and grammar questions based on the comprehension. The 8-4-4 system is designed in a way that learners spend eight years in primary school, four years in secondary school and four years in the university, unlike the previous system, where they spent seven years in primary school, four years in lower secondary (O level), two years in high school (A level) and 3 years in the university (7-4-2-3). While in the earlier curriculum English and Literature were examined as separate subjects as mentioned above, the integrated curriculum was designed in a way that although there were Literature set books examined in form four, the examination was intended to have the results emanating from both English and Literature being merged to one grade. In a recent research by Matere (2012) on Strategies used in teaching integrated English course in secondary schools in Bungoma, Kenya, it was highlighted that teachers' training at pre-service and in-service levels, as well as the consultative process of curriculum development was needed to prepare teachers to cope with the rapid changes in the teaching of integrated English course. One of the strategies employed in upgrading of teaching methods is the professional development of English teachers. According to Day and Sachs (2004), Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a term used to describe all the activities in which teachers engage in, during the course of their career, which are designed to enhance their work. Generally, professional development is often understood as the acquisition of skills and knowledge, both for personal development and for career advancement. It often encompasses consultation, coaching, lesson study, mentoring, reflective supervision and any other type of technical assistance. In Kenya, professional development programs are visible either as short term courses sponsored by schools or the government, or other times they take place as a result of teachers' own initiatives to improve their skills and educational levels. This study analyzes the effectiveness of professional development programs, with data emanating from teachers of English and Literature in selected schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi County.

Nyarigoti's (2013) research on continuing professional development needs for English language teachers in Kenya uncovers the teachers' needs, challenges and their suggestions on improvements needed in continuing development of teachers and the school system at large. While Nyarigoti's research centers on some of the issues that our research is concerned with, it only looks at the modes of study used by the teachers and it does not pay attention to the benefits teachers get from professional development programs, especially in their work stations; this is what our research examines.

Lumala (2007) argues that although the integrated English and literature curriculum was introduced in Kenya over twenty years ago, little has been done to bring about the envisaged integration. In his findings, he shows that there was a continuous use of what he calls Traditional Approach (TA) as opposed to teaching imaginative texts, despite the integrated English curriculum. This state of affairs was attributed to lack of relevant training and the overwhelming focus on examinations by the education system. Lumala therefore recommends an urgent need for educators to rethink the way English teachers are trained in the country, introduce short term courses to update teachers, and in addition, redesign the integrated English curriculum. While Lumala's research focuses on the general teaching of the integrated English and literature curriculum in secondary schools in Kenya and concentrates on the level of the teachers and learners, our study narrows down to specific areas of Meru and Tharaka Nithi Counties and pays attention to the teachers only. Specifically, our study fills the gap Lumala identifies, by assessing the effectiveness of back up courses designed to cater for the teaching of the integrated English and literature curriculum. We examine whether professional development programs like inset trainings, seminars, workshops or self-motivating studies in colleges and universities have assisted teachers in improving the teaching of English and Literature in secondary schools.

The practice by teachers in teaching the integrated English and literature curriculum in Kenya has also been assessed by Manyasi (2014). Her study specifically concentrates on how cultural values in the set book *The River and the Source* are taught via the integrated approach. Manyasi identifies lack of integration of language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in the teaching process. While teachers might fall short of integrating English and Literature skills appropriately as identified by Manyasi, our study goes further to find out whether professional development programs are effective enough to reduce such problems of integration. The study also presents the suggested remedies from the teachers.

Macharia (2011) acknowledges the difficulties involved when teaching English and Literature in secondary schools in Kenya and looks at the tactics that teachers use to cope with these challenges. From her study, it is clear that one of the ways these teachers cope with challenges is to attend in-service courses. Looking at how effective and beneficial such professional development courses are to the teachers in this research therefore allows us to suggest ways in which the teachers think the courses can be improved.

A study conducted in Eldoret municipality, Kenya, by Wafula (2012) focuses on teachers' awareness, training and preparedness on the use of integrated methods to teach oral literature in secondary schools as a general approach to integrating English and Literature. She shows that most of the teachers stated that none of the seminars or in-service courses they attended was specifically prepared for oral literature. Our study gives variety to Wafula's as it has a wider scope in the sense that it does not just look at the teaching of integrated curriculum in a limited scope of oral literature, but it looks at Literature and English in general, the bigger concern being assessment of the effectiveness of professional development on the concerned teachers. This study will also be able to gauge whether the same problems that Wafula identifies in Eldoret persist in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi counties.

2. Statement of the Problem

Many studies on the integrated English curriculum have been done in the Kenya, with many focusing on the pre-service training of teachers and the degree to which learners benefit from the integrated curriculum as shown in the above introduction. Many other studies (Omollo 1990; Magona 1999; Otieno 2003; Gichuki 2007) have tended to focus on the challenges of teaching the integrated English curriculum in secondary schools. However, little has been done on the effectiveness of the professional development courses that teachers undertake to boost their pre-service training. This research paper therefore attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the responses from teachers in selected schools in Tharaka-Nithi and Meru County, in an attempt to gauge the effectiveness of professional development courses in teaching the integrated English curriculum in secondary schools. The results of this research are useful in helping both the educators and school heads in strategizing on how to make the teaching of the integrated English curriculum successful and enjoyable. The suggestions for improvement from the teachers will also help educators in matters of how to specifically enrich professional development programs.

3. Objective

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development programs or initiatives in Kenya, with special reference to those aimed at enhancing skills for the integrated English curriculum in secondary schools in Kenya. The study also suggests areas for improvements in professional development programs as identified by the respondents.

4. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design as it is the most appropriate when the purpose of study is to explore and create a detailed description of a phenomenon. The actual sample size used in the study was 30 teachers that were purposefully sampled. The participants were teachers of English in randomly selected secondary schools in Tharaka-Nithi and Meru County. All the 30 questionnaires were analyzed.

The instrument used in the study was questionnaire for teachers which had five sections. The first section included teachers' profile; section two composed of close ended questions about the training in professional development activities; section three was on implementation of skills the teachers acquire when they attend professional development programs; section four was on follow-up and support for teachers; while section five was on suggestions or teachers opinions about professional development courses. The questionnaire was administered to the teachers by the researchers. Data analysis was done quantitatively. All the information from the teachers' questionnaire was summarized and analyzed before being interpreted. The analysis and interpretation focused on the objective of study.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the research findings in line with objective that guided the study. The analysis done here is done systematically, in accordance with the questionnaire presented to the respondents.

5.1 Profile of the Respondents

The teachers who responded to questionnaires varied in gender, age, years of experience and level of education. Out of the teachers who participated, 70% were female while 30% were male. This depicts the presence of gender disparity in favor of female with regard to the teachers who teach English in the study locale. These results resonate with findings in the UK seven years ago, where teaching was reported to be turning fast into an all-female profession with women outnumbering men in the classroom (London, *Evening Standard*, 2006).

Regarding the teaching experience of the respondents, 30% have been teaching for 1-9 years, 33% have been teaching for 10-19 years, while 27% have been teaching for 20 years and above. It was evident that 70% of teachers had a teaching experience of over 10 years, which implies that the teaching workforce in the sampled location is made up of experienced teachers who have been in the teaching career for quite some time and who should therefore be fully aware of the integrated English and literature curriculum. On the age range 32% of teachers were between 25-34 years, 32% between 35-44 years, 29% between 45-54 years, while 7% were 55 years and above. These results show that many teachers are below 45 years of age, meaning they are active and energetic, and they could therefore be flexible to change and be able to accommodate new methods of approaching the integrated English curriculum. A teacher's age could sometimes influence his way of teaching and readiness to adapt to changes in curriculum and since most of the respondents are young, the suggestions they give about improvements in professional development programs can be said to be dependable as they are the active participants in the field.

With reference to the highest academic qualification, 21% are holders of diploma, 76% are holders of bachelor's degree while 3% are holders of masters. This implies that the teachers were professionally trained and had a vital ingredient that was likely to improve their effectiveness in ensuring successful implementation of curriculum. This also means that they would be able to gauge how effective their training was in the field in order to seek further professional development. Our findings concur with Berry et al (2010), who argue that trained teachers are likely to interpret and implement integrated English curriculum better as compared to their colleagues who are untrained.

About the teaching subjects trained for, 66% had English as major and Literature as minor, while 34% had English as major and another teaching subject as minor. This means that although most of the teachers had the required qualifications to teach secondary school, not all received pre-service training for both English and Literature hence the necessity for effective professional development. The failure for teachers to train for both English and Literature in the Kenyan training institutions could affect the teaching of the integrated curriculum negatively because as McRae (1992) asserts, teachers are often inadequately equipped to cope with the difficulties of having to teach both the English language and Literature when they have not been trained to teach one of the components. It is therefore advisable for the ministry of education in Kenya to undertake a survey on the qualifications of the teachers in the secondary schools for the integrated curriculum to proceed smoothly and with success.

5.2 Training for Professional Development

All the teachers indicated that they have attended workshop or seminar to enhance the integration of teaching English and Literature. This demonstrates that at least there is opportunity for professional development and in addition, that teachers have a need to expand their content knowledge and they therefore need to be assisted in learning new instructional strategies in order to improve their effectiveness.

A total of 79% of teachers indicated that the professional development activities lasted one day while 7% indicated that the workshop duration was one week. The one day duration was the most popular mode for professional development activities and it might be inadequate to help teachers effectively better their performance and raise students' achievement. This concurs with finding of Laura (2002), who suggests that training for improvement must be sustained over an extended time period and have sufficient duration so that teachers can have the time to learn and improve because a professional development activity is not an event but a process. Hill (2007) also concurs that effective ongoing professional development programs usually require large time commitment.

Around 52% of teachers strongly agreed that they enjoyed attending professional development activities and none of the teachers who responded to the questionnaires had a negative view on professional development activities.

This implies that the professional development activities are good learning experiences that certainly help teachers to improve their own practice and sort out challenges they experience in teaching.

All the teachers agreed that professional development helps to develop teachers who are all round in teaching skills of English; meaning that the pre-service programs cannot provide the extensive range of learning experiences necessary to become effective teachers due to changes in the curriculum. Nunan (2001) posits that teaching is a career that needs constant development particularly where new changes are introduced in an education system. Thus effective professional development is critical to ensure that teachers continue to strengthen their practice as professionals.

Over 70% of teachers indicated that a lot of language skills are learnt in a single session. All the teachers also pointed out that professional development focused on content knowledge and integration of the English curriculum. The teachers further noted that the new knowledge that was specifically learnt was mainly on handling comprehension questions, integration of Literature into English language skills, examination setting and marking requirements. The content covered in these programs therefore seems to be relevant to the demands of the integrated curriculum.

5.3 Implementation

The teachers indicated that the professional development helped them to teach grammar aspects when teaching literature lesson. The teachers also learnt skills on how to handle poetry work, and in addition, these courses helped them to integrate Literature into English lessons and also adopt student centered teaching and learning methods. The teachers also were taught correct pronunciation of words and proper articulation of sounds that affects the quality of one's speech. About 97% of teachers stated that the students benefited from their professional development activities. These results demonstrate that professional development programs are beneficial to both the teachers and learners, and thus there is need for continuity which can only be possible through provision of the required personnel in the training centers to ensure that all the needs of the integrated English and literature curriculum are addressed.

When asked whether they found using integration in teaching English and Literature effective, only 7% of teachers disagreed that they find it effective, while 93% agreed that it was an effective approach. When the teachers were asked whether the integrated approach makes teaching easy, 79% of teachers agreed while 14% disagreed and the rest were undecided. Around 86% of teachers at least agreed that integration of teaching English and Literature gives teachers great opportunities while 14% disagreed. From the above responses, it is visible that the integrated approach to teaching English and Literature was a favored approach and thus professional programs focusing on the same were crucial.

A large proportion of teachers (95%) indicated that their teaching approach changed after attending professional development activities. This implies that teachers were provided with specific technical skills and new subject matter coverage that enabled them to address students' needs. Attending these programs therefore helps teachers better manage the negative aspects of their practices by identifying their strengths and how to use them more effectively (Bisplinghoff 2005).

5.4 Follow-up and Support

The teachers expressed the need for more exposure to the professional development activities in integrated English and Literature. In addition, there was an indication that there were no follow-ups done by the educators after training, and that there was need for such follow-ups to review the strategies, ensure proper implementation, evaluate the effectiveness of the skills, provide the feedback to decide whether skills are effective and address challenges faced during implementation. This implies that educators require follow-up activities for the teachers to reinforce the skills learnt and also to ensure continual improvements in their practice and in terms of addressing learners' needs.

5.5 Suggestions

When teachers were asked whether the skills of English and Literature should be taught separately, 32% of teachers agreed while 65% disagreed. The teachers pointed out a close relationship between the learning of English language and Literature and also indicated that integrated English and Literature teaching is beneficial to the students because grammar helps the learner to write essays in Literature, thus indicating that the teachers appreciate the approach, and further implying that the integrated English and literature curriculum makes the learners all-rounded.

This concurs with Brumfit (1985) who asserts that teaching of English language and Literature, as one subject will make the teaching of language more practical than when the two areas are taught separately. Brumfit further points out that Literature is a vital component of English language teaching in that Literature provides learners with a convenient source of content for language, thus making the learning of language more practical. The skills learnt in English are also used in Literature, pointing to the complimentary relationship in the two subjects.

When asked to indicate which areas they wished to be given more priority in professional development, many of the respondents said that more practice was needed in poetry, essay writing, grammar and comprehension. This suggests that there is need for educators to make follow ups on the teachers to get information on specific areas that need attention so that they can modify their training strategies.

6. Conclusion

The results from this study reveal that majority of the respondents were experienced teachers who are aware of the integrated English and literature curriculum and they were professionally trained. However, not all teachers received pre-service training for both English and Literature which presents the need for effective professional development programs.

The research also showed that all the teachers had attended the professional development courses, although most of the trainings ran for one day, a period that was said to be inadequate for the skills needed. Nevertheless, the content covered in these programs was said to be relevant to the demands of the integrated curriculum and the teachers' teaching approach changed after attending the programs. Thus professional development programs were indicated to be beneficial to both the teachers and learners.

However, the research has also shown that there were no follow-ups done by the educators after training, which implies that educators need to improve in these sequel activities in order to reinforce the teaching approaches learnt during professional development seminars. The teachers also pointed out that more practice was needed in poetry, essay writing, grammar and comprehension.

7. Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

- a. Training and effective professional development programs should be provided to all because from this study the program was noted to be useful.
- b. Professional development programs should run for longer duration to ensure comprehension of the material needed for the integrated English curriculum.
- c. There is need for educators to make follow ups on those trained during professional development programs to ensure continued benefits and also to identify new problem areas.

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