

The Significance and Usage of Integrated Skills in Teaching English

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ABSTRACT

This article is intended to give basic information on the importance of integrated skills in teaching English language. Also, after defining segregated-skill instruction and integrated-skills, this paper explains how it is necessary to integrate the four skills in the English language classroom in order to create authentic communication. Using integrated skills during the lesson can give several opportunities to achieve success on learning foreign language. Today, majority of teachers are using integration and segregation ways of conducting the class by authentic materials to enhance learner's interest and motivation. Factual information and supported details which are used in this article will be efficient for the teachers and students who want to learn and improve integrated skills of language.

Integrated skills are the intentional combination of core language skills like speaking, writing, listening and reading, used within lessons on an exciting new topic. The goal of teaching with integrated skills is to strengthen children's overall social and educational communication skills through continued practice, while learning about a new theme that will interest and excite them. In order to integrate the language skills in ESL and EFL instruction, teachers should consider taking these steps:

1. Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom (e.g., content-based, task-based, or a combination).
2. Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated.
3. Choose instructional materials, textbooks and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking and writing as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary and so on.
4. Even if a given course is labeled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate tasks.
5. Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills.

Also, we may use segregated-skill instruction in teaching. In the segregated-skill approach, the mastery of discrete language skills like reading or speaking is seen as the key to successful learning, and there is typically a separation of language learning from content learning (Mohan, 1986; Cantoni-Harvey, 1987). This situation contradicts the integrated way that people use language skills in normal

communication, and it clashes with the direction in which language teaching experts have been moving in recent years.

Skill segregation is reflected in traditional ESLIEFL programs that isolate language skills for instructional purposes. These programs offer classes with titles such as "Intermediate Reading," "Basic Listening Comprehension," "Advanced Writing," "Grammar I and II," "Pronunciation," and so on. Why do ESLIEFL programs offer classes that segregate the language skills? For one thing, teachers and administrators might think it is logistically easier to present courses on writing divorced from speaking, or on listening severed from reading. For another thing, they may believe it is instructionally impossible to concentrate effectively on more than one skill at a time.

An integrative approach is the approach of teaching language skills simultaneously. This means the four macro skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are taught concurrently. Richards and Rogers (2001) define it as "integrated language skills teaching approach is 'the teaching of the language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in conjunction with each other as when a lesson involves activities that relate listening and speaking to reading and writing.'" According to Afnan, (2014), integrating language teaching approach is vital technique for effective language learning. This technique refers to including two or more than two language skills, in a lesson/ task. Richards and Schmidt (2010) as cited in Afnan 2014 also define this approach as relating reading, writing, speaking, and listening together in activity that can be taught via a holistic method.

Integrating language skills teaching can be described as a whole-language approach or a multi-skill syllabus. This is because the approach teaches all the language skills together.

Integrated language skills teaching approach is a whole language approach. That is, if a lesson deals with reading skills, then, it will also deal with listening, speaking, and writing skills. It emphasizes on communication purpose in addition to academic success (Hungyo and Kijai 2009 as cited in Elena and Lorena 2011). The four English language skills can be taught integratively in the actual classroom situation via integrative approach. For example, by practicing conversational skills the learner can focus not only on speaking but also listening, in order to reply and ask appropriate follow-up questions. All language skills are considered and to be essential components to develop the communicative competence of students, the skills should be taught together via interactive language teaching approach. Thus, the approach advocates integration of all language skills in actual classroom situation (Crystal, 2003). In other words, integrated language skill teaching approach is the natural way of learning a language. In real life communication, language skills are rarely used in isolation; it is a rare situation where one of the four skills occurs alone. For example, to engage in a conversation, one needs to be able to speak and comprehend at the same time (Jing, 2006).

In terms of integration skill Oxford (2001) introduces the concept of tapestry, it is woven from different strands including the teacher, learner, setting, and relevant languages besides four skills. She believed that absence of such threads may lead to a discrete, segregated skills-like in a real tapestry parallel threads not touching, supporting, or interacting with each other. Additionally, she argues that in integrative language skill teaching includes associated or related skills such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. According to her, this forms an integrated language teaching approach.

In effective lessons language teachers must be integrate language skills simultaneously in order to make language learning as realistic as possible which is a requisite in communication. Often one skill will reinforce another; we learn to speak, for example, in part by modeling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read (Brown, 2001). For instance, teaching reading can be easily tied to instruction on writing and vocabulary, and oral skills readily lend themselves to teaching pronunciation, listening, and cross-cultural pragmatics (Hinkel, 2001; Lazaraton, 2001; McCarthy and OKeefe, 2004). Furthermore, other scholars confirm that language learning tasks should be designed in an integrative manner (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). This helps students to be involved in language tasks that integrate different language skills and advance their skills (Hulstijn

and Laufer, 2001).

Moreover, educators (such as Fotos, 2002; Ellis, 2003; Snow, 2005) argue that integrative language skill instruction can increase learners' opportunities for language learning and purposeful communication, interaction, real-life language use and diverse types of contextualized discourse and linguistic features, all of which have the goal of developing students' language proficiency and skills. When the four primary skills of language: listening, reading, speaking and writing are interwoven during instruction, it helps us emulate real-life language use and it also paves the way for optimal language learning to take place (Oxford, 2001). In addition to this purposes, integration of four skills can develop communicative competence, because the real life demands from the learners not only immersion into the knowledge of language, but also into the knowledge about how to use the language appropriately in communicative situations (Jing, 2006).

From the above discussion, it can understand that integrated language teaching skill approach is the usual way of learning a language and allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time. Integration of language skills will expose learners to actual language use and encourage interaction (Oxford,

2001). Furthermore, there are several advantages of using integrative approach to teach language skills.

As we come to the factors that affect the use of integrated language skills teaching approach, they are essential how to conduct the lesson, achieve goals and get more opportunities to learn English completely. In foreign Language learning context, there are various factors that influence the teaching learning process such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, aptitudes, intelligence, age, personalities, etc Lehmann, (2006) as cited in Mehamad, (2012). In this regard, many scholars such as Oxford, 2001; Richards, 2001, Edge, 1993; Frazee, 1995; also confirm that there are several factors that hinder implementation of integrative language skill teaching. These factors can be categorized into three different groups namely, school factors, learner factors and teacher factors.

1. Teachers' factors

We can see this factors in two ways; teachers' knowledge about teaching integrative skills and his/her attitude.

A. Teachers' Knowledge

Educators, have pointed out that a particular feature of teaching skills is their interactive nature. A teacher's action during a lesson continuously need to take account of changing circumstances. Indeed, a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom is very dependent on how well they can modify and adapt their actions in the light of how well the lesson is going. Thus, in effective teaching skills teachers should have enough knowledge (Campbell *et al.*, 2004; Muijs and Reynolds, 2005). Shulman, 1987 also believes that teacher knowledge is crucial point in teaching skills in integrative ways.

These include:

1. knowledge about content (subject matter).
2. knowledge about broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization.
3. knowledge about how to prepare lesson plans and implementation
4. knowledge about learners' interest. attitude etc.

Everyone can infer that from the above point EFL teachers must be active, skillful and in order to tackle different problems and achieve certain goal. Moreover, teachers should be designing integrated activities for their students. In developing learners' skills, a teacher therefore is as much about developing and extending her/

his knowledge about the decision you may take in a particular situation as it is about the successful execution of the observable action (Chris, 2007).

B. Teachers' Attitude

Teachers' and learners' attitudes are very important to implement different techniques and methods of teaching language skills (Rogers, 2003). Attitude is a settled behavior or manner of acting reflecting individuals' feelings or opinions. This definition suggests that individuals' beliefs are crucial in determining their behaviors

(Mohammed, 2006). Attitudes are defined as the interplay of feelings, beliefs and thoughts about actions (Rusch & Perry, 1999) as cited Rahimi & Naderi (2013). As discussed before integrating the four skills can help the development of students communicative competence but can be demanding of the teacher. We need to have a good understanding of discourse, and to be able to use textbooks flexibly. Therefore, the teacher perception is very essential towards implementing of this approach and readiness of challenging these problems. We can conclude that teachers' attitudes and beliefs remain the single strongest guiding influence on instruction (Gorsuch 2000 as cited in Rahimi and Naderi (2013), these negative attitudes can be the source of difficulties teachers face in implementing integrative language teaching approach.

2. Learners' factor

Attitudes can be viewed as a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing, idea, person, situation, etc.) Gardener (1985) as cited Hashem, A and D Salem, S (2015) defines attitude as an evaluative reaction to some activities, situations, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the activities. As for education, Brown (2000) as cited in Hashem and Salem (2015) notes that teachers should recognize that all students possess positive and negative attitudes in varying degrees and adds that the negative attitudes can be changed by thoughtful instructional methods, such as using materials and activities that help students achieve an understanding and appreciation of foreign culture, a fact that might be reflected in the process of learning in the foreign language.

The matter of learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impact on learning language (Fakeye, 2010) as cited in Mohamad (2012). Thus, developing students' attitudes towards learning is considered to be one of the most important issues that should be taken into account factors affecting language teaching-learning process. Hashem and Salem, (2015) also confirmed that understanding learners' attitude is unquestionable issue to proceed effective language classes. Their views of communicative aspects are necessary in actual instructional practices should guide the pedagogical decisions associated with their learning (Tigist, 2002). An essential feature of the teaching skills involved in establishing a positive classroom climate is best to foster pupils' motivation towards learning (Chris 2007 Edge, 1987; Oxford, 2001).

According to Jones 1984 as cited Ababayehu (2011) learning is related to attitudes; what is learned may depend on the attitude of the learner. Students' attitude toward the teacher, the school and various subjects are primarily important in the teaching learning process. He also cited in Chamber (1999) claimed that learning occurs more easily, when the learner has a positive attitude towards the language and learning. Hence, attitudes have their own effect on the process of learning. This means, it either facilitates or hinders learning. Students' lack of motivation in class participation can be taken as the symptom of their antagonistic attitude to the given context. Prodromou (1992) as cited in Ababayehu, (2008) also a successful learner is the one who possess positive attitudes towards the target language.

Moreover, Baker (1988) as cited in Ababayehu, (2008) believed that attitudes towards a particular language learning might be either positive or negative. Some learners may have negative attitude towards the foreign language and want to learn it in order to prevail over people in the community. Some students might generate neutral feelings. Attitudes towards language are likely to have been developed by students' experiences. We can infer that, learners, engagement of classroom activities

that done to be improve language skills are very important element to effective classes (Chris, 2007; Edge, 1987; Oxford, 2001). Learners positive attitude towards learning strengthens their motivation to perform activities successfully and it becomes a means of effectiveness (Baker, 1988) as cited in Abebayehu (2008).

3. School factors

When we say school factors such as sufficient materials that used to proceed effective language skill teaching via integrative approach. But most government schools in Ethiopian context may not adequate materials (instruments) and resources, such as student text books, teacher guides, language lab classes, chairs, tables and etc. (Cruickshan, Bainer and Metcalf, 1995; Edge, 1987; Richards, 2001). Moreover, most EFL teachers in the world reject teaching in large groups due to the large mixture of students, heterogeneous ages and abilities, learning and individual attention difficulties. Teachers think that they can get better pedagogic results in small number of learners. Thus number of students in a single class hinders normal teaching learning process. In connection to this, the present study was conducted which problems are barrier of language skill teaching in integrative way and how language teachers tackle these problems and proceed successful language skill teaching/learning.

In conclusion, integrated skills focus on the four main English skills - reading, writing, speaking and listening through a “Communicative Language Teaching” methodology. New grammar patterns are learned in the context of a conversation or a real-life situation. Also, integrating the skills allows you to build in more variety into the lesson because the range of activities will be wider. Instead of just having listening, the students can have speaking, reading and writing practice. This can raise their motivation to learn English language.

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