

INTEGRATED APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE: THE PRACTICE IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish how the integrated approach was used in teaching cultural practices and English language skills in the set book novel: *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola. The findings revealed that teachers analyzed cultural practices in isolation without integrating the teaching of literature with the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Punctuation and grammar was also not taught. The instructional objectives focused on identifying and illustrating the cultural issues in the novel. Teachers emphasized on the cognitive domain ignoring the psychomotor and the affective domains, hence there was a disparity between curriculum developers' expectations and classroom practice.

Key words: Integrated Approach, English Language Skills, Teaching, Culture.

1. Introduction

This paper highlights the importance of using literature to teach English language while sensitizing learners to be “culturally literate” in the diverse cultural environment in Kenya. The paper focuses itself on cultural issues in ‘The River and the Source,’ by Margaret Ogola, which is the current set book in secondary schools in Kenya; and how it can be used to facilitate the learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The National Center for Cultural Competence defines culture as an “integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations” (Goode, Sockalingam, Brown, & Jones, 2000).

The Kenya Nation Education Commission reformed the education system inherited from the colonial government to make it responsive to the needs of independent Kenya. *The National Committee on Educational objectives and policies* focused on redefining Kenya's educational policies and objectives, considering National unity, economic, social and cultural aspirations of the

people of Kenya (Gachathi Report, 1976). These issues were considered fundamental to the success of the nation given that it has over 40 different ethnic communities. *Policy Initiatives , Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005* was developed to help avoid policy conflict, resources wastage and duplication. It gives future direction of education in Kenya. It encourages collaboration of parties in the education sector and expansion of existing institutions to cater for the ever-increasing demand. Contemporary issues such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Open and Distance Learning (ODL) are discussed in detail. The paper outlines the philosophy, vision, mission, goals and objectives of education and training in Kenya.

Education in Kenya is guided by the philosophy of “education and training for social Cohesion as well as Human and Economic Development” (MOES &T, 2005). Social cohesion in Kenya is affected by the diverse cultures of the different speech communities. English being a compulsory subject in secondary schools, is used as a vehicle to know about the diverse cultures hence unity in diversity. One of the recommended set books is usually written by a local author to highlight cultural issues. The current set book is, ‘The River and the Source’ by Margaret Ogola. Ogola (2002) writes about the traditional culture in Kenya. She specifically draws from the Luo speech community which is not much different from other speech communities in Kenya. Teachers of English can use the novel to make learners appreciate the Luo culture and use it to draw parallels from other speech communities. The detailed presentation of cultural issues in Kenya, much of which represent the larger African culture has made the novel to be approved by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development as a set book in secondary schools for the second time. The aim is to achieve the objective of “To enhance understanding and respect for own and other people’s cultures and their place in the contemporary society.”

2.0 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was guided by the research questions: What cultural practices were taught from the novel? What language skills were integrated while teaching the cultural practices?

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 The Philosophy of Education in Kenya

The Philosophy of teaching is the rational of teaching or a personal vision of teaching (O’Cormor 1992). Education in Kenya is guided by the philosophy of “ *Education and Training for social cohesion as well as Human and Economic Development.*” (Ministry of Education 2005). Social cohesion is only possible when people understand their culture and respect other people’s culture, given that Kenya is made up of many tribes. The varied cultures can be experienced through reading several literal texts based on the culture of different communities. The importance of culture in education is also supported by the idealism philosophy.

The Idealism Philosophy was advanced by Plato (427-347 B.C) and Froebel (1782-1852). This philosophy advocates that learners should be taught moral values and intellectual knowledge which

they needed in order to become model citizens. (Myra and David 2000). Teachers should instill respect for authority, perseverance, fidelity to duty and consideration for others. Learners should be taught to be '*culturally literate*'- to be familiar with the people, events, and institutions that shape their society. In Kenya, education should "nurture our cultural heritage" (MOES&T 2005). The eleventh objective of teaching English in secondary schools in Kenya is, "*appreciate and respect own as well as other people's culture*" (MOES&T 2002). This paper is based on the fifth objective of secondary education; "to enhance understanding and respect for own as well as other people's culture and their place in contemporary society" (MOES&T 2002). (K.I.E.2006). The objectives of teaching reading in Kenya are to provide learners with the opportunity to:

- i. To acquire necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the development of self and the Nation.
- ii. To provide love for and loyalty to the Nation.
- iii. To Promote harmonious co-existence among the peoples of Kenya
- iv. To develop mentally, socially, morally, physically and spiritually
- v. To enhance understanding and respect for own and other people's cultures and their place in the contemporary society.

3.2 The Integrated Approach

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education stipulates that English language must be taught using the *Integrated Approach*; hence, the subject is called Integrated English. This involves teaching English language and Literature in English as one subject in the school curriculum. The *Kenya Secondary School Syllabus* explains the issue of integration as follows: *merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both. Through exposure to literature the learner will improve their language skills. They will not only enrich their vocabulary but also learn to use language in a variety of ways. Similarly, an improved knowledge of the language will enhance the 'learner's appreciation of literary material. On yet another scale, integration means that no language skill should be taught in isolation. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should complement each other...* "It has been established that teaching language structures in isolation is not only boring, but it also tends to produce learners who lack communicative competence" (KIE. 2002, p.3). The *Integrated approach* has similarities with what Richards and Rodgers (2001:109) call the *Whole Language Approach*. *All the skills of language: writing, reading, listening and speaking should be integrated in learning and teaching.*

4.0 Methodology

The study used the qualitative research methodology. Jwan & Ong'ondo, (2011) say that such a methodology uses a relatively small number of cases considered in terms of details. The paradigm was appropriate for the study because the researcher could generate data about the cultural practices taught from the novel and the language skills integrated while teaching the cultural practices. Due to their real-life setting, qualitative research is more reality based hence the researcher found out the

reality about the use of the recommended integrated approach to teach English language in secondary schools in Kenya. *Ethnography method* was used during the study. It emphasizes the importance of studying at firsthand what people do and say in particular contexts (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). It involves a researcher participating in people's daily lives for an extended period of time: observing, listening, asking questions through formal and informal interviews (Hammersley and Artkinson, 2007). The study used *selective intermittent time mode*. It calls for the researcher's visit to the setting of the study at selected intervals when the particular event occurs. However, it is a very flexible approach; the frequency of the research site visits is determined by the researcher's convenience (Pole and Morrison, 2003). Prior visits were made then the researcher visited the research sites the time they were teaching cultural practices in the novel.

The researcher used purposive sampling as recommended by qualitative researchers to select ten secondary schools in Narok Town and its environs. Narok was an appropriate site of the study because inhabitants of the town come from all communities in Kenya; hence, drawing parallel cultural practices would be possible. In qualitative research, data is made up of words. The technique used to generate data was observation of classroom practice. Data was analyzed qualitatively and reported in narration according to the research questions. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) say that such studies can lead to 'fuzzy generalizations.' That if something happens in one place, it may happen elsewhere, especially if the different cases have similar characteristics. It is a logical argument in education research because of a number of similarities revealed by the generated data. There was a similar curriculum, similar recommended course books to be used, a similar setbook i.e., *The River and the Source*, by Margaret Ogola. They also used a similar teaching and testing syllabus, and similar teachers with regard to training.

5.0 Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings about the cultural practices taught from the novel: *The River and the Source* and how English language skills were also taught using the integrated approach.

5.1 Cultural Practices Taught Integrating With English Language Skills.

5.1.1. Administration

The Luo community had a formal structure of administration. The main character in the text – Akoko, is born in Yimbo, in the homestead of chief Odero Gogni, somewhere in Siaya. The chief holds a hereditary position, administering in consultation with a council of elders referred to as *jodongo*. This ensured equity in leadership as the council of elders observed fairness in solving disputes and all other issues that could affect the society. After learners appreciating the way Luos were administered, they can give examples of how people of their respective communities administered themselves. This is a community where dictatorship was frowned. Structures were put in place to facilitate participative management. The chief was highly respected by the people and he served them well. No parallel management systems were given. They just stopped at identifying and illustrating from the novel.

5.1.2. Communal Activities

The people of Yimbo share tasks and the problems they encounter. The girl child – Akoko, is born during the weeding season. Weeding was done communally.

“The weeders were busy hoeing and chanting in unison a song about the prowess of a departed hero ” (Ogola 2002, p. 9).

When the baby girl spends most of the time crying, everyone is very concerned. They all converge at the chief’s homestead until a solution is found at “the first cock crow.” The kind of brotherhood practiced goes way beyond the Christian teaching of love your neighbour as yourself. The teacher can ask learners to explain some of the activities that were performed communally in their communities, however, that was not done.

5.1.3. Naming of Children

In the Luo community, children are named according to the time they are born , after their dead ancestors , or according to their personality. The main character in the text; the girl child, is named *Adoyo*, meaning born during the weeding season, *Obanda*, after her dead uncle, a former great medicine man in the society, and *Akoko*, to reflect her strong personality. The name *Akoko* means ‘the noisy one,’ because of her endless chatter. When the baby spends much of the time crying, it is interpreted that it is because of a disappointed ancestor that wants to be named. Nyar Alego , the baby’s grandmother , gets into an incantation to find her cure. In a conversation, she begins by naming *Rahuma*, her deceased father, *Achieng*, her late mother, up to the time she mentions *Akelo*, her late *younger sister and co- wife*. The moment she says,

“Oh Akelo my sister, is it my fault that you died....” (p. 11).

Before completing the sentence, the baby stops crying and falls a sleep. She is then named *Akelo*.

5.1.4 Speaking skills

At this point, the teacher should facilitate discussion among learners about how children used to be named traditionally in their communities. The discussion should aim at making learners appreciate their culture and other people’s culture as well as acquire language through the meaningful conversation. By so doing, all the three domains of learning; knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes can be acquired. They could also debate about whether it is morally right for a man to marry two sisters like Nya; Alego and her younger late sister Akelo. The place of such a practice in the contemporary society could have been discussed in details. This is not done hence the teacher missing the platform on which he or she could appeal to the affective domain of learners.

5.1.5 Religion

Religion was not introduced to Africans by the white man. The Luo people believed in one god; Great Were, god of the eye of the rising sun , creator of Ramogi, their founding father. They also believe in the spirits of their ancestors. During the incantation, Nyar Alego says, *“O Were and you departed spirits of our ancestors...” (p. 11)*. *Kong’o*, a local brew would be offered as libation to *Were* during important occasions such as betrothal ceremonies.

5.1.6 The Girl Child

Girls are treated with a lot of contempt. When Akoko is born, Chief Odere Gogni knows that it is ‘another rock for his sling,’ meaning, another son to fight his wars. The narrator says that the chief had,

“covered himself in considerable glory by siring seven sons.”(p. 9).

However, he gets a baby girl. In a rather belated wisdom, he turns about and says,

“a home without daughters is like a spring without a source” (p.9).

Akoko grows up and wins the affection of her father, something the society considers unusual. Sons are glorified as they meant continuity. The argument is that a girl would depart and go to ‘cook’ for some other clan. They believe that the sole purpose of the girl child is to bring wealth to her paternal home through bride price and sire children for her matrimonial home. Chief Owuor Kembo’s uncle says that his late brother the great chief Gogni Adinda *“had only two sons and many daughters who will continue to bring in more wealth”* (p. 18). This makes Akoko’s father to be envious as he had only eight daughters to his twenty-one sons. The more daughters one had, the more wealth he would fetch through bride price.

Akoko had two wonderful children when her mother in-law pressurizes Chief Owuor Kembo to marry another wife. She does not recognize the girl Nyabera as she tells the chief, *“My son, what if some ill wind took your only son!”*(p.30). This implies the contemptuous attitude towards the girl child. When she realizes that her son does not want to marry another wife she gets worked up and accuses Akoko of bewitching her son. This infuriates Akoko to the point of returning to her paternal home. Before that, she summons the entire village, informs them of her intentions and what was provoking her to leave. She also reminds them that *“Children are a gift from Were both to the deserving and the undeserving”* (p. 31). She informs everyone that Nyar Asembo; her mother in-law and her brother in-law Otieno are bitter that she has not born thirty children in exchange for the thirty heads of cattle paid as bride price. The crowd gets surprised. The narrator says, *“The crowd hissed; such a thing was unheard of. Didn’t a man own a woman body and soul?”* (p. 32). They also acknowledge that Akoko’s mother in-law had gone beyond. To accuse someone of *witchcraft*, was an unforgivable crime.

Girls had no right to choose their spouses. A father selected a husband for his daughter. Chief Odera had dispatched twelve suitors by the time Owuor arrives to seek Adoyo’s hand in marriage. Her grandmother says, *“Oh Rahuma... did you not select a husband carefully for me and did I not as a good daughter agree without a murmur?”*(p. 10). Girls are also taught to be shy before men. Akoko does not conform to this, something that really infuriates Otieno, her prospective brother in-law.

“Traditionally the girl at this point should have been the picture of demure shyness, her eyes fixed firmly on the floor, her hands held together in front of her mouth. Not Akoko. She walked in, steps measured, head held high, hands at her sides. Her head swiveled around a bit and then her gaze rested on Owuor”(p. 22).

At this point, the teacher could guide students to debate about “*Gender inequality has no place in the contemporary society.*” Later they could write argumentative essays in groups and present in class. They could be allowed to cite examples from their community and experience, besides the text at hand. Such language learning in context is usually meaningful, enjoyable and effective. Learners become aware of some of the retrogressive cultural practices that may need to be discarded in the contemporary society.

5.1.7 Marriage

Marriage was highly valued. “*Marriage was sacred and Chik saw to it that it remained that way by a series of taboos that made it impossible to sever the union*” (p. 32). It is treated as a communal affair. Marriage negotiations are done formally by representatives from both sides. Not everybody is allowed to talk. Each side had to appoint a spokesperson to speak on their behalf. Aloo K’ Olima represents the Yimbo people during negotiations. The spokesperson had to measure words and remain calm always, as highlighted in the following speech by the Sakwa spokesperson.

“We have come to see Odero the son of the great chief Gogni Adinda for the purpose of betrothing our family to his for even as far away as Sakwa we have heard of the beauty and the spirit of his eldest daughter. We would have come earlier had we not been mourning for our Chief Kembo K’ Agina who died last moon, but we came as soon as we could for my nephew Owuor Kembo, now chief in his father’s place, urgently seeks a wife. It is unthinkable that a chief should be unmarried, a situation which has arisen only because of the sudden death of his father-the young chief himself being only twenty seasons old.” (p. 16).

The speech is meant to impress the girl’s father because Chief Owuor is wifeless so, whoever was to marry him would hold the envious position of *mikai*; the first wife, who is respected in the society for she controls the co- wives and would bury her husband around her hut.

The Yimbo spokesman’s speech

“Brothers, people of Sakwa, we are pleased to welcome you to Yimbo. It is customary because of the good dak between us, for you to marry our daughters and we yours. We are therefore more than neighbours, we have great wat between us because of the intermingling of blood though this has not occurred between our two lines so there is no danger of brother marrying sister-a great taboo. Since therefore you are our brothers, we will not make things difficult for you.”

He stopped to take a sip of kong’o and you could have heard the ants talk, so great was the silence. However nobody was fooled by his sweet words. He continued...

“Our daughter, Adoyo Obanda is a great beauty whose assets have been praised and sung by many a nyatiti singer from here to Chumbu Kombit, from Sakwa to Loka Nam. She is as fleet as a gazelle and her flying feet have been incorporated into the sayings of our village so that mothers sending their daughters on errands tell them to run like Adoyo of the flying feet. She has been carefully brought up and has been taught all the requirements of Chik. She is a very apt pupil, and will therefore not bring shame and ruin to her husband by improper conduct.

Her antecedents are peerless for she can trace her bloodline clear to Ramogi our great father and her blood is pure for we have always taken care to marry correctly. She is also the eldest daughter of our great chief a man whose fame is known throughout this land. After careful consultation we have therefore decided that thirty head of cattle should be the proper bride price.” (p. 19).

This was two and a half the usual bride price and yet the spokesperson says, “We will not make things difficult for you.” This shows that *speaking is an art*. The art of speaking observes *etiquette, figurative language, formal measured words, appropriate tone and mood*. The sipping of kong’o was meant to create suspense. Even if the spokesperson strongly disagrees with what is said, he had to remain calm.

The people of Sakwa get out to deliberate on the bride price. Emotions flare up. Owuor’s brother, Otieno, tells his brother that they should go away as the amount was too much. It was enough for three wives. When they come back to the house, the spokes person presents their resolution in a very calm manner.

5.1.8 Speaking and Writing Skills

Through role play, learners could practice presentation skills by assuming the roles of the two spokespersons. Students could also write a speech to present a spirited bargain by the people of Yimbo to reduce the amount of bride price to at least twenty heads of cattle. This could be presented in class. Learners could observe formality and etiquette. The speeches could be presented in class as other students comment on it. They should also discuss how bride price is negotiated in their community. A debate about; “Bride price should be abolished.” could be discussed in class.

5.1.9 Love

Some men fell in love with their wives without knowing, as love was not considered a factor for marriage. Owuor’s love for his wife began the moment he set his eyes on her. When his brother Otieno tells him, “Women are all the same Owuor – let us get out of here.” (p. 20). Owuor begins reflecting the Jawan’gyo’s (the spy he had sent to inspect the girl) report. That she had a very beautiful neck, long with lovely creases tracing their way around it. She also had a long hooked navel on which two long rings of beads could fit. The same love blinds him from marrying another wife. His wife also loved him and honored him. It is evident in the dirge Akoko sings while mourning Owuor when he dies.

*Women have given birth to sons
But none are like Owuor
The son of Kembo, of the line of Maroko
My friend, my husband.*

Men live with their wives

*Like cats and dogs, ravens and chicken
But not the son of Kembo
My friend, my husband.*

*When I first set my eyes on him
So tall. So handsome. So full of nyadhi(style)
My heart was smitten within me
By my friend my husband.*

*My father demanded thirty heads
And the son of Kembo did not demur
Paid up like a really man
My friend my husband.*

*Yes women have had sons
But none will ever be like Owuor
The son of Kembo of the blood of Maroko
My friend my husband.” (p.63).*

Students could write a letter of condolence to the widow, Akoko.

5.1.10 Personal praise songs

*“ Iam Ochieng Suna, the mosquito
Tiny I am but when I bite,
Even the great elephant
Flaps his big ears.”*

*Another one
“Iam Oloo Polo, the sky
When I rumble
And send signs and wonders
Even the brave tremble.”*

*Another...
“ I am Ong’ong’ Jaber
So handsome am I
That when I pass
Girls gape and drop their water pots.” (p.23).*

The teacher ought to draw students’ attention to the fact that the singers are using their knowledge of the environment to compose songs. Each student could compose and write a

praise song about himself or herself using environmental features. They could then sing aloud in chain. It becomes fun to sing the praise songs as they acquire language.

5.2 The Objective of Teaching the Cultural Practices

The objectives of teaching the cultural practices were to identify and illustrate the cultural practices in the novel. They were at the cognitive level, not psychomotor or the affective.

6.0 Conclusion

Integrated English language teaching focused on teaching Literature in English language. Classroom interactions provided meaningful communications which facilitated acquisition of the language; however, there was no deliberate effort to use the literal material to teach the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, the integrated English language teaching objective about: 'to enhance understanding and respect for own and other people's cultures and their place in the contemporary society,' was not achieved. The instructional objectives focused on identifying and illustrating the cultural issues in the novel. There were no parallels that were being drawn from other communities. There was no discussion about the place or value of some of the cultural issues identified in the contemporary society. Teachers emphasized on the cognitive domain ignoring the psychomotor and the affective domains. There was a disparity between curriculum developers' expectations and classroom practice.

7.0 Implications for Language Teacher Education

Language teacher educators should train teachers of English to use appropriate approaches in integrated English teaching. They should train language teachers in the instructional strategies to be used in the teaching of literature in English language while integrating the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing plus the subsidiary skills of grammar and punctuation.

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