

## **An Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives about the Implementation of Integrated Curriculum in Primary Schools**

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### **Abstract**

The researchers' main goal was to identify variables that may impact instructors' adoption of integrated curriculum (IC). Jacob's model was used to define integrated curriculums' contentious notion, and that was done to create a consistent research background. The researcher used a random selection strategy to choose three primary schools in the District Sheikhpura for data gathering. To find out how a well-integrated curriculum is implemented in primary schools, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the heads of primary schools. To verify data validity and uphold heads' responses, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews of the teachers of the same schools, qualitative data of both teachers and heads were used. Results showed that most teachers implemented integrated curriculum regularly; On the other hand, the teachers and students chose to utilize a less integrated approach. In addition, the research found that despite instructors mostly agreeing that integrated curriculum is beneficial and that they are aware and skilled in using the integrated curriculum, their degrees of agreement on other aspects affecting integrated curriculum implementation differed. The role of instructors' scheduling time and comparable working hours about their colleagues in influencing teacher use of integrated curriculum was shown to be necessary. The extent to which instructors obtained community support, resources and information and skills related to implementing an integrated curriculum was shown to have a modestly positive impact on the most often used integrated curriculum type. Finally, researchers discuss future research implications and suggestions.

**Key Words:** Curriculum and its implementation, teachers' perspectives and integrated curriculum.

### **Introduction**

Educators are familiar with the term "integrated curriculum." Its roots may be found in the 1950s and 1960s. IC has been extensively supported and applied at all levels of schools. However, scholars cannot introduce one single definition of an integrated curriculum. Even the term "integrated curriculum" gets mixed with different terms like "transdisciplinary" and

"interdisciplinary" curriculum (Jacobs, 1989; Vars, 1993). Due to a uniform theoretical framework, researchers and educators cannot create a clear grasp of curricular integration. When instructors try to integrate IC in their classrooms, this leads to even more uncertainty in teaching approaches. Like Jacobs (1989) argues, when school teachers talk about their "interdisciplinary unit," they give an entirely different understanding to that term than their peers down the hall.

Previous IC research has focused on three main themes. First, the efficiency of IC has been investigated in a few research. Second, there have been continuing studies on whether IC may help kids study better, for example, by increasing their self-esteem and success. Third, in specific research, the ability of in-service and preservice instructors to adopt IC was emphasized. On the other hand, very few studies have focused on the elements influencing the implementation of an integrated curriculum. Above mentioned studies explain almost all the essential elements required for effective IC implementation; nevertheless, these aspects have frequently been studied separately.

The purpose of this research was to perform a more thorough analysis of the relevant aspects that influence IC implementation in primary schools' classrooms. The study's goal was to see how teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of IC, their knowledge and abilities to apply IC, and other non-teaching elements influenced their curriculum choices. Furthermore, the research was performed from the standpoint of instructors, which aided in the collection of teachers' viewpoints on IC. In-service teachers are an excellent resource for identifying elements that may affect integrated curriculum implementation. However, the integrated curriculum is a multi-layered and vigorous course, and it can not be separated from the complex realities of our education system. Last but not least, the present research was founded on a coherent theoretical foundation by using Jacobs' (1989) model to explain the problematic idea of IC and the comprehensive definition of an integrated curriculum.

### **Review of Related literature**

As defined by the studies described above, an integrated curriculum has the following critical elements in the broadest sense: any curricular structures that purposefully integrate material from multiple subject areas are grouped as IC. This comprehensive definition is by Meeth's (1978) observation that there is an intentional focus on identifying the connections across disciplines. Shoemaker (1989) describes IC as "education that breaks over subject-matter divide and brings together diverse curriculum components into meaningful connection to concentrate on broad areas of study." Others are in favour of this comprehensive definition as well. According to Gehrke (1998);

"Curriculum integration is instructional form concerned less with outlining disciplinary boundaries about learning activities, and more with enabling students to recognize or design their learning."

Jacobs' (1989) approach was utilized to understand the idea better and identify distinct curricular types under the IC umbrella. According to Jacobs, the educational curriculum should give students experiences in discipline-specific and interdisciplinary fields of study. Since she offered a content design spectrum with discipline-specific design options, she suggested that the entire curriculum be arranged from one end of the continuum. According to Jacobs, the IC programme incorporates a project approach, where students live and learn within the school setting and construct curriculum throughout their daily life. In parallel, complementary, and interdisciplinary design,

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instructors create lessons to align with other disciplines' lessons that deal with the same subject or issue.

There have been ongoing debate and investigations of how IC enhances student learning since its inception. An extensive body of research was reviewed in 1984, with the help of the National Association for Core Curriculum, on the efficacy of integrative programming. Based on this study, it seems that, in almost every instance, children who study via an integrated curriculum programme do as well or better than students who use a conventional curriculum programme on standardized testing. While multiple quantitative and qualitative research studies have found that IC students benefit academically, socially, personally, and mentally, many more show that students benefit in various ways, including academic success, team effectiveness, control, motivation, and attitudes. A thorough examination of the available research reveals that a range of variables, counting teachers' views in integrated curriculum, teachers' understanding and abilities in implementing integrated curriculum, and further concerns outside teaching, may influence integrated curriculum implementation in schools.

### **Teachers' Opinions on IC**

Many investigations have looked at the success of IC by comparing it to the conventional curriculum; though, little emphasis has been paid to instructors' perceptions of its success. Lun's (2006) study on the difficulties of teaching IC gives insights into primary school teachers' attitudes about the subject. 117 teachers who educate children in grades 1-6 were asked to participate in a survey on an integrated curriculum. Based on the key findings, the researcher concluded that the participating teachers supported IC implementation. That it helped pupils connect classroom learning to the real world, boost academic accomplishment, and motivate students to use their knowledge in meaningful ways was what they believed. Ozturk and Erden verified and expanded teachers' views on the usefulness of IC (2010).

Ozturk and his fellow researchers conducted a study of 255 female kindergarten instructors to learn more about their views about the integrated curriculum. Teachers had favourable attitudes toward IC in general, according to the survey. Many instructors thought IC was particularly helpful in enabling meaningful learning, supplementing conventional learning activities, and promoting children's overall development. Several studies have highlighted the significance of teachers' attitudes on educational issues and how these views influence decision-making processes and instructional techniques. Thus, every investigation of teachers' behaviours should be accompanied by researching teachers' beliefs. As a result, a study of instructors' perceptions of IC's efficacy is critical.

### **Teachers' IC Skills and Knowledge**

Teachers' ability to implement curriculum can impact their approach to the classroom and their views on the curriculum. According to Hinde (2005), Successful implementations of IC need trained and competent instructors. Because of the complexities of applying IC, in-service and preservice teachers are challenged to achieve comprehensive teaching competence, a grasp of content, academic knowledge about integrated curriculum, and understanding of applying integrated curriculum. Teachers must be well-versed in various academic areas to teach IC properly. According to studies, strengthening teachers' topic understanding is a priority.

Cunningham and his fellow researchers (2004) examined the subject knowledge of 722 junior school English educators. The study's results were disappointing because the participants had very little understanding of the integrated curriculum, cognitive levels and awareness about phonemes. According to the study, "underrating their reading-related subject matter competence, and being blind to what they know and don't know, are common among the characteristics of immoral teachers". Researchers have looked at teachers' subject understanding in different academic subjects, specifically science. Lee (2010) studied kindergarten teachers' subject understanding of mathematics. Although instructors had a greater understanding of their subject matter, he determined that they still need to improve after assessing 81 teachers' mathematics knowledge in six subcategories. Lam, Alviar-Martin, Adler, and Sim (2013) published research with comparable findings. Instructors' insufficient topic understanding in diverse subject areas impeded them from identifying crucial concepts to cover in teaching an integrated curriculum, according to the researchers, who analyzed the interview data of eleven teachers.

While the researchers raised a red flag about instructors' lack of content understanding, Park (2008) shared the researchers' concerns that instructors were not yet adequately trained in theoretical understanding of IC. Park found that all of the in-service primary teachers he spoke with were concerned about the lack of theoretical support in their classrooms. He concluded that the participating instructors were only partly familiar with the integrative approach's fundamental principles. They prefer to understand principles through intuitive knowledge rather than systematically examining their relevance and applicability in their instruction. However, integration efforts depend on intuition and personal experience rather than established theory, which hinders the academic progress of integrated curricular projects in schools.

Araujo and his colleagues (2013) conducted more current research that revealed instructors' lack of theoretical understanding of IC. The authors discovered that instructors had different understandings of IC based on focus groups and individual interviews with twenty-seven participants. Therefore, the term "integrated curriculum" describes various concepts applied to math instruction. It shows that instructors have pushed themselves to improve their pedagogical skills to work with inappropriate content and insufficient theoretical knowledge while designing their lesson plans. Twenty-eight preservice teachers who teach first graders in a field-based transdisciplinary curriculum were researched by Richards and Shea (2006). The two researchers went into depth on two different issues the educational training professionals faced, as stated by the researchers. The first issue was that implementing different topics inside a single IC framework was challenging; the second issue was that course planning presented new creative challenges. The study showed that preservice teachers had major obstacles while using IC and made the urgent necessity to determine in-service teachers' pedagogical competencies.

### **Non-Teaching Concerns**

A slew of additional concerns might make curricular integration in K-3 classes more challenging. According to Lun's (2006) study, the main impediment to adopting IC was instructors' severe workload, leaving little preparation time. One of the biggest challenges in implementing curricular integration is increased cooperation between instructors from various subject areas. This cooperation necessitated allocating more reasonable working hours for instructors to collaborate.

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Other barriers to curricular integration in the early childhood context. Beyond K-3 grade levels, similar and distinct variables that may impact IC adoption have been found.

Beane (1995) described how many variables outside the classroom, such as a lack of support from colleagues, administrators, and parents, might work against integration. Meister and Nolan interviewed five high school teachers in 2001 about their attempts to restructure an interdisciplinary curriculum and found that the administration consistently supported the teachers. Teachers faced many difficulties when it came to reorganizing their curriculum, including a lack of teacher involvement in the decision-making process, a dearth of professional development, the absence of a written curriculum, and a lack of administrative support and multidisciplinary team loyalty that was fraying. These factors contributed to instructors' hesitation and scepticism about transitioning from subject-centred to interdisciplinary teaching, making curricular integration exceedingly challenging.

### **Aim of the Study**

The study claims that certain factors, such as integrated curriculum application by instructors, influence certain factors. First, before adopting IC, teachers' thoughts about IC's effectiveness might affect whether or not they want to apply the curriculum in their classrooms. Secondly, instructors' knowledge and talents in IC greatly influence both teachers' course curricula and their materials to teach the courses. Other additional aspects must be considered, including time, money, and support from students and their families, to successfully implement the curriculum successfully. Prior research has demonstrated that these traits were studied separately in the previous study. IC installations in early childhood centres are standard, but little research has studied how these variables affect the number and types of IC installations.

### **Research Questions**

This study was centred on four research questions:

- i. What is the teachers' perception about integrated curriculum?
- ii. How often do primary school instructors use an integrated curriculum?

### **Research Design**

Given the nature of the investigation, the researcher used the interpretivism paradigm. This study uses phenomenology, particularly transcendental phenomenology, as the research design. Because the prior study had focused only on quantitative data, this analysis also included semi-structured interviews with teachers to understand their opinions on adopting an integrated curriculum in their respective schools.

### **Sample of study**

The researcher used a suitable selection strategy to choose three primary schools in the District Sheikhpura for data gathering. To find out how well IC is implemented in primary schools, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the heads of primary schools. To verify data validity and uphold heads' responses, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews of the teachers of the same schools, qualitative data of both teachers and heads were used. The researcher chooses teachers with more than 10 years of expertise in the classroom to conduct in-depth interviews.

## **Instrumentation**

Data was gathered via semi-structured interviews. The researcher drafted an interview procedure that included any necessary probing or follow-up questions in advance of the interviews.

## **Validation of Instruments**

Concerned professionals carried out validation. Pilot testing with two school educators was used to assess the reliability of the interview methodology; however, the findings of the pilot testing were not included in the final analysis.

## **Data collection**

All questions were made natural to participants, and approval was obtained from the institution's higher authorities before collecting data. Follow up questions and probing techniques are used to ensure the accuracy of responses.

## **Data Analysis**

To conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews, the researcher used the following methodology:

1. Taking the time to listen to the interview recordings
2. They are being translated and transformed
3. Outline important quotations.
4. The fourth step of TQM is to connect relevant quotations.
5. Conceptualization of the theme

The researcher used the thematic analysis technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which uses inductive logic to discover themes and issues that should be studied (Creswell, 2008). During the first stage, the researchers used open coding, which entails fragmenting and linking transcripts for an indeterminate number of samples. The interview fragmentation included having several codes arise and pulling them out of the interview context. In R1's interview, a coded piece read "restricted planning time." According to the findings, which included searching through records for answers to the coding questions and verifying the answers against school records, the researcher discovered that other codes, such as "shared settings" and "collaborative instruction," were related to "shield planning time" because each reflected school action in support of integration. In another way, the researcher linked the same coded pieces using the terminology "school support." As a result, the researcher retrieved the central idea in each interview thanks to the connected and fragmented material. As a result, the researcher examined internal validity by reading and coding the interviews independently.

In the second step, comparisons between interviewees in the same group were made. The researcher used axial coding to identify common ideas and discover combinations of codes, looking for commonalities across interviews. Two participants were in each group: a) headteachers from schools where integration was a fundamental curriculum component, and b) teachers from the same schools. The category "school support" from R1's interview seems to be a frequent feature in this first group. Some instructors had previously attended other schools. Thus their help was expressed differently. For example, "school support" was shown in R3 by "shield planning time" and the "National Education" curriculum, rather than through shared venues and collaborative teaching. The

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development of a matrix to describe the teachers' experiences of adopting an integrated curriculum ultimately relied on the criteria used in the interviews that varied from one another.

Two dominant themes emerged in the analysis, which shaped the study's research topics. The first involves getting the theoretical underpinnings of students' perspectives on integration, how they perceive the integrated curriculum, and methods used to integrate courses. The second thematic element deals with teachers' views on integrated curricular reforms. Additionally, the instructors stated that integration encountered many difficulties due to solid views, attitudes, and traditions in place for a long time. It is described in detail below.

### **Findings**

The researcher started research by asking if instructors thought the integrated curriculum was present in their schools. This researcher claims that instructors' view of integrated curriculum does not fit easily into models of curricular integration, such as those of Applebee et al. (2007). When it comes to exploring methods of curricular integration, in-service seminars and short courses have had the most impact. Additional research has also shown that teachers' views on integration are tied closely to the features of the integrated programs in their schools. Teachers who worked in schools where they used integrated curriculum to deliver on core programs for an extended time reported conceptualizing integration in terms of problems study over the preservation of disciplines.

Teachers have stated that building camaraderie has had a beneficial impact on teacher/pupil relationships. Team spirit in the instructors' working relationships was said to have increased because of the integrated curriculum. According to R3, instructors put in long hours to create their curriculum units independently. He went on to say that the usual teaching period provided cross-disciplinary views while enriching teacher interaction. Teachers in both groups reported learning about integration by completing short, specialized training sessions developed by QAED.

Teacher perspectives on the integration of school activities and curriculum implementation within the framework of the school system are examined here. Interdisciplinary methods for school integration were widely accepted by teachers, who claimed that a high proportion of integration strategies they devised adhered to the execution of ways in which information from diverse disciplines was grouped around a central subject. Few examples of educational frameworks placed students at the centre of the curriculum, whereas transdisciplinary techniques "organized courses around student questions and concerns" (Drake & Burns, 2004, p. 4). It was clear from the participants' responses that many of the significant concerns associated with transdisciplinary approaches were well-known from earlier research (see Grossman et al., 2000; Lam & Chan, 2011). There are a number of these factors that may affect instructional effectiveness, including the following: (a) a teacher's belief that they don't have enough subject knowledge; (b) teachers' identification of their subjects; (c) insufficient resources and time required for curriculum development; and (d) lack of alignment between curriculum topics and assessment.

Only one of the instructors worried that their topic expertise was inadequate. Teachers had difficulty finding the main concepts they addressed in their lessons without adequately understanding the topic. Finding time for instructors to meet and discuss school-based activities was difficult for all teachers. Many instructors participating in more limited-scale integration initiatives wanted to see an

action plan and time allotment implemented. The adoption of a whole-scale integrated curriculum was supported by those who viewed it as consistent with test preparation. In integrated programs, proponents claimed that the advantages exceeded the operational challenges. R4 thought pupils had more knowledge and greater interest and confidence in the Humanities because of R4's assertions. It was particularly true among lower ability kids and those from difficult circumstances. Who are they missing out on if they aren't receiving the assistance they need in their schooling at home? He discovered that initially, students did not notice any change in exam results, but scores for successive cohorts steadily increased.

Additionally, I believe the kids appreciate and adore the topic. Overall, with limited experience, instructors had excellent opinions about including a more integrated curriculum and believed it would be hard to execute. Some instructors felt that the effectiveness of introducing a new curriculum was questionable given the multitude of difficulties that they had to contend with when it came to preparing lessons, scheduling, and subject-based training. They felt that integrated curricula put the systematic understanding of subjects at risk.

## **Discussion**

While the abundance of evidence indicates that Integrated Curriculum (IC) is more effective than traditional curricula, these educational gains cannot be realized until teachers put it into practice in their classrooms. The research findings added to our knowledge of how IC is employed in early childhood education settings. Over 99% of the educators believed in the efficacy of IC curricular integration, and they also highly regarded their skills and expertise concerning IC implementation. However, there is a significant variation in the degrees of agreement on other variables affecting IC adoption.

These findings corroborated a prior study that found that early childhood instructors had solid opinions that IC may help students learn in various ways. The instructors' self-reflection on their knowledge and abilities on IC is an intriguing difference between the previous literature and the present research. While previous researches indicated that teachers' understanding of IC was lacking, this study discovered that instructors believe they have enough knowledge and abilities to teach IC. Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, and Stanovich indicate that since instructors are self-reported, they may have unwittingly misreported or overstated their competence (2004).

Further research is needed to bridge the gap between instructors' fundamental abilities and their opinions about their knowledge and capabilities. Second, as indicated in Lun's (2006) work, the current teacher survey data analysis results suggest that instructors' available planning time and working hours are critical factors in their curricular selections. Furthermore, preparation time and appropriate working hours are two essential indicators of instructors' IC use in the classroom. An integrated curriculum is a complex endeavour to plan since it requires ample planning time and coordination from instructors from diverse disciplines. Teachers are typically overburdened and overworked due to increased administrative and administrative labour, distracting them from teaching. School administrators can consider modifying teachers' workloads to increase the recurrence rate with which IC is implemented to allow for more incredible preparation time and

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collaboration among instructors. Teachers should maximize their working time, enhance their time management abilities, and actively seek out chances to cooperate with their colleagues.

However, IC was used most often, although IC with other integrated structures, such as Parallel Discipline Design and Complementary Discipline Unit, were favoured. There may be correlations between three factors (community support, colleague support, and instructors' knowledge and skills) and curricular form selection. Teachers with inadequate knowledge and abilities in IC often use fewer integrated IC forms since they may not successfully implement more integrated IC approaches. Because most U.S. teacher preparation programmes employ specific topic area courses, it is not unexpected that many teachers are inadequate in their capacity to develop and implement IC. Reinventing the framework of present teacher education programmes and getting preservice teachers involved in interdisciplinary teaching across subject boundaries. Preservice teachers should understand IC and study different IC techniques to identify which types they could use in the classroom.

Furthermore, one should note that IC teachers who were less integrated relied on their support and the support of the community and their colleagues. It could be because curricular formats that are less integrated, such as flipbooks, are more popular. However, more significant research is required to determine why community and colleague support is particularly damaging to curricular integration.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Regardless of its instructional usefulness, the study includes shortcomings that might be addressed in future capacity. First, the research sample size is small, with all 6 participants employed as primary teachers in public primary schools in SKP. Therefore, the generalizability of the research may be limited by the demographic characteristics of participants and the sample size used in its design. Future researchers will be able to undertake large-scale examinations because they will recruit early childhood educators from around the province. Second, as previously stated, several essential parts of the polls' question sets are removed from the question sets. Academics must concentrate on characteristics that impact primary school teachers' instructional materials (IC) to comprehend instructional problems better. The data types used to address this study question aren't all that diverse. Qualitative data, such as classroom observations, lesson plans, and interviews may be used to gain extra understanding about a topic by providing additional context. Apart from allowing researchers to benefit from the synergy and strength of qualitative and quantitative methods, the mixed-methods design (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006) may also aid them in better understanding the related factors that influence primary teachers' implementation of IC and how these factors influence teachers' curricular decisions. Is there anything more we should know concerning IC that instructors aren't aware of already? Consider the following scenario: you are the administrator of a preschool. How do you consider the many conditions that could influence glazing used in your setting?

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