

The importance of integrated skills in teaching English

Mirzayeva Mahbuba Mamajonovna

*PhD, The methodology of teaching English department, Fergana State
University*

Madaminova Mokhinur

*student, The methodology of teaching English department, Fergana State
University*

Annotation: *In a practical sense, one of the most crucial of these strands consists of the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This strand also includes associated or related skills such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. This is known as the integrated-skill approach.*

Key words: *Skills, integrated-skill, approach, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, listening, reading, speaking, writing, skill segregation.*

Introduction

Teaching and learning English are more important for teachers and learners. One image for teaching English as a second or foreign language is that of a tapestry. The tapestry is woven from many strands, such as the characteristics of the teacher, the learner, the setting, and the relevant languages (i.e., English and the native languages of the learners and the teacher). For the instructional loom to produce a large, strong, beautiful, colorful tapestry, all of these strands must be interwoven in positive ways. For example, the instructor's teaching style must address the learning style of the learner, the learner must be motivated, and the setting must provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of the language. However, if the strands are not woven together effectively, the instructional loom is likely to produce something small, weak, ragged, and pale-not recognizable as a tapestry at all. If this weaving together does not

occur, the strand consists merely of discrete, segregated skills--parallel threads that do not touch, support, or interact with each other. This is sometimes known as the segregated-skill approach. Another title for this mode of instruction is the language-based approach, because the language itself is the focus of instruction. In this approach, the emphasis is not on learning for authentic communication. By examining segregated-skill instruction, we can see the advantages of integrating the skills and move toward improving teaching for English language learners. In the segregated-skill approach, the mastery of discrete language skills such as reading and speaking is seen as the key to successful learning, and language learning is typically separate from content learning. This is contrary to 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 ESL/EFL programs that offer classes focusing on segregated language skills. Why do they offer such classes? Perhaps teachers and administrators think it is logistically easier to present courses on writing divorced from speaking, or on listening isolated from reading. They may believe that it is instructionally impossible to concentrate on more than one skill at a time. Even if it were possible to fully develop one or two skills in the absence of all the others, such an approach would not ensure adequate preparation for later success in academic communication, career-related language use, or everyday interaction in the language. This method restricts language learning to a very narrow, no communicative range that does not prepare students to use the language in everyday life. Frequently, segregated-skill ESL/EFL classes present instruction in terms of skill-linked learning strategies: reading strategies, listening strategies, speaking strategies, and writing strategies. Learning strategies are strategies that students employ, most often consciously, to improve their learning. Examples are guessing meaning based on context, breaking a sentence or word down into parts to understand the meaning, and practicing the language with someone else. Very frequently, experts

demonstrate strategies as though they were linked to only one particular skill, such as reading or writing. However, it can be confusing or misleading to believe that a given strategy is associated with only one specific language skill. Many strategies, such as paying selective attention, self-evaluating, asking questions, analyzing, synthesizing, planning, and predicting, are applicable across skill areas. Common strategies help weave the skills together. Teaching students to improve their learning strategies in one skill area can often enhance performance in all language skills. Fortunately, in many instances where an ESL or EFL course is labeled by a single skill, the segregation of language skills might be only partial or even illusory. If the teacher is creative, integrated skills. For example, in a course on intermediate reading, the teacher probably gives all of the directions orally in English, thus causing students to use their listening ability to understand the assignment. In this course, students might discuss their readings, thus employing speaking and listening skills and certain associated skills, such as pronunciation, syntax, and social usage. Students might be asked to summarize or analyze readings in written form, thus activating their writing skills. In a real sense, then, some courses that are labeled according to one specific skill might actually reflect an integrated-skill approach after all.

The integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. Moreover, this approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. Finally, the integrated-skill approach, whether found in content-based or task-based language instruction or some hybrid form, can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.

In order to integrate the language skills in ESL/EFL instruction, teachers should consider taking these steps:*

various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom.

* Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated.

* 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.

* Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills.

Conclusion

This article has been made as a guide for teachers of English as a foreign language to develop the student abilities in the language. It is the application of an integrating approach for the development of communicative skills in the classroom, in which the four skills in the acquisition of knowledge of a foreign language can be taught in a coherent way, and practiced together, with a distinction of the importance of one upon the others. With careful reflection and planning, any teacher can integrate the language skills and strengthen the tapestry of language teaching and learning. When the tapestry is woven well, learners can use English effectively for communication.

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