Integrating Language and Literature in English Teaching: Teachers' Attitudes and Classroom Practice in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

English is Kenya's medium of instruction and an official language, and secondary schools are required to teach it through the Integrated Approach (IA), which merges Language and Literature into one subject. This study examined teachers' attitudes towards IA during implementation of the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC) in Embu County, where mean scores in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) English have remained below 50%. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used, guided by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Questionnaires were completed by 255 teachers of Integrated English (100% return); 20 of them were then purposively selected for lesson observation, and document analysis complemented both strands. Teachers' attitudes were ambivalent. Most agreed that the elements of English should be taught together (85.5%) and that IA benefits speaking and writing (93.7%), yet 81.2% felt that English requires an approach other than IA, and only 48.2% believed that IA improves academic achievement. In the classroom, most teachers taught Language and Literature separately. Limited preparation for IA during pre-service training appears to underlie this gap between endorsement and practice. The study recommends regular in-service training and the inclusion of IA in teacher-preparation programmes. The findings will interest teacher educators, curriculum developers, policymakers and school administrators.

Keywords: teacher attitudes; Integrated English; Integrated Approach; curriculum implementation; Kenya

INTRODUCTION

English is both the medium of instruction and a principal language of communication in Kenyan schools, and proficiency in it shapes learners' access to further education and employment. To benefit fully, students must develop strong literacy skills, speak fluently and understand communication in English (Shrishthy, 2023).

To strengthen these outcomes, Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 requires Kenyan secondary schools to teach English through the Integrated Approach (IA), which merges Language and Literature into a single subject, the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC). The policy seeks to promote critical thinking, values-based education and clear communication (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2019). Rather than treating knowledge as a collection of separate subjects, an integrated curriculum draws different areas of study together, and it has become central to English teaching in Kenya.

Research Problem And Purpose

English is a prerequisite for success across the curriculum, and students are expected to achieve at least 50% in summative assessments. Yet KCSE English results have been persistently low. Table 1 shows that the national mean was below 50% in each year from 2018 to 2022 (Kenya National Examinations Council [KNEC], 2018). It rose by 4.61 percentage points between 2018 (36.39%) and 2019 (41.00%) but returned to about 36.4% by 2020 and stayed there.

Table 1: Candidates' Overall Performance in KCSE English in Kenya, 2018–2022

Year	Candidates	Maximum score	Mean score	Mean (%)
2018	659,953	200	72.78	36.39
2019	697,222	200	82.00	41.00
2020	747,161	200	72.98	36.49
2021	831,026	200	72.92	36.46
2022	881,416	200	72.88	36.44

Source: Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), 2018–2022.

Embu County's results are somewhat better but still disappointing (Table 2). Its mean exceeded the national mean in every year yet stayed below 50%, and it has drifted down slightly since 2019, from 49.5% to 48.3%, even as the number of candidates grew.

Table 2: Candidates' Overall Performance in KCSE English in Embu County, 2018–2022

Year	Candidates	Maximum score	Mean score (%)
2018	9,327	200	40.9
2019	10,021	200	49.5
2020	12,531	200	49.2
2021	13,221	200	48.7
2022	14,394	200	48.3

Source: KNEC, 2018–2022.

Why performance remains low is unclear. It may reflect teacher-related factors, or other factors that call for a comprehensive review of the curriculum, its implementation and the ways in which English is taught and tested. Neupane (2024) lists several possible contributors to poor English proficiency: the spread of non-standard varieties such as Sheng, the unchecked use of vernacular languages in some institutions, inadequate English proficiency among some teachers and excessive teacher workload. Among teacher-related factors, attitude during English lessons is a key attribute.

The stated aims of the IEC and its execution in classrooms also appear to be at odds. This raises questions about how well-prepared teachers are for IA and how well their attitudes align with it. The stakes are high, because weak results in English restrict entry to higher and middle-level colleges and close off economic opportunities, impeding both personal advancement and national development. This article therefore examines English teachers' attitudes towards integration during implementation of the IEC in Embu County and considers their implications for students' performance in English at summative assessment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars commend integration on several grounds. It is said to prevent knowledge from fragmenting and to promote fuller comprehension of ideas (Azevedo et al., 2021), and, when well implemented, to create a learning environment in which connections can be made within and across subjects (Kamatgi, 2025). Pring (2021) argues

that subject-based curricula are incomplete, irrelevant, ineffective, controlling and duplicative, while Bean and Melzer (2021) contend that disciplinary boundaries prevent learners from grasping concepts on a broader scale. Amrina et al. (2024) add that the IEC was designed to link English and Literature, easing the burden on both learner and teacher and strengthening the skills being taught.

Whatever its merits on paper, an innovation succeeds or fails in the hands of teachers. Thompson et al. (2026) note that a teacher's command of a subject affects both their ability to teach it and their attitude towards it, and that this attitude influences how well the subject is taught. Lee et al. (2023) similarly link better learning outcomes to teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills and attitudes, and Almunawaroh and Steklács (2025) show that attitudes are closely tied to pedagogical content knowledge and can either support or hinder achievement. Negative attitudes have accordingly been associated with lower student achievement (Sultana & Imran, 2024; Yudistira et al., 2024). In curriculum reform, Kusmawan et al. (2025) argue, teachers' skills and attitudes matter more than changes in content or method, and So (2025) describes teachers as the pivot on which curricular content rests.

Attitudes also shape the classroom climate. Supportive teachers make learners more receptive, more willing to risk mistakes and quicker to master tasks, whereas harsh or critical teachers may provoke anxiety and withdrawal that depress literacy and examination results (Uwitonze & Andala, 2024). Teacher enthusiasm sparks learners' motivation (Zhang, 2025), while a teacher who is not committed to their own work may leave learners poorly prepared for examinations (Zondi, 2025). Zhang and Tian (2025) identify cognitive ability and affective–motivational traits as the two main components of teacher competence.

Training is a key influence on these attitudes. Inadequate preparation is closely related to negative attitudes towards reforms such as IA, and teachers may avoid the approach and discourage learner participation (Sholakhuddin & Nurkamto, 2026). Vu et al. (2020) likewise stress that teachers should be fully prepared before a programme is introduced if their attitudes are to improve. In Kenya, an assessment by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD, 2017) reported that a significant proportion of teachers have consistently held negative attitudes towards curriculum change.

Empirical evidence on teachers' attitudes towards integration is mixed. Gordon and Schultz (2020) investigated the perceptions of five Career and Technical Education and academic teachers in Minnesota, USA, using questionnaires and interviews, and found that the teachers regarded integration as useful and necessary for positive learning outcomes. That study, however, concerned integration across vocational and academic subjects, whereas the present one concerns two distinct but related disciplines, English Language and Literature.

Closer to the present topic, Adansi and Adukpo (2025) examined how far teachers use IA to teach English in junior schools in Hohoe Municipality, Ghana, prompted by learners' poor performance in English. Interviewing 10 supervisors, 10 heads of department and 10 teachers of English, they concluded that IA helped learners to improve their linguistic and critical-thinking skills, understand better and engage in more practical discussion, although it prevented teachers from completing the syllabus on time. Teachers held positive attitudes towards IA and believed that the IEC design supported examination performance. Their study, however, focused on the extent of IA use rather than on the influence of attitudes on performance in summative assessments, and it relied on qualitative data alone.

Findings from Kenya are less encouraging. Wafula (as cited in Indumba, 2020) studied teachers' knowledge of the IEC in Uasin Gishu County and found that, among 67 respondents, most felt that IA mixed up too many issues and confused both teachers and learners. The sample is too small to generalise from, and the study addressed knowledge rather than attitudes. Khan and Soomro (2022) similarly found that teachers of English disfavoured an integrative approach and supplemented it with other approaches.

Taken together, these studies leave a clear gap: little research connects teachers' attitudes towards IA in English with students' examination performance, and the studies reviewed relied on either qualitative or quantitative methods alone. The present study addresses this gap with a mixed-methods design that allows survey, observation and document evidence to be compared.

The study is guided by Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Applied to teachers, the theory suggests that an innovation lying comfortably within a teacher's ZPD, that is, within reach with appropriate support, is likely to be met with acceptance and engagement, whereas an innovation imposed on teachers provokes an adverse psychological response (Vu et al., 2020). Where the gap between what teachers already know (their zone of actual development) and what the innovation demands is wide, they experience frustration and resistance and feel inadequately prepared unless a "More Knowledgeable Other" guides them (Zondi, 2025). Alghamdy (2023) likewise connects teachers' attitudes towards a new approach to whether it lies within, outside or below their ZPD.

Vygotsky did not address examination outcomes directly, but his sociocultural theory helps explain how teachers' attitudes shape the classroom environment and, through it, learners' attainment. Tests usually measure what learners can do entirely on their own, yet academic success depends heavily on the ZPD, the window in which a learner can master challenging ideas with a teacher's help. Examination success therefore requires learners to move from assisted performance to independence (Baker et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, specifically a convergent parallel design, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected in the same period and compared. The design is anchored in pragmatism, which permits a deliberate combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to address complex social, psychological and institutional problems that rarely fit purely qualitative or purely quantitative frameworks (Gillespie et al., 2024). Embu County was chosen as the study area because of its poor performance in KCSE English and because few empirical studies of teachers' attitudes towards the IEC, particularly using mixed methods, have been conducted there.

The target population comprised 178 public secondary schools, 2,640 regular teachers and 704 teachers of Integrated English (IE) in Embu County. Schools were stratified by sub-county, and 17 schools, approximately 10% of the 178 public schools, were randomly selected. Purposive and stratified sampling were used to obtain a sample that was balanced and diverse: both male and female teachers were included; schools of different categories were sampled; schools were drawn from both urban and rural locations; and teachers with varying years of experience took part.

From the 704 teachers of IE, a sample of 255 was determined using Slovin's formula, $n = N \div (1 + Ne^2)$, where N is the population and e the margin of error (0.05 yields 255). The qualitative sample comprised 20 IE teachers purposively selected from among the questionnaire respondents.

Three instruments were used. The Teachers of English Questionnaire on Integration (TOEQI), administered in person by the researcher, collected quantitative data on teachers' attitudes. A Lesson Observation Schedule (LOS) captured how teachers actually taught; observation goes beyond what people write or claim to do and reveals what they really do, which may not be reflected in records (Fischer et al., 2022). A Document Analysis Guide (DAG) structured the examination of the IE syllabus, textbooks, teachers' notes, schemes of work and lesson plans.

Content experts reviewed the instruments to ensure that they measured the intended constructs (Markus & Borsboom, 2024). A Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated for each item using Lawshe's (1975) method. Items that were not significant at the critical level were removed, and the format and wording of the remaining items were revised for clarity before use in the field.

Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using test–retest and internal consistency; Cronbach's alpha averaged 0.814 across variables, which is acceptable. The trustworthiness of the qualitative instruments (LOS and DAG) was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The questionnaire was administered to 255 teachers of IE. Twenty IE teachers were observed while teaching, and the documents listed above were analysed. Quantitative data were entered in a spreadsheet, updated daily,

and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) were computed and presented in tables. Qualitative data were organised thematically. In keeping with the convergent design, the two data sets were analysed separately and then compared to identify points of convergence and divergence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All 255 questionnaires administered were returned (100%). The researcher was present while respondents completed them and collected them in person, which probably explains this result; clearly worded items may also have helped. Creswell and Plano Clark (2023) regard a 60% response rate as acceptable, 70% as good and 80% or more as excellent, so this return rate exceeds the highest benchmark. The researcher's presence may, however, have encouraged socially desirable responses (see Section 3.5).

The profile of the 255 respondents by gender, highest academic qualification and years of teaching Integrated English is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Profile of Respondents (N = 255)

Characteristic	**Category**	***f***	**%**
Gender	Female	140	54.9
	Male	115	45.1
Highest qualification	Diploma	22	8.6
	Bachelor's degree	210	82.4
	Master's degree	18	7.1
	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	5	2.0
Years teaching Integrated English	1–5	75	29.4
	6–10	52	20.4
	11–15	36	14.1
	16–20	38	14.9
	21–25	32	12.5
	26–30	22	8.6

Source: TOEQI (2026). Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Gender

Female teachers (54.9%, *n* = 140) slightly outnumbered male teachers (45.1%, *n* = 115). Because the sampling method gave both genders an equal chance of selection, this probably reflects the composition of IE teachers in the county rather than sampling bias. Teachers of both genders were therefore represented, which matters because gender may shape teachers' views of integration.

Qualification

Understanding teachers' qualifications is important because the level of education attained shapes teachers' attitudes and, consequently, learners' progress (Mpiti et al., 2025). Highly qualified teachers are often better

equipped to interpret the curriculum, adopt instructional strategies and apply content knowledge in diverse classroom contexts. Most respondents (210, 82.4%) held a bachelor's degree, the basic qualification for secondary teaching in Kenya; 22 (8.6%) held a diploma, 18 (7.1%) a master's degree and 5 (2.0%) a PhD. The 23 postgraduate holders (9.0%) may have acquired advanced research skills, content mastery and exposure to progressive instructional methods that could support positive attitudes and successful implementation of the IEC. By contrast, the 232 teachers (91.0%) with a diploma or bachelor's degree may have had limited exposure to curriculum reforms and fewer pedagogical skills, which could constrain implementation and, in turn, students' KCSE English performance. This is in line with Pandey et al. (2023), who found that teachers' pedagogical skills depended largely on the number of years spent in training and that less-trained teachers produced weaker student results in tests.

Experience

A broad range of teaching experience was needed to capture the views of both newly recruited and long-serving teachers. Early-career teachers (1–5 years) formed the largest single group (75, 29.4%), and 158 respondents (62.0%) had between 6 and 25 years of experience. Teachers with this level of experience are likely to have encountered a variety of instructional strategies and are well placed to comment on the use of IA in English teaching.

Attitude plays a key role in shaping motivation and morale, which in turn influence students' examination performance: enthusiastic and caring teachers stimulate curiosity and reduce examination anxiety, whereas teachers with negative attitudes may leave learners with low self-esteem and little interest in the subject (Uwitonze & Andala, 2024). Whether teachers embrace a new approach also depends on whether it lies within, outside or below their ZPD (Alghamdy, 2023). The study therefore examined the emotional, cognitive and behavioural components of teachers' attitudes, which are widely recognised as strong predictors of instructional decisions and student outcomes (Uwitonze & Andala, 2024). Teachers' responses are summarised in Table 4, and the sections that follow discuss each theme in turn.

Table 4: Teachers' Attitudes towards Integration (% of respondents, N = 255)

Statement	**SA**	**A**	**U**	**D**	**SD**	**SA + A**	**D + SD**
It is necessary to teach the various elements of English together in one lesson	26.3	59.2	2.4	8.2	3.9	85.5	12.1
The teaching of English requires a different approach apart from IA	56.1	25.1	9.4	7.4	2.0	81.2	9.4
I find teaching English in the integrated approach quite easy	20.0	27.8	4.3	44.4	3.5	47.8	47.9
My schemes of work are prepared using the integrated approach	25.9	65.9	3.1	3.5	1.6	91.8	5.1
Teaching English using the integrated approach leads to positive academic achievement in English	20.8	27.4	2.0	41.6	7.2	48.2	48.8
Teaching English using the integrated approach contributes positively to speaking and writing skills among students	20.5	73.2	3.1	2.4	0.8	93.7	3.2
Teacher training should be done using the integrated approach	34.0	20.8	1.6	41.2	2.4	54.8	43.6

Note: SA = strongly agree; A = agree; U = uncertain; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. SA + A and D + SD are sums of the adjacent columns. Row percentages for the fifth statement sum to 99.0% as reported. Source: TOEQI (2026).

A large majority of teachers (218, 85.5%) agreed that it is necessary to teach the various elements of English together in one lesson; only 31 (12.1%) disagreed. A further 91.8% reported preparing their schemes of work using IA. In principle, then, IA was accepted. This contrasts with Khan and Soomro (2022), whose teachers of English disfavoured an integrative approach and turned to other approaches. The acceptance found in Embu County makes the persistently poor KCSE results all the more puzzling.

An apparently conflicting result followed: 207 teachers (81.2%) agreed that English requires an approach other than IA. One reading is that teachers accept IA as a principle but are dissatisfied with how it is currently operationalised and supported, and want change rather than outright rejection. In the authors' view, appropriate training would address this discomfort and could improve IE students' examination marks.

Teachers were evenly divided on whether teaching English through IA is easy: 122 (47.8%) agreed and 122 (47.9%) disagreed. Lesson observations suggested that the difficulty was greater than self-reports implied, since most teachers struggled to integrate the elements of IE. None of the 20 teachers observed integrated effectively, including those who had prepared careful notes. Twelve struggled to merge English and Literature, especially when addressing several language skills in one lesson. Ten made an effort to include literary aspects, while ten others concentrated entirely on literature, especially set novels. Some covered only English grammar at the expense of listening and speaking, and in one class the teacher devoted the whole lesson to reading comprehension (researcher observation). Although about 70% of teachers (n = 178) reported using IA in their lessons, the gap between reported and observed practice suggests that self-reports overstated integration.

Teachers were split on whether IA leads to positive academic achievement in English: 48.2% agreed and 48.8% disagreed, a near-even division with a marginal tilt towards scepticism. They were evidently unsure whether IA contributes to the low KCSE scores recorded in the county. One possible reason is that many teachers did not actually use IA in their lessons, because their training had not supported it, and so could not judge its results.

By contrast, the great majority (239, 93.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that IA contributes positively to students' speaking and writing skills, and only 8 (3.2%) disagreed. Teachers thus value the communicative benefits of IA even though they doubt its examination benefits. This is consistent with Jalolova (2023), who describes IA as a key tool for providing varied stimuli and a wide choice of activities, so that students engage in listening, speaking, reading and writing exercises that raise their curiosity to learn. It also resonates with Adansi and Adukpo (2025), whose teachers valued IA for improving language and thinking skills. That teachers who value IA remain uncomfortable with it in practice points to the difficulty of implementing the IEC rather than to rejection of its aims.

When asked whether teacher training should be organised around IA, 140 teachers (54.8%) agreed and 111 (43.6%) disagreed. About 60% of the teachers had been trained in conventional single-subject methodology without explicit exposure to integration. Taken with the divided opinion, this suggests that pre-service preparation at universities and teacher training colleges has not met the demands of implementing IA, and that some teachers may not yet see integrated training as necessary. Matere (2024) similarly identifies the lack of alignment between teacher training and needs in the field as a gap that universities and training colleges must address. Until it is closed, teachers are likely to keep grappling with low scores in IE.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence converge on a picture of ambivalent attitudes. Teachers endorse integration as an idea (85.5%) and recognise its communicative benefits (93.7%), but they doubt that it improves examination achievement (48.2% agreeing), regard it as difficult to implement and, in 81.2% of cases, consider that English needs a different approach. Observed practice did not reflect the integrated approach: teachers tended to teach Language and Literature separately, with Literature confined largely to prescribed texts and grammar taught on its own. Read through the ZPD framework, IA appears to lie beyond many teachers' zone of proximal development at present. Teachers trained in single-subject methods face a large gap between what they

know and what the IEC demands, and without sufficient guidance from a More Knowledgeable Other they appear to revert to familiar, separate teaching of Language and Literature.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined teachers' attitudes towards the Integrated Approach (IA) during implementation of the Integrated English Curriculum (IEC) in Embu County. The findings reveal ambivalent attitudes. Teachers largely endorsed IA in principle: 85.5% agreed that the elements of English should be taught together in one lesson, 91.8% reported preparing schemes of work using IA, and 93.7% believed that IA contributes positively to students' speaking and writing skills. At the same time, 81.2% felt that English requires an approach other than IA, only 47.8% found teaching through IA easy, and teachers were almost evenly divided on whether IA improves academic achievement (48.2% agreed; 48.8% disagreed). Classroom observation and document analysis confirmed a clear gap between endorsement and practice. None of the 20 observed teachers integrated Language and Literature effectively; most taught the two components separately, with Literature largely confined to prescribed texts and grammar taught independently. Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that their pre-service training had followed a conventional single-subject methodology without explicit preparation for integration.

The study concludes that a persistent gap exists between policy intent and classroom execution. This gap is rooted in limited preparation for IA and in attitudes of hesitancy rather than outright rejection. The gap is consistent with the persistently low KCSE English performance observed under an integrated curriculum. Because the relationship between teachers' attitudes and examination scores was not tested statistically, the link remains an informed inference rather than a demonstrated causal effect. Interpreted through Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, IA currently lies beyond the reach of many teachers. Without adequate support from a More Knowledgeable Other, teachers tend to revert to the familiar practice of teaching Language and Literature separately.

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Teachers Service Commission, should institute regular and obligatory in-service training for teachers of English. Training should focus on practical strategies for implementing the Integrated Approach and should incorporate mentoring by more experienced colleagues, thereby bringing IA within teachers' Zone of Proximal Development.

2. Universities and diploma teacher-training institutions should revise their curricula to include systematic practical experience of the Integrated Approach. New graduates would then enter the profession with the pedagogical skills, confidence and positive attitudes required for effective implementation of the IEC.

3. School administrators and heads of English departments should support collaborative lesson planning and peer observation so that teachers can develop and refine integrated lessons in a supportive professional environment.

Future research should examine teachers' attitudes towards integration in other subjects taught through an integrated curriculum, such as Social Studies, Life Skills and Science, to determine whether the challenges identified in the IEC are subject-specific or reflect a wider systemic concern. In addition, studies that statistically relate teachers' attitude scores to students' examination performance would strengthen the evidence base on the attitude–performance link and inform more targeted interventions.

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