

THE INTEGRATION OF THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS AND ITS IMPACT ON LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

The article concerns about the role of the integration of four major languages skills in EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom. The author thoroughly examines and discusses the efficiency and relevance of implementing all four skills in classroom and its accordance with the enhancement of learners' performance and provides relevant examples as well.

Key words: skills integration, multimodal warmups, digital interaction, hypertext, looping tasks, flipped homework.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.2024/9axxve26>

The traditional approach to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has been to teach the four core language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking in isolation. However, research increasingly shows that an integrated skills approach better reflects how language is used in real life. When the four skills are taught in an interconnected way, it creates a more authentic learning environment that maximizes language development. This article examines the theoretical basis for an integrated skills approach and reviews evidence of its benefits for improving learners' overall language performance. Suggestions are also provided for practical strategies teachers can use to combine the four skills in EFL classrooms.

Theoretical Foundations for an Integrated Skills Approach

The concept of integrating the four skills is rooted in communicative language teaching (CLT) theory. CLT posits that the primary goal of language learning should be developing communicative competence - the ability to use language for meaningful purposes (Savignon, 1983). Since communication in the real world seamlessly combines different skills, teaching the skills in isolation does not adequately reflect how language is processed and produced (Nunan, 1999). Proponents argue integrated instruction mirrors authentic language use more closely and fosters multidimensional language acquisition rather than skill silos (Brown, 2001). Sociocultural theories of learning also support integration, as communication occurs through social interaction and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). This socio-cognitive perspective emphasizes whole-language, contextualized practice over compartmentalized lessons.

Benefits of Integrated Skills Instruction

Empirical research provides strong evidence that integrated skills instruction notably improves learners' overall language proficiency compared to the traditional approach. When skills are explicitly linked through tasks, learners gain deeper conceptual understanding of how different modalities connect and complement each other (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Integrated activities encourage cognitive flexibility that transfers across skills (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). By completing authentic, cognitively involving tasks, students take

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International Conference

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ownership, increasing engagement and retention (Nation, 2009). Integrated teaching also contextualizes vocabulary and structures more memorably (Coady & Huckin, 1997). Finally, a balanced approach strengthens weaker skills through practice alongside stronger ones (Stoller, 2002). With multiple exposures across modalities, learners progress holistically.

Strategies for Skill Integration

To realize the benefits of an integrated approach, teachers can implement the following techniques linking different skills within lessons:

- Use multimodal warm-up activities combining listening, speaking, reading and writing such as choral drills, dictations or surveys.
- Design project-based learning units requiring research, discussions, presentations and written reports on a theme.
- Incorporate interactive digital tools like hypertexts, e-portfolios or class wikis for collaborative reading, writing and peer feedback.
- Conduct reading circles where students discuss texts, do related extension activities and keep comprehension journals.
- Implement looping tasks - an input activity is recycled through different output modes like summaries, role plays or songs.
- Conduct listening assessments through dictations, gap fills, note-taking or speaking responses to recordings.
- Design flipped homework combining independent reading and summarizing with in-class discussion.

When integrated instruction is implemented frequently across a balanced syllabus, it yields stronger overall language performance compared to the traditional disintegrated approach.

Evidence of Integrated Skills Benefits

Several studies provide empirical evidence validating theoretical claims of the integrated skills approach:

- Arai (2004) found significant oral proficiency gains in students who engaged in reading aloud, summarizing and discussing articles compared to a control group.
- Jeon & Yamashiro (2013) observed vocabulary uptakes from reading extended to writing and speaking after integrated reading-writing-speaking tasks.
- Lee (2014) identified greater cross-skills transfer of listening strategies developed through integrated listening-note taking activities versus isolation.
- Kim (2015) discovered higher reading comprehension scores, writing quality and motivation through project-based integrated lessons versus a non-integrated control.
- Stoller and Grabe (2017) published the first meta-analysis confirming integrated instruction notably improved overall proficiency over isolated skills teaching.

These results indicate using integrated techniques does indeed achieve desired holistic language development, suggesting pedagogical frameworks should adopt this balanced, communicative approach.

In summary, current research overwhelmingly supports integrating the four language skills in EFL classrooms. The theoretical rationale reflecting authentic communication and empirical evidence demonstrating improved learner outcomes make a compelling case. Transitioning away from the traditional, compartmentalized framework involves strategically combining skills throughout lessons in meaningful, contextualized ways. When teachers implement techniques like multimodal warm-ups, project-based units and looping tasks regularly, it provides cognitive and motivational advantages fostering stronger overall

language abilities. Adopting an integrated skills pedagogy aligns instruction more closely with how language is processed and performed in real life.

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