

## **Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Integrating Literature into the English Language Curriculum for Junior Secondary Schools in Kwara State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the availability of the English Language curriculum in junior secondary schools and explored teachers' perceptions of how Literature-in-English can be integrated into the Junior Secondary School (JSS) English studies curriculum. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all English language teachers in JSS in Kwara State. A total of 100 English Language teachers were selected from 30 secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria, using purposive sampling. Data were collected through a validated, researcher-designed instrument titled "Perception of Teachers' on how literature can be integrated into the English Language Curriculum (PTQLIEC)". Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that 28 out of 30 schools had access to the JSS English Language curriculum, indicating a high level of curriculum availability. Additionally, 66.6% of teachers strongly agreed that blending language and literature would help achieve integration in the English studies curriculum, while 63% believed that a Language Arts framework could serve as a viable strategy for achieving integration. It was concluded that the teaching of English Language and Literature is still done separately in the JSS curriculum. It was recommended among others that there is a need for an integrative curriculum model unifying linguistic and literary discourse to promote English language learning outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum Integration, English Language Teaching, Junior Secondary School, Teacher Perception, Language Arts.

### **Introduction**

Prior to the development of the Junior Secondary School English Language Curriculum in 1985, English Language and Literature-in-English were considered as independent subjects. Each was therefore, taught separately by separate teachers. The aspects of English Language in the curriculum were: composition, comprehension, vocabulary, summary, and lexis and structure. English Language was compulsory at every level of the secondary school education, while Literature in English was not compulsory. Language was taught without consideration to the role of literature plays English language learning.

In 1985, the curriculum on English for Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools was developed. This curriculum acknowledged the fact that literature is an essential part of English. It was stated clearly in the introductory part of the curriculum that in the previous syllabus prepared for English, curriculum planners did not take into consideration the connection of language and literature. The

reason for this being that language and literature were regarded as two separate subjects. Hence, students could not access the benefits that comes from integrating literature in language learning. In the objectives of the 1985 curriculum (p. 91), the following six were listed as aspects of the English language curriculum:

1. Vocabulary Development
2. Comprehension
3. Structure
4. Spoken English Component
5. Writing
6. Literature

Another Integrated English Language Curriculum which is still in use today was developed in 2007. Unlike the 1985 curriculum, the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were itemized. The other itemized areas in English are grammatical accuracy and language appreciation through literary works (supplementary readers). English Language and Literature have been merged into one and is now called English studies. As observed by Onuwa and Oken (2018), Literature is language and language can be literary. Integrating the two gives the learners exposure to the use of language in all its discourse types.

Similarly, Banda and Kakoma (2020) observed that, literature imparts analytical skills and helps to develop the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Affendi and Aziz (2020), it is global knowledge that literature enhances the language process, builds proficiency, sensitivity and awareness of the students. As also observed by Ibrahim (2016), Literature-in-English could be used as a vehicle for teaching English effectively. The genres of literature: poetry, prose and drama, could be used in studying the various aspects of language. Components of language such as words and meanings, paragraphing, punctuation marks, sentence types and register are features in novels that could be used to teach comprehension and essay writing. Speech skills could be taught using drama and listening skill taught using poetry. Barzani (2024) stated that the integration of language and literature will improve language proficiency. It is also an inventive way for students to be intrinsically motivated to learn.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The new integrative approach in English Language was a step taken in the National Policy (FRN, 2004) to integrate certain related school subjects as was previously done in social studies and integrated science. However, instead of adopting an integrative approach whereby aspects of selected literary texts are used to teach specified structural and functional aspects of the language, the two component subjects were to be taught separately. There is therefore the need to examine teachers' perception about the concept of integration of English Language and Literature-in-English in the JSS English studies curriculum.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Is the English Language curriculum available in schools?
2. What is English Language teachers' perception about how literature can be integrated into the JSS English Language curriculum?

## **Review of Literature**

### *Curriculum Integration*

As observed by Stull (2004), curriculum integration can be traced to John Dewey, when he argued against the separation of academic and vocational education and for a combined approach which he referred to as “education through occupation”. Integration and the process of integrating in various disciplines have therefore been written on by educationists and different personalities at different times.

Lawal (1993), links integration in education to theorists, psychologists, and schools of curriculum thought like those of Gestalt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Broadfield theory developed in the 1940s by Kurt Lewin, a Gestalt psychologist. Gestalt psychology on perception, emphasizes that the whole of everything is greater than the parts. Literary works are written in language. The basic reason language is taught is communication. Literature is the vehicle with which language is used for expression in all areas and every circumstance of life. Language and Literature are interrelated. Literature in English combines all structures of English language in communication, strengthening students’ broad use of the different language skills. Broadfield’s theory combines similar subjects into a broad field, which allows learners to see similarities in the items in the curriculum. Literature is language in all ramification, and usage. It is the channel through which students gain fluency in English. Researchers have also established the psychological reason for integration on the ground that organized or related materials are assimilated more easily and retained longer than segmented materials.

Drake and Burns (2016) stated that the simple meaning of integration could be connections: across disciplines, to real life, skill based, or knowledge based. Drake and Burns identified three approaches to integration. The first one is the- multidisciplinary approach. In this approach, teachers cut across disciplines in search of materials to plan instruction around a theme. The second is interdisciplinary approach, teachers integrate related disciplines in the same subject area. Such is the approach in: integrating reading, writing and oral communication in language art; history, geography, economics and government in social studies; biology, chemistry, physics and earth space science in integrated science. The third approach to integration is the trans-disciplinary; teachers fuse knowledge, attitudes and skills into the school curriculum. Integration of language and literature as one subject, is the language arts interdisciplinary approach of blending the language and literature components, using the four communicative skills; Listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Ibrahim (2016) suggested that an effective method of teaching English language is teaching its structure using the three genres of literature. English literature is embedded with the structures of English, for example, words and meanings, paragraphing, punctuation marks, register are features in literature for teaching comprehension and essay writing. Oral skills can be taught through drama while listening skills can be taught through poetry. The use of language is beyond making sentences in isolation. Communicative competence is achieved when the learner is able to confidently express himself in any situation, he finds himself. Literature is taught in school to expose students to the use of language in its varieties.

### *Literary Genres and the Development of Language Skills*

The different genres of literature, (drama, prose and poetry), have a variety of text types that can be used as templates to teach the different language structures. Literature has a wide range of

vocabulary that learners can use to attain fluency in communication. Bird (1979) argued that “anything that will cement the students’ usage and knowledge of the language, increases their confidence and spurs on their desire to extend and intensify their expertise, should be welcomed (p. 290). Bird advocated drama texts or improvised drama for students as a good method of language teaching. Wessels (1991) was also involved in teaching English through drama, Wessels observed that teaching materials that can be used to teach all language skills can be developed from drama texts.

Ramsaran (1983) developed an article to demonstrate how poetry may be used in language classes to develop the students’ knowledge of English. In the article, extracts from various poems were analyzed to illustrate different linguistic features: the extracts were chosen to assist with (1) phonological matters of pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation; (2) vocabulary; (3) grammar and (4) meaning. According to Watts (1981) the English language learner in West Africa today is not expected to express his feelings in English; certainly, he is not expected to use the language of poetry. Watts (1981) observed in his study of one of the popular English language teaching textbooks, Ogundipe and Tregido’s *Practical English*, that language learning must indeed be practical. Watts observed that in the text, there was virtually no treatment of imaginative uses of language, nor of literary genres. Students were required to write police statements, newspaper articles, business letters, minutes and the like, concluding that “unless the students also study literature, however, and many do not, they never experience the language as used in an imaginative way” (p. 444). Many of the students are not capable of reading or writing the language in any of its literary varieties. English language learning goes on in a distinctly practical vein, omitting from the students’ language experience, the pleasure and passions of imaginative language. Although it can be argued that omitting the language of imagination from the students’ experience is purely a matter of priority in an environment like West Africa, where English may be used for a wide variety of activities, this omission can bring about an unbalanced use of linguistic skills.

Research shows that some teachers’ argument against the use of imaginative language in teaching English is aimed particularly at poetry. These teachers are of the opinion that the language of poetry is too remote and esoteric, far removed from ordinary uses of language. The teachers argue that reading and writing poetry interfere with learning correct English usage, since poetry tends to deviate from the standard patterns of lexical and syntactical usage. Winifreds (1962) however argues that poetry is language at full stretch. Watts (1981) also observes that poetry can stimulate imaginative and personal expression. Watts, developed a project on reading and writing poetry. This was to test the viability of using poetry in the English language learning programme. Themes like dream, towns, creatures, protests, people, weather, death rites, and festivals were used. Using J.P. Clarks’ poem *Ibadan* as illustration, each student was made to write a poem and a prose piece about a particular town. During the twelve weeks of the programme, many poems were reported to have been written, demonstrating the students’ ability to use their imaginations, as well as to express something personal. Watt’s project experience was used to draw the relationship of poetry writing to the learning of English language skills. It was observed that some students made frequent errors, particularly at the beginning of the project, but that the discussion of their errors formed a regular feature of the programme. The errors as observed, diminished significantly as the project proceeded, this suggested that as students became increasingly involved in expressing themselves in a particular variety or model of language, their grammatical competence increased. This project also however did not go well with some teachers’ who argued that writing poetry interferes with the students’ acquisition of the ‘correct’ grammatical forms of the language.

Thompson (1987), observed that teaching the two aspects separately can also lead to poor thinking, linguistic insensitivity, and a weakening hold on reality. Fairman (1981) used oral traditional stories in teaching English to first-year secondary school pupils (aged 13+). The pupils were taught to write clear narrative prose. In the first stage, the teacher tells the story to the class two or three times, then the pupils retell it. The basic oral version is written on the chalkboard, which the pupils copy down. The pupils were then made to produce written versions, either in groups or individually. After the project, it was observed that (i) the exercise improved students' narrative through the use of various linguistic forms. (ii) The approach helped students appreciate the different styles in English.

Lazar (1990), in his study (Using novels in the language learning classroom), found that the novel can provide a rich source of English language activities. He identified some features of novels which provide unusual education and linguistic opportunities for the learner. Stating that, using novel with the English Language learner, can provide teachers with unique opportunities for linguistic development. If a novel is carefully selected and linked with students' interest, it may provide a more involving source for pedagogic activities than some of the pseudo-narratives that one sometimes finds in course books. A good novel addresses itself to complex situations and adult dilemmas. It engages students intellectually, emotionally and linguistically and as such can provide the basis for a motivating variety of classroom activities, ranging from extensive reading tasks to close textual analysis. To make the language of the novel more accessible to students, students could be encouraged to analyze an extract from the novel to identify how specific lexical and grammatical features produce particular stylistic effects.

#### *The Language Arts Concept as a Means of Language/ Literature Integration*

Language Arts is a broad term that comprises all the components, written and spoken that aims at developing learners' communication skills. These are, the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Literature supports all areas of language arts. Orisawayi (1984) proposed the proper integration of the learning of English and the study of literature in the English medium in the Nigerian school system. Observing that the separation of English into language and literature is a waste in terms of declared failure of learners at the 'O' level examinations. If properly employed, fiction, poetry, drama, letters, biography and other non-fictional literary materials will provide rich sources of language development in the areas of performance skills such as speaking, reading and writing. Similarly, according to Gesinde and Adegbara (1983), Literature is the use of language in either prose, poetry or drama forms. "The main aim for the development of language is to develop the act of literary appreciation in the students" (p.291). Day (2009), describes language art as "building bridges between two traditionally divided subjects. The function of literature is building the language skills.

Protherough, Atkinson, Fancett (1989) asserted that English has a unique important role to play listening, speaking, reading, and writing as these are required for learning in all subject areas. They further see English as a subject concerned with what it means to be a human being in relationship with other individuals growing within a culture. They emphasize that the world we need to know about is created by language, we know ourselves and others, discover how to learn and how to make choices or judgement. At the heart of these processes is responding to literature. In line with this assertion, Unoh (1981), stated that language arts is the study of the productive and creative use of language in communication and learning. Further stating that since language Arts otherwise known as communication Arts comprises of the arts of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the study of communication or language Arts should certainly involve a study of human expression

in all its ramifications. Lefevre (1970), views language Arts is a problem-oriented and communication-centred study of language. It makes the study of language functional in terms of human concerns and activities.

## Methodology

*Research Design:* The study adopted the descriptive research design. The descriptive research design was considered appropriate because it helped in eliciting direct responses from respondents.

*Participants:* The population for the study comprised all JSS English language teachers in Kwara State. The sample for the study was made up of 100 JSS English language teachers sampled from 30 secondary schools in three local government areas (Ilorin East, Ilorin West and Ilorin South LGAs) of Ilorin Metropolis. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30 secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis consisting of the three local Government areas. First, the schools were stratified into school type (single-sex schools and co-educational schools). School location, qualification and experience of teachers were also considered in the selection of the sample. On the averages of three teachers were used in each school. The selections of schools were made up of ten male schools, ten female schools and ten co-educational schools.

*Instrument:* A researcher-designed questionnaire for teachers titled “Teachers’ Perception Questionnaire on Integration in the JSS English Curriculum” (PTQLIEC) was used to collect the relevant data for the study. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, A, B, and C. Section A elicits the demographic data of the participants. Section B comprised the items that measured the availability of the curriculum in schools. Section C consisted of statements that best described teachers’ perceptions about how integration could be achieved in the JSS English curriculum.

*Data Collection Procedure:* One hundred copies of questionnaire were administered on 100 JSS English teachers in Kwara State.

*Data Analysis:* Data collected for the study were subjected to descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

## Results

*Research Question One: Is the English Language Curriculum available in schools?*

**Table 1: Availability of the JSS English Curriculum in Schools (N = 84)**

/N	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	Mean	SD
1	The JSS English Curriculum is available in the school	97.6%	2.4%	0.98	0.15
2	Only a copy of the JSS English Curriculum is available in the school	97.6%	2.4%	0.98	0.15
3	A copy is available in the English Department and the principal’s office	14.3%	85.7%	0.14	0.35
4	Each teacher of English at the JSS level has a copy	0.0%	100.0%	0.00	0.00
5	I have never come across a copy of the JSS English Curriculum	2.4%	97.6%	0.02	0.15

Table 1 presents statements on four issues related to availability of curriculum in schools. The first is on general availability, the first statement revealed that 97.6% of respondents agree that the curriculum is available in their schools. But the second statement adds an important clarification: only one copy is available; suggesting limited access despite general availability. The second is the location of copies of the curriculum in the school. Only 14.3% confirm that a copy exists in both the English Department and the principal's office. This suggests that even when the curriculum is available, it might not be well-distributed or easily accessible within the school. The third issue is teacher's access to the curriculum, 0% of respondents said each teacher has a copy. This is very concerning. It reveals that individual teacher access is nonexistent, which could hinder curriculum delivery and lesson planning. The last issue is total absence. Only 2.4% said they have never seen a copy, which aligns with Statement 1 and 2, affirming general availability, but not widespread distribution.

*Research Question Two: What is English Language teachers' perception about how literature can be integrated into the JSS English Language curriculum?*

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions on Curriculum Integration**

Item	Description	Mean	Std. Dev.
6	Integration can be achieved by teaching language and literature separately	1.98	1.42
7	Integration can be achieved by blending components of language and literature	4.21	1.34
8	Integration occurs through successful blending of language and literature	3.93	1.49
9	Integration cannot be achieved through a language arts curriculum	2.18	1.71

Table 2 shows teachers' perception about the integration of literature in language teaching. For Item 6: "Integration can be achieved by teaching language and literature separately" (Mean = 1.98, SD = 1.42) shows that respondents generally disagree with this idea. Item 7: "Integration can be achieved by blending components of language and literature" (Mean = 4.21, SD = 1.34). This shows strong agreement that blending is the effective way to achieve integration. The next, Item 8: "Integration occurs through successful blending of language and literature" (Mean = 3.93, SD = 1.49), This shows a high level of agreement, though slightly lower than Item 7. The last item. Item 9: "Integration cannot be achieved through a language arts curriculum" (Mean = 2.18, SD = 1.71). Most teachers disagreed, meaning they believe that language arts curriculum can support integration.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide critical insight into both the availability and perceived implementation of the English Language curriculum at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level. The analysis of research question one revealed that while the curriculum is technically present in most schools, its distribution and accessibility are extremely limited. Only one copy exists in the schools, and no teacher reported having a personal copy. This raises significant concerns about the practical use and awareness of curriculum guidelines among English Language teachers. Without

direct access to the curriculum, teachers may rely on outdated knowledge or personal judgment, leading to inconsistencies in instructional delivery and curriculum implementation.

The answer on the research question on teachers' perception shows that teachers overwhelmingly support the integrated approach to teaching English; particularly the blending of language and literature. These findings suggest that teachers are conceptually aligned with current curriculum ideals, even though structural barriers, like lack of access to curriculum documents, may hinder full implementation. The gap between teachers' positive perception of integration and the inaccessibility of the curriculum poses a challenge to curriculum delivery. This gap suggests a disconnect between policy and practice: while the curriculum framework promotes integration, teachers are not being adequately equipped to apply it.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that although the Junior Secondary School English Language curriculum is officially available in most schools, it is not adequately distributed or accessible to classroom teachers. Teachers do not possess personal or departmental copies, which severely limits their ability to engage with, interpret, and implement the curriculum effectively. On a more positive note, the study shows that teachers have a strong understanding of and favorable attitude toward curriculum integration, especially the merging of language and literature components. This suggests a readiness among teachers to implement modern, integrated teaching strategies.

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ministry of Education and relevant agencies should provide multiple copies of the JSS English curriculum to each school.
2. Curriculum documents should be made available in digital formats to enable easy access via mobile devices and computers, especially in resource-constrained settings.
3. Regular training and orientation programmes should be conducted to familiarize teachers with the content, objectives, and pedagogical strategies promoted in the curriculum.
4. Develop and supply instructional materials that clearly demonstrate integrated language and literature lessons, so teachers can effectively model this approach in the classroom.

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