

WHAT MATTERS MOST, LOW-ORDER OR HIGHER-ORDER COGNITIVE SKILLS?

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Abstract:

This article examines which cognitive skills—lower-order or higher-order—are primarily developed through the Integrated Language Skills textbook for second-year students at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. An analysis of the task content reveals that most activities focus on developing lower-order cognitive competencies, such as memorizing, reproducing, recognizing, and applying basic language knowledge (vocabulary, grammar, simple structures). Although some tasks require students to use the learned material in practical situations, these are less common. Tasks that foster analytical, evaluative, and creative skills—such as analyzing context, comparing, critiquing, arguing, formulating, or creating new contexts—are practically absent. A comparison with phenomenon-based learning shows that the traditional approach falls short in cultivating critical thinking, learner autonomy, and the ability to use the language in real-life, interdisciplinary situations. Thus, the article concludes that integrated language courses mainly promote lower-order cognitive skills, limiting the formation of deep and sustainable language competencies necessary for modern intercultural communication.

Key words: cognitive skills, lower-order skills, higher-order cognitive competencies, Integrated Language Skills, phenomenon-based learning, traditional learning, critical thinking, language education, tasks, content analysis.

In the analysis of the content of the manual of Integrated Language Skills, it has been revealed that the highest percentage of tasks include assignments that develop low-order cognitive competencies such as remembering and understanding the themes and applying the relevant vocabulary.

Here is the table of tasks assigned to the 2nd course students

Table of Low-Order Cognitive Skills Tasks for an Integrated Language Course

Task	Description	Cognitive Skill	Objective
Vocabulary Flashcards	Students match words to definitions or recall definitions for given words.	Remembering	Reinforce vocabulary retention and recall.
Simple Recall Quizzes	Short-answer or multiple-choice questions based on previously studied material.	Remembering	Test recall of key vocabulary, grammar, and concepts.
Fill-in-the-Blanks	Complete sentences or short paragraphs by recalling missing words.	Remembering	Practice the use of target vocabulary or grammar structures.
Word and Picture Association	Match vocabulary words with corresponding pictures or objects.	Remembering	Strengthen association between words and their meanings.
Cloze Tests	A passage is given with missing words, and students fill in the blanks from memory.	Remembering	Reinforce comprehension and vocabulary recall in context.
True/False Questions	Answer simple true/false questions based on facts or concepts learned in class.	Understanding	Develop the ability to distinguish true vs. false information.
Grammar Rule Identification	Identify the grammar rule being used in a given sentence or passage.	Understanding	Reinforce understanding of grammar rules in context.

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Rearrange the Jumbled Sentence	Rearrange words in a sentence to form a grammatically correct sentence.	Understanding	Help students understand sentence structure and word order.
Matching Definitions to Words	Match vocabulary words with their corresponding definitions.	Remembering	Improve vocabulary recall by linking words with their meanings.
Short Passage Recitation	Memorize and recite a short passage or dialogue aloud.	Remembering	Improve recall and pronunciation through practice.
Listen and Recall	Listen to an audio clip and recall details or answer questions about it.	Remembering	Develop listening comprehension and memory.
Memory Chain Game	Recall and repeat a growing sentence or phrase chain, adding one new element each time.	Remembering	Enhance memory retention in a collaborative, active way.
Flashcard Review with Partners	Quiz each other with flashcards to test knowledge of vocabulary or grammar.	Remembering	Encourage peer-to-peer learning and reinforce retention.
Repetition Drills	Repeat words, sentences, or phrases in unison to reinforce retention.	Remembering	Strengthen recall through repetitive practice.
Simple Fact-Based Games	Use games like bingo or matching games with language concepts (e.g., vocabulary or grammar structures).	Remembering	Make learning fun and help students recall basic language facts.

Table of Tasks Demonstrating Applying Skills in an Integrated Language Course

Task	Description	Cognitive Skill	Objective
Real-life scenarios role-play	Students engage in role-play based on real-life scenarios, such as ordering food at a restaurant, making a reservation, or attending a job interview.	Applying	Practice using language for practical, everyday communication.
Problem-solving discussions	Students discuss and solve problems in groups, such as planning a vacation or resolving a conflict, using appropriate language structures.	Applying	Encourage collaborative problem-solving in authentic contexts.
Conducting an interview	Students simulate conducting an interview (e.g., for a job, a project, or a research study), asking relevant questions and responding appropriately.	Applying	Develop questioning and responding skills in formal or informal contexts.
Create a travel itinerary	Students create a detailed travel itinerary for a trip, including transportation, accommodations, and activities, using target language.	Applying	Use language to plan and organize events or travel, applying vocabulary related to travel and logistics.
Customer service simulation	One student acts as a customer and another as a service provider, dealing with common customer service situations, such as complaints or inquiries.	Applying	Practice handling customer interactions and using polite language in various service contexts.
Plan a group event	Students work in groups to plan an event (e.g., a party, meeting, or cultural event), negotiating tasks and	Applying	Develop language for negotiation, collaboration,

	responsibilities using language effectively.		and event planning in practical settings.
Create a personal budget	Students create a personal budget or financial plan, using language for budgeting, planning, and making financial decisions.	Applying	Apply language for discussing finances, managing money, and making financial decisions.
Write a formal letter or email	Students write a formal letter or email for a specific purpose (e.g., applying for a job, requesting information, or making a complaint).	Applying	Practice writing professional or formal communication using proper tone and structure.
Create a public service announcement	Students create and present a public service announcement (PSA) about an important issue (e.g., health, safety, environmental issues).	Applying	Apply language skills to create persuasive messages for real-world causes or issues.
Develop a product pitch	Students create and present a pitch for a new product or service, using persuasive language and key vocabulary related to marketing.	Applying	Develop persuasive language and communication strategies in a business context.
Interpret a map or directions	Students follow and give directions based on a map, practicing language related to navigation and locations.	Applying	Use language for giving and understanding directions, strengthening spatial awareness and communication.
Job search simulation	Students search for job listings, write a cover letter, and tailor their CV/resume to specific job postings in the target language.	Applying	Apply language skills for professional settings, focusing on job-related vocabulary and writing.
Analyze a case study	Students are given a case study (e.g., a business problem or a social issue) and must analyze it, suggest solutions, and discuss their findings.	Applying	Apply critical thinking and language skills to analyze complex scenarios and propose solutions.
Create a video tutorial	Students create a short video tutorial explaining how to do something (e.g., cooking, crafting, using a tool), using instructional language.	Applying	Use instructional language to explain processes, enhancing clarity and communication skills.
Conduct a survey and report results	Students design a survey, collect data from peers, and then report on the findings, using appropriate language for presenting data.	Applying	Practice language for research, data collection, and presenting findings in a formal context.
Simulate a negotiation	Students simulate a negotiation (e.g., discussing terms of a contract, buying or selling goods), using formal or informal negotiation language.	Applying	Develop negotiation skills and the use of persuasive language in professional or personal contexts.
Create a health and wellness plan	Students create a personal health and wellness plan, including exercise routines, meal plans, and wellness goals, using language for health and fitness.	Applying	Apply language related to health, fitness, and wellness, while discussing personal goals and strategies.

Key Focus of Tasks:

- Remembering: Reinforces retention of vocabulary, grammar, and factual knowledge.
- Understanding: Tests comprehension and application of learned material in simple contexts.
- Applying: Tasks where students actively use language to solve real-life problems or perform tasks in realistic contexts.
- Communication Skills: Students practice conveying information, persuasively, or effectively in various scenarios.

- **Practical Application:** Encourages the use of language in contexts students might encounter outside the classroom, reinforcing its real-world utility.

From the table, it is visible that most of the tasks require learners to do low-cognitive skill-developing assignments, which stimulate learners to the following functions such as remembering certain information by duplicating, defining, listing, memorizing, recalling, repeating, reproducing, and stating. In the next step, they will be urged to understand certain information by classifying, describing, explaining, identifying, locating, recognizing, paraphrasing, or translating. In the lowest percentage, learners are demanded to apply that information in a new context by choosing, demonstrating, dramatizing, employing, illustrating, interpreting, operating, sketching, solving, or using and writing. It seems that those tasks do not serve the development of higher cognitive skills, including analyzing the context, scientific article, or literary work, by comparing, contrasting, criticizing, differentiating, distinguishing, examining, experimenting, questioning, and testing. Learners are also not asked to evaluate the above contexts where they can show their ability to appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, and evaluate. Most importantly, the contexts do not seem to ask learners to assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write, or invent specific contexts relevant to the topic and may have a connection with real life, a crucial feature of phenomenon-based learning.

It is manifest that the presented tasks in integrated language skills serve to develop low-order cognitive competencies, which require learners to remember certain contexts by defining, listing, and naming specific terms, collocations, or phrasal verbs. Concerning the application process, users are asked to match particular terms, phrasal verbs, and collocations with their meanings. However, the tasks stimulating the formation or growth of analytical competencies through which a learner will have to distinguish related contexts, contrast and compare particular objects, subjects, situations, or events, and scrutinize the interest or the target contexts to learn the investigated topic further have not been provided in the book under analyses. Also, these tasks will not trigger learners to survey and go deeper into the topic, ultimately weakening their deep learning skills.

Figure 1 presents the main differences between Phenomenon-based learning and Traditional learning languages.

Figure 1.

Aspect	Phenomenon-Based Learning (PBL)	Traditional Language Learning
Focus	Focuses on real-world phenomena or interdisciplinary topics that require students to explore and use the language in context.	Focuses on mastering language rules, grammar, vocabulary, and structure through explicit instruction.
Approach	Student-centered, inquiry-based, and holistic; students investigate language use in real-life situations or problems.	Teacher-centered, structured, and linear; students follow a set curriculum focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and reading/listening comprehension.
Context	Language is learned through authentic situations, often tied to real-world issues or phenomena.	Language is typically learned through isolated exercises, textbook drills, and language-specific tasks (e.g., translation, grammar exercises).
Learning Method	Students engage with the language by discussing, solving problems, and working on projects related to the phenomenon.	Students learn language skills separately (e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking), often with little connection to real-world contexts.
Skills Developed	Emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to use the language in practical, dynamic contexts.	Emphasizes memorization, repetition, and grammar accuracy. Focuses on linguistic competence.
Student Role	Students are active participants, collaborating with peers, exploring, and creating solutions related to a phenomenon using the language.	Students are passive recipients, focusing mainly on absorbing knowledge the teacher provides in a structured manner.
Assessment	Assessment is often holistic, based on projects, real-world application, and student reflections.	Assessment is typically summative and focuses on tests,

		quizzes, and written assignments evaluating grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension.
Learning Environment	Collaborative, interdisciplinary, and inquiry-based. Students often work in teams to explore topics from various angles.	More traditional and isolated, with the teacher as the main knowledge source. Often focused on individual work.
Cultural Context	Language learning is deeply connected to cultural and societal contexts through real-world phenomena.	Language learning may include some cultural elements but tends to be secondary to language mechanics.
Example Activities	Investigating a global phenomenon (e.g., climate change) in the target language, discussing its impact, and proposing solutions using the language.	Memorizing vocabulary lists, completing grammar exercises, reading dialogues, or translating texts.

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