

## Integrated and Segregated Teaching of Language Skills: An Exploration

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### Abstract

*This article attempts to explore some existing dimensions of integrated and segregated approaches to teaching language skills along with their psychological and methodological foundations. The body of language is built out of various components of skills and aspects fitted together in a natural harmony. They are substantial elements for teaching and learning endeavour. But, nowadays there are serious arguments about whether to choose segregated or integrated approach for teaching language skills in an ESL/EFL classroom. Although the behavioural psychology and structural linguistics pleaded for segregated approach of teaching through Grammar Translation Method and Audio-lingual Method, the communicative movement supported by cognitive psychology and functional linguistics has a strong adherence to integrated approach in teaching language skills with a sole aim of attaining communicative competence. This article is entirely based on document analysis method, a major component of qualitative research design. The study arrived to conclude that the current communicative movement in foreign language teaching significantly stresses on integrated teaching of language skills. This approach of teaching was proposed in different language teaching methods and models. Among them, Content Based Instruction and Task Based Instruction are the two major methods introduced for integrated language teaching. Now, it has been inferred that integrated approach of language teaching is sure to pursue its hegemony at least for some decades unless a new powerful approach appears to challenge it.*

**Keywords:** application, communicative, integrated, segregated

### Introduction

Currently, there is a widespread belief among language professionals that languages are naturally divided into four language skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Such a division of language skills is taken for granted. Based on the opinions of Bloomfield (1933), the structural division of language into four macro skills was instigated mainly by teaching-learning objectives. The pedagogists of that time wished to synchronise a harmony between first language acquisition and second language learning. However, in the recent pedagogical practices, some methodologists have raised a suspicion over this suppository division of the skills and attempted to raise questions on the appropriacy against such segregated approach of language teaching.

In contrast to the segregated approaches and methods of language teaching, some current approaches to language teaching strive to integrate the four skills in pedagogy as far as they are justifiable. Integrated language teaching and different integrated pedagogical paradigms started to emerge into practice after the emergence of communicative movement. Distinct from the predecessors, the audiolingual method attempted to integrate the four language skills and initiated a new turn into the integrated language teaching movement. Since then there have been several studies carried out with an aim of underscoring the most

effective methods and approaches for teaching a foreign or second language. Nevertheless, the degree of appropriacy of an approach rests upon the range of advantages and disadvantages determined in practical relative terms.

The segregated approach of language teaching practiced in the first phase emphasized on one or two of the four macro skills while the other skills were left either dominated or untouched totally. Oxford (2001) describes this approach as a segregated skill approach. According to her, such a segregation of skills is reflected in traditional ESL/EFL language programmes. Yet, this segregated skill approach was found to contradict with the natural process of first language acquisition. Perhaps, by reason of standing in assymetrical relation with the first language acquisition process, there have been some movements which plead for integrated approach for teaching all the four language skills within a single general framework. In fact, language skills are rarely used in isolation in practical linguistic activities. As language is taught by breaking into skills one by one, it creates a wide gap between classroom learning and real life language use. Regarding this concept, Brown (2001) states that 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. If all the skills are introduced through integrated approach, it would be easier for the learners to catch up the natural process of language development. In support of this view, Richards and Rodgers (2009) state that in natural language hearing, skills integration is inevitable and in the language classroom skills need to be practiced in integration. In actual language use, one skill is rarely used in isolation. Numerous communicative situations in real life involve integrating two or more skills together. As guided by this quoting, it becomes an accepted fact that human communication acts never take place in segregated skills. Therefore, language skills in the classroom should also be integrated just as it is done in real life linguistic communication. The teacher needs to integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing in a foreign language classroom.

### **Review of Literature**

Modern pedagogy of language has divided language skills into two broad categories as receptive and productive. This is a categorization made on the basis of communicative process. Similarly, Klimova (2014, p. 87) has divided the skills into spoken and written based on the form of the communication process. Jing (2006) states that the early day applied linguists focused on teaching the four language skills separately with a belief that a separate focus on each of the language skills accelerates students' language efficiency. Therefore, Oxford (2001) claims that discrete skills approach is also known as "language-based approach." In the same line of thought, Jing (2006) writes that language itself is the focus of instruction and learning for authentic communication bears not much significance in language learning process. Thus, traditional discrete skill approach seems to have ignored communicative aspect of language against the light of structural and formal competence.

The traditional ESL/EFL courses laid a heavier emphasis on discrete approach of teaching language skills. They suggested teachers to teach listening, speaking, reading and writing sequentially often with jumps and revisits. With regard to this approach, Oxford (2001) infers that focusing on more

than one skill at a time can be instructionally impossible. She further mentions that the traditional Grammar Translation Method focuses on 'grammatical competence' and translation from source language to target language on the basis of reading and writing skills shading back listening and speaking, the two major primary skills. According to Su (2007), the traditional approach to teaching English, as a second or foreign language, teaches reading, writing, speaking and listening the four language skills, separately by stressing on skill orientation and rote memorization, where teachers pay a great deal of attention to reading and writing for instruction.

This does not teach the learners to use language for real life communication. In contrast to traditional GT method, audio lingual method emphasized maximally on speaking skill being guided by the principles of structural linguistics and behavioural psychology. The same principles guided them for the teaching of listening skill as being complementary to speaking (Hinkel, 2010). The audio lingual method is aural-oral, consequently it instigated the separation of four language skills reasonably. Thus, a distinct model of language teaching was developed that stood for logical separation of four language skills with a primacy of speaking skill (Hinkel, 2010). Another group of linguists, popularly known as the formalists, focused on accurate reading and writing skills as the basic canons of language learning (Sanchez, 2000). In the same backdrop, Hinkel (2010) states that the ppp (presentation, practice and production) model of classroom teaching as proposed by situational approach suggests that learners can use the language skills on their own pace as needed in real life situation even if they are taught the language skills through controlled practice in the classroom.

The researchers who adhered to discrete teaching of language skills believed that the ESL/EFL learners can attain complete command over one language skill due to focusing on only one language skill (Jing, 2006). Further, it was believed that this approach would enable the learners to become an accurate user of language (Klimova, 2014, p. 88). Tajzad and Namaghi (2014) assert that as a matter of fact, despite having a sound knowledge of segregated skills, the learners were not able to communicate in actual communicative situation because of not possessing communicative competence. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that, though it is possible to teach language skills through segregated approach, this approach could be failed to prepare the learners for academic, job oriented or everyday communication (Oxford, 2001).

The concept of 'communicative competence' introduced in the pedagogical realm brought a remarkable change in the perspectives on how language skill were to be taught and used for communication inside and outside of the classroom (Hinkel, 2010). Regarding this, Harmer (2007) states that receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing), as being two sides of the same coin, cannot virtually be separated by reason of the fact that one skill can reinforce another in a number of ways. In the same stream of thought Hinkel (2010) writes, the communicative approach to language teaching led to the integration of four macro skills and their components which do have complementary roles to the development of one another. Such an integrative approach of teaching and learning a target language keeps a harmony with the process of using language skills in normal communication (Oxford, 2001). In the words of Tajzad and Namaghi (2014), individual learners may require to learn language skills

separately for gaining a perfect mastery over target language, however the skills and aspects must be learnt integrately if they intend to use the language in actual communicative situations.

In order to highlight the role and goals of language skills, Klimova (2014) states that the four macro skills are both the means and goals for communicative language use. It is through skills integration that the learners become able to use authentic language and use it for real interaction. They can get to higher levels of skill proficiency through this approach (Oxford, 2001).

Moreover, the communicative approach adopted by ESL/EFL learners focus on functional proficiency rather than the lexical forms and grammatical operations. Here, the entire teaching learning endeavor emphasizes on learning to communicate over merely passing an academic examination. Due to the emphasis on solving practical necessities of communication, this way of integrated learning can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds (Oxford, 2001). In actual practice, language skills are barely used in isolation. For example, a conversation needs both speaking and listening comprehension. At other times, one may require listening, reading and taking notes (writing) simultaneously as is often done by journalists. Likewise, Jing (2006) suggests that integration of skills is vital for learners with varying learning styles as extrovert learners can practice speaking, introvert learners can listen or read, and analytical or visual learners can observe written sentences being constructed. As a result, the integrated skills approach creates an optimal ESL/EFL communication as the skills are presented in interwoven net-form during instruction (Oxford, 2001). Therefore, Tajzad and Namaghi (2014) propose that skills should be taught integrately from the day one to make the learners competent language users.

### **Application of Integrated Skills Teaching**

Oxford (2001) states that there are basically two teaching methods under the communicative approach of language teaching. They were basically designed and proposed for teaching language skills integrately.

**Content based instruction.** As suggested by the name itself, content based instruction focuses on the subject matter more than the forms, aspects and communicative functions of language and aspects of language. Here, students practice all the language skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion while learning content such as science, mathematics and social studies (Crandall, 1987, as cited in Oxford, 2001, p. 9). Content-based language instruction is equally useful at all grades and levels of study, but the only matter is that the nature and difficulty level of the content obviously differ from grade to grade. The content selected for the beginners involves basic social and interpersonal communication skills. But, for the higher level learners, the content becomes increasingly academic and complex. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) describe Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) about how language learning strategies can be integrated into the simultaneous learning of content and language.

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) have presented three general models of content based language instruction as given below.

**Theme based model.** This model integrates the language skills into a particular theme such as social discrimination, dowry system in marriage, seven wonders of the world, global warming, cross-

cultural variations in marriage practices, etc. Such theme based topics must be highly interesting and familiar to the learners so as to attract them towards spontaneity and fluency in communication. This is a highly useful and widespread model in the recent time. Perhaps due to this reason that majority of modern ESL/EFL textbooks are compiled and written in this framework.

**The adjunct model.** This model of language instruction is designed in such a way that the language and contents are taught separately but with careful coordination. There seems a perfect symmetry among all the subject matters organized for in mutual complementation and reciprocal supplementation.

**Sheltered model.** This model is such in nature that the subject matters for instruction are selected and graded to suit to the level and interest of students. In order for selection, the students' existing proficiency level is identified by administering proficiency tests.

**Task based instruction.** Task-based instruction is an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. The proponents of this model assert that it is a logical development of communicative language teaching since it resides on several principles from communicative language teaching movement (Richards, & Rodger, 2009).

In task based instruction, students are involved in pair work, group work and mini workshops where they need a significant range of interaction and collaboration. Regarding this Nunan (1989) writes:

The communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone, as a communicative act in its own right.

Thus, task based instruction fundamentally utilizes pair work and group work to involve the learners into interaction and collaboration. For example, students work together to write a sample news bulletin, develop a television commercial, rehearse a scene of a play, practice for giving directions to a stranger, prepare a condolence message, etc. Task-based instruction can be used at all levels of language proficiency with varying degrees of learning complexity. The advanced students may require to do more demanding tasks such as taking opinion polls, preparing someone's autobiography, exploring teachers' attitude towards their profession.

Thus, the relevance of task based and theme based language instruction is very important for integrated skill teaching. Here, the tasks prepared for students are chosen from coherent themes in the unified manner which has become a trend in recent ESL/EFL instruction.

### **Methodology**

In this research, I employed a document analysis research method as a part of qualitative study. Document analysis research is such a design where a researcher can use a huge plethora of texts to comb through and arrive at a conclusion. Bowen (2009) suggests that a wide array of documents is better although the question should be more about quality of the document rather than quantity. It is an effective and efficient way of gathering data since such documents are easily manageable and practical resources to identify different intellectuals' authentic ideas. They provide a very accessible and reliable source of data.

Moreover, documents are stable, "non-reactive" data sources in that they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). As with other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, as cited in Harmer, 2007).

In this study, I went through a number of documents related to the title and analyzed them to explore on integrated language teaching models against segregated teaching of language skills.

### **Results and Discussion**

Integrated-skill approach is a modern practice in ESL/EFL pedagogy. It was intensely brought into discussion along with the introduction of communicative movement in language teaching. In contrast to the purely segregated skill approach, the integrated skill approach exposes ESL/EFL learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturalistically in the language (Oxford, 2001). This approach provides the students with a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as is naturally employed for communication. Rather than being merely an academic subject, this approach recognizes that English is a real means of interaction and sharing in actual communicative events. This approach enables the teacher to direct the language learning efforts of students straightly into language learning, as a product. In this approach, language teaching and learning is taken as an automatic process not confined within the four walls of classroom and language lab only.

Research carried out so far on integrated and segregated approaches towards language teaching has presented us with some useful insights. The discrete approach in skill teaching provides the learners with an opportunity to learn the skills thoroughly in an isolated manner. Supporting this view, Hinkel (2010) points out that teaching discrete language skills in class allows more focused teaching and more intensive learning. Sometimes, attempting to teach multiple skills at the same time may push the learners into confusion provided that they lack some basic level of proficiency on the language skills. The complex tasks of language learning accompanied by multiple skills may demotivate the learners from learning as a whole. It is more demanding on both the instructors and learners (Hinkel, 2010) as the tasks or language units integrate multiple language skills and respective underlying aspects. Consequently, due to complexity of the tasks, the learners may escape some of the skills and sub-skills either knowingly or unknowingly. On the other hand, sometimes teacher may be incited to overlook students' errors for the sake of pursuing fluency in integrated teaching of language skills. As a result, the students' incompetencies may be left uncorrected during learning stage and finally they may be very difficult to unlearn.

Although skills are taught separately in segregated/discrete skills approach, they are naturally integrated in classroom learning. As people use language for communication in real life situation, it is not possible to use only one skill at a time nor does it look natural. Regarding this, for instance, Oxford (2001) explains that, in a reading skill oriented class, students need listening skill to comprehend teacher's instruction, speaking skill for discussing the reading text. Hence, listening, speaking and reading skills are naturally integrated in the classroom. Similarly, as we talk about the lessons in a textbook, a particular skill

may be given as a topic of learning which implicitly requires the support of remaining other skills for a successful learning of the task.

Obviously, teaching language through integrated skills approach is more beneficial than teaching through segregated skills approach. Integrating the skills permits the learners to learn them simultaneously during communication inside and outside the classroom. The simultaneous use of skills can be very rewarding to the learners since they can prosper all the four skill uniformly. Besides, the achievements in one skill are sure to pave the way for better hearing in remaining other skills as well. Akram and Malik (2010) reveal that reading helps the students get vocabulary to be used, and the learners give better performance in writing when all the skills are integrated at the first place. In the traditional segregated skills approach, language was taught as a distinct subject itself and the learners were found to be demotivated to language learning. Conversely, modern integrated skills approach treats language as a means for communication and interaction which boosts the motivation and confidence of the learners. After learning the skills, they can express their own ideas and feelings without any fear and hesitation. In order to support this view, Tajzad and Namaghi (2014) explain that, integrating skills reduces learners' level of stress and anxiety by engaging them in real communication of ideas rather than mechanical practice of skills and components. The segregated skills approach focuses on form, mastery of language, and accuracy. But the integrated approach focuses on mastery of meaning, fluency and communication as a whole language system. Tajzad and Namaghi (2014) note that integration of skills leads to reconceptualization of teachers' role by decreasing their talking time and increasing students' talking time. Thus, successful integration of skills can make the lessons dynamic by involving the learners in various activities which gives them the scope for interaction and communication and such a communication makes them motivated to learn (Jing, 2006).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This article analyses some of the major research works available on teaching language skills from philosophical and procedural point of views. The main focus of this study lies on the rationale of integrated and segregated teaching of language skills and their implications in ESL/EFL classes. Although segregated teaching of skills enables the learners to learn each of the isolated skills deeply, the integrated teaching of skills enables them to become competent users of language as a whole. Regarding this, Hinkel (2006) asserts that in an age of globalization, pragmatic objectives of language learning place an increased value on integrated and dynamic multi skill instructional models with a focus on meaningful communication and the development of learners' communicative competence. Integration of language skills, therefore, proves to be more effective provided that the teachers are more dedicated and resourceful to adopt the new models for effective classroom teaching. Although there are certain drawbacks of integrated approach, these drawbacks can be minimized to optimum level if the integration aims at boosting up natural communication against teaching individual skills separately. However, the integration of skills should not be too excessive to result in counterproductive effects through demotivation and extra burden on the part of the learners. It is up to the syllabus designers and teachers that they should decide what is logical and illogical integration following some practical trails and testing upon the real students. In conclusion, it is commonly asserted

that the gateway of research is always open for inviting any new logically practical principles and findings to accommodate in the vast realm of ESL/EFL pedagogy.

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