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DEFINE THE SKILLS INTEGRATION AND SKILLS SEGREGATION WITH EXAMPLES

Qochqorova Zulfizar Abduxamid qizi

Fergana State University English

language and literature faculty

Applied English department EFL teacher zulfizarqochqorova97@gmail.com

Malikov Muhammad Malik ôg'li

English language and literature faculty 4th year student

Abstract: This article has been made as a guide for teachers of English as a foreign language to develop the students´ 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 other One image for teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) 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. In addition to the four strands mentioned above–teacher, learner, setting, and relevant languages–other important strands exist in the tapestry. 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. The skill strand of the tapestry leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication when the skills are interwoven during instruction. This is known as the integrated-skill approach.

Key words: language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, writing, sub-skills, English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), segregated-skill.

Introduction. The language skills; namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing were at first taught in isolation in the traditional approaches. For instance, proponents of the Audio-Lingual Method believed that language is basically oral and therefore the focus was on speaking. Given such an emphasis, it appeared logical to separate language skills. The outcome of this approach was learners who knew the language skills, but were not able to communicate their thoughts especially in writing. Another extreme example is that of the Grammar-Translation Method, which used to teach students to analyze grammar and to translate (usually in writing) from one language to another. This method restricts language learning to a very narrow, non-communicative range that does not prepare students to use the language in everyday life. Taking learners' communicative incompetence into account, there was a shift away from the traditional model towards the communicative approach. One of the characteristics of the communicative language teaching was the integration of the four skills and their sub-skills to complement each

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other. According to Hinkel (2010) "To study a language, you may need to break the language into parts. To use it, however, the skills and components must be integrated."

Widdowson (1978) was one of the first linguists to call for integrating the four language skills in language teaching for the purpose of raising learners' proficiency levels. He argued that "We can talk of skills in respect to usage/grammar, but if we talk about language use/communication, we need a different concept, and perhaps a different term" (Widdowson, 1998, p. 325). In the 1980s and 1990s, a great deal of elaboration and refinement took place in communicative language teaching. As it had to be not only learner-centered but interaction-centered and as authentic as possible to enable students to use the language for purposeful communication. In this respect, post method researchers such as Oxford (2001) claimed that integrated language teaching is supposed to be an effective strategy for language learning as a whole. She used the image of a tapestry to refer to teaching ESL/EFL. According to her: "for the instructional loom to produce a large, strong, beautiful, colorful tapestry, all of the 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." She adds that the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing and their components; vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, spelling, and meaning should be woven well to create the integrated approach. In her words: "If the strands are not woven together effectively and well, the instructional loom is likely to produce something small, weak, ragged, and pale--not recognizable as a tapestry at all" (Oxford 2001).

This tapestry leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication when the skills are interwoven during instruction. This is known as the integrated-skill approach. If this weaving together does not happen, the strand consists only of discrete, segregated skills—that do not touch, support, or interact with each other. This is known as the segregated-skill. There are other terms to describe it such as the discrete skill, isolated skill, single skill, and separate skill approach. Another title for this mode of instruction is the language-based approach, because the language itself is the focus of instruction (language for language's sake). In this approach, the emphasis is NOT on learning for authentic communication. In this modest report, by defining pointing out to the deficiencies of the segregated-skill approach along with its two types; total and partial, and examining the integrated skill approach and its modes of instruction; content-based and task-based, we will understand the relevance and the necessity of integrating the skills in the ESL/EFL classrooms.

1. The Segregated-Skill Approach

In such an approach, mastery of discrete language skills or subskills, such as listening comprehension, phonics, speaking, or punctuation, is often seen as the key to successful learning, and there is typically a separation of language learning from content learning.

2. Total skill segregation

In the purest form of segregation, language is taught as an end in itself rather than a means to an end, the end being authentic interaction and communication. Strictly separate-skill classes sometimes end up concentrating on subsidiary skills like grammar and vocabulary, even though the course title refers to one of the main language skills (listening, reading, speaking, or writing). Memorization rather than understanding is the primary process students are involved in, in these kinds of classes. Motivation, interest, and class involvement quickly decrease when the language is taught in this fragmented, non-communicative way

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2.1. Partial skill segregation

In many cases, an EFL course is labeled by a single skill, but this segregation of language skills is unsuccessful or only partial. Frequently skills other than the targeted one appear. I call this situation partial skill segregation – a circumstance in which the language skills appear at first glance to be isolated in instruction but are actually not separated completely. For instance, in a class on "Intermediate Reading," the teacher usually gives some or all of the directions orally, thus forcing students to use their listening skills to catch the details of the assignment. In this class students might discuss their readings, using speaking and listening skills and a host of subsidiary skills, such as pronunciation and grammar. Students might be asked to summarize or analyze readings in written form, thus activating their writing skills. However, the focus remains always on one skill over the other.

3. The Integrated Skill Approach

In past decades, EFL classes gave prominence to one or two of the four traditional skills separately, sometimes excluding the other three; each skill did not support or interact with each other. Rather, these segregated-skill-oriented (SSI) courses had language itself as the focus of instruction to the extent that excessive emphasis on rules and paradigms taught students a lot about language at the expense of teaching language itself (Brown, 2000: 218). As Oxford (1990) maintains, in segregated skill instruction courses, language learning is separate from content learning, which did not guarantee adequate preparation for later success in academic communication, career-related language use, or even everyday interaction in the language.

The opposite of this approach is known as the integrated skills approach, that is, the linking of the language skills for the purpose of real communication. In an instructional approach that favors integrated skills, the skills are interlocked, exactly as they are in everyday life. Practice with any given skill reinforces other skills. Two types of integrated-skill instruction are content-based language instruction and task-based instruction. The first of these emphasizes learning content through language, while the second stresses doing tasks that require communicative language use. Both of these benefit from a diverse range of materials, text- books, and technologies for the ESL or EFL classroom.

Conclusion. 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.

Actually, the integrated-skill approach has little or no limitations compared to its segregated counterpart. However, since there is no perfect approach, I had to think of some disadvantages of the Integrated-skill oriented courses.

- The challenge of the necessity of teachers to maintain an appropriate balance between integration and separation.
- Integrating the four skills: can be demanding from the part of the teacher (understanding discourse, using textbook flexibly); can be time-consuming, requiring a lot of preparation.
- Assessment in skills integration is not defined precisely since all the skills are assessed at once while it must be borne in mind that whatever the teacher does, s/he will always find students with better writing skills, others with better oral abilities and so on.

Nevertheless, the limitations of this approach should not prevent teachers from using it because – up to now- it is the optimal approach when it comes to skills instruction.

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