

An Integrated Skill Approach: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The present research paper aims to identify the integration of the four skills of the English language - Reading and Listening Comprehension, Written and Oral expression in the lessons of students of standard IX observing how they are taught to determine if the Integrated-Skill Approach impacts or not the student's performance during lesson. To achieve this, the observations of the lessons are recorded on checklists which are applied to compare the situation in two different schools. For the present comparative research study, the two schools selected are Malik Amber Urdu High School and National Urdu High School of Aurangabad city.

Keywords: Integration of skills, English as a third language, Receptive skills, Productive skills, Introductory questions, Work in groups, Worksheets, Classroom Management.

1. Introduction:

There are many approaches to the teaching of English. All of them have been used during a time and then have been replaced by new approaches that proposed new ways for helping regional students to reach a better proficiency of English as a third language. For a few years, there have been many opinions reinforcing the idea of language as a whole and proposing that the integration of the four skills is the key to teach English in a way close to a real communicative situation.

Learning language comprises four skills. They are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW). The former two skills are known as oracy and the latter two are known as literacy; both oracy and literacy form lingua.

Among these four skills, listening and reading are used as the channels of receiving information. Thus, these two skills are called receptive skills. The remaining two skills, speaking and writing, are used as channels of sending information. Thus, these two skills are labeled as productive skills.

1.1. Listening Skill:

Listening is an essential part of other skills of the language. The activity of listening is not a move of just recording the speaker's voices and repeating them like a record player as they are. It is a process of understanding meaning out of spoken words. Listening involves receiving the structured sounds of the language, getting meaning from the words received, and the talent to translate and grasp the speaker's voices, etc.

1.2. Speaking Skill:

Speaking is a more compound skill than listening. It is an expression of creativity. Besides knowing the language, the speaker must believe that he can express, either commencing the lecture or conversation or replying to the previous speaker. The activity of speaking involves the alertness of the grammatical, rhetoric, and ethnic features of the language, the capability to speak with proper pronunciation and grammatically correct, and the talent to express understandably.

1.3. Reading Skill:

Reading is not only understanding of written symbols but also identifying and grasping skills. To carry out the reading activity one must know the language, potential to identify the sounds, explicate and make sense of the texts. During the reading, a reader interconnects with a text, decrypts it, and constructs meaning in the process. The reading activity increases one's knowledge and it is an important tool for learning any language.

1.4. Writing Skill:

Writing is an activity of conveying one's perspectives through written symbols. It is a tough task. The writing skill comprises of expressing the views with the help of written symbols and presenting grammatically correct text in an organized manner.

All these four skills of language are the basis for communication. Hence, they form the base for language proficiency - the ability to use the knowledge in different tasks.

1.5. Integration of Skills:

Language skills in the classroom should also be integrated into the language teaching process as it is in real life. To provide a more purposeful and meaningful learning environment, teachers should integrate the language skills -reading, speaking, listening, and writing- while teaching and practicing the language. There are several benefits of using an integrated-skills approach in language teaching. First, integrating language skills provides more purposeful and meaningful learning at all levels. Besides, it contributes to coherent teaching and better communication. It also brings variety into the classroom.

Teachers enrich classroom instructions by integrating language skills cooperatively. *By integrating the skills, students learn to operate the language and they can easily transfer the acquired knowledge to other areas* (River, 1981: 166). Practicing all four skills promotes language learning and affects the L3 *knowledge of learners positively. When language skills are integrated into language teaching, language learning comes closer to the way we do in real life.* (Almarza Sanchez, 2000: 44). River (1981: 167) explains the benefits of skills integration as follows: *When various skills are integrated into free-flowing activities, in which one provides material for the other, students learn to operate confidently within the language, easily transferring knowledge acquired in one area for active use in another.*

It is in consideration of this, this investigation aims to identify the integration of the four skills of the English language in Urdu medium school students, and how these skills are developed to teach English as a third language to the students of standard IX. The Integrated-Skill Approach results in optimal English as a third language communication by using the four primary English language skills together while teaching.

2. The Importance of the Study:

The problem in Urdu medium schools is that the Integrated-skill Approach is not applied which results in poor performance of students in the English language and the importance of integrating the four skills of the English language is that it enhances students' natural language interaction.

Applying this approach encourages the learner to interact naturally in the language, realize that English is not a foreign language but also an opportunity for them to interact in the same way as in Urdu. Teachers can improve multiple skills of students at the same time.

3. Hypothesis:

The present study covers the following hypothesis;

With the help of The Integrated-skill Approach, the English language can be taught and understood as easily as the mother tongue.

4. Scope:

This investigation is going to examine how the four skills of the English language are or are not integrated into a secondary school class of two different schools, as an experiment to determine how much does Integration affects the students' performance in learning the English language.

5. Objectives:

The present study covers the following Objectives:

To identify the integration of the four skills of the English language during a lesson of students of standard IX and to compare the students' performance according to the Integrated skill Approach during lesson observation.

6. Methodology:

The teaching of English as a third language has been segmented considering the four skills of it – Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking – separately. This results in an unnatural teaching

method in which students are not prepared to face real-life communication, where the four skills are used in a complementary way.

The objective of this investigation is to identify if the four skills of the English language are integrated during a lesson of IX standard Urdu medium high school students and effective impact on the students' performance.

This investigation only observes the current classroom situation, without considering what happened before or what is going to happen after it.

7. Research Sampling:

To present the methodologies used for the teaching and practice of the different skills of the English language, two same grade classes had been visited to observe teacher's and students' performance during the lessons. The two groups studied are IXth from Malik Amber Urdu High School, Aurangabad, and IXth A from National Urdu High School, Aurangabad.

IXth is a class is formed by 42 students – 30 girls and 12 boys. These students are grouped as boys and girls in different lines. In high school, periods are of 35 minutes so four periods had been observed.

The other class observed is IXth A which is formed by 49 students – 33 girls and 16 boys. These students are also arranged as boys' line and girls' line. Here also 4 periods had been observed.

8. Data Collection Mechanisms:

To obtain the most faithful information from the sample studied and observed, the instrument for recollecting information is the Checklist, which has been designed by the Researcher of this investigation. The checklist is applied in every period.

8.1. Checklist

This instrument aims to verify if the teaching of the four skills is complementary or segregated. Another objective for using these instruments is to notice the strategies used by the teacher to integrate the four skills of the English language.

It considered different aspects that should configure a successful Integrated-skill classroom including setting and opportunities for the students to practice the language in situations. All of the aspects provide a clear idea about how the four skills of the English language are integrated.

The Checklist is applied as many times as possible within the same class, each time corresponding to a different lesson. In the end, four periods are observed, distributed according to the schedule of both schools.

The questions included in this checklist are:

1. Does the teacher start with the introductory questions?
2. Does the teacher read the lesson?
3. Do the students listen while the teacher reads the lesson?
4. Does the teacher ask questions?
5. Do the students understand the question and able to answer it?
6. Does the teacher use English to explain the lesson?
7. Do the students ask questions in English?
8. Does the teacher relate the students' previous knowledge with the new contents?
9. Does the teacher provide a worksheet related to the lesson and ask students to complete it?
10. Does the teacher encourage students to work in a group?
11. Does the teacher encourage the students in practicing language skills?
12. Does the teacher integrate the four skills?

9. Data Analysis:

The information obtained from the mechanism is systematically organized. The results of the Checklist are considered for the conclusions of this investigation.

The answers on the checklist are analyzed to determine the influence of the integrated-skill Approach on the performance of students. The information referred to the level of proficiency in every skill is also analyzed that show how developed is every skill-listening and reading – in comparison with the other one. The results are considered successful if the students obtain at least 80% of achievement in every skill, and the students' grades are arranged to know how many students obtained the minimum required percentage.

10. Investigation Result and Analysis:

The analysis represents the level of achievement for every question proposed by the Checklist and a comparison of these results between the two schools observed.

10.1. Sample 1 (Standard IX):

The following analysis shows the information obtained from what was registered on the checklist for one of the groups observed.

1. Does the teacher starts with the introductory questions?

Yes, the teacher started the period with the introductory questions. This brought the concentration of all the students towards the teacher and they became curious about the new topic being started.

2. Does the teacher read the lesson?

Yes, the teacher read the lesson loudly and instructed the students to look into the book and listen carefully. The voice of the teacher was clear and the pronunciation was almost correct.

3. Do the students listen while the teacher reads the lesson?

Most of the students (except some backbenchers) saw in books and listened to the lesson carefully. This increased their listening skill and also understood the correct pronunciation of the text.

4. Does the teacher ask questions?

The students were constantly asked questions. Also, they were instructed to search for the answer in the text and encouraged to answer in their own words. Asking questions keep the students alert in the classroom. It enhances student's listening skills.

5. Do the students understand the question and able to answer it?

Most of the students understood the question and able to answer it because they have to read the text and answer from the text. The teacher accepted their answers even if grammatically incorrect to enhance the confidence of the students. This involved reading and speaking skills.

6. Does the teacher use English to explain the lesson?

The English language was spoken during all the four lessons observed, at all times. It was understood by the students who answered every given question, which contributed to an English spoken lesson.

7. Do the students ask questions in English?

Most of the students try to ask questions. In this case, the students were encouraged to use English for asking the question they may have, which was done throughout the four lessons observed. If the students' mother tongue, Urdu, was used, they were encouraged to use English.

8. Does the teacher relate the students' previous knowledge with the new contents?

Yes, the teacher related the students' previous knowledge with the new contents. The teacher reminded the student of previous vocabulary and grammar knowledge and also encouraged the students to imagine themselves in the current lesson and then answer.

9. Does the teacher provide a worksheet related to the lesson and ask students to complete it?

Yes, the teacher provided the worksheets related to the current lesson being taught in the class. Also encouraged students to search from text and write the answers in the worksheet. This improved their writing skill.

10. Does the teacher encourage students to work in a group?

The students were asked to work in groups. This enhances their teamwork ability, interaction with each other, and also exchange ideas. This also improves their conversation capability.

11. Does the teacher encourage the students in practicing language skills?

The two of the four lessons observed in which the new contents were related to real situations helped to engage them with the lesson. The other two lessons were devoted to solving the exercises (worksheet), which shows that the material was accurately selected. In this way, the teacher encouraged the students in practicing language skills.

12. Does the teacher integrate the four skills?

Yes, the four skills of the English language were successfully integrated during the four lessons that were observed.

10.2. Sample 2 (Students of IX-A):

1. Does the teacher starts with the introductory questions?

The teacher asked the introductory questions, students were asked to answer questions to explain the name of the new chapter to the student. This brought the concentration of the students towards the teacher as well as towards the new chapter.

2. Does the teacher read the lesson?

Yes, the teacher read the lesson and instructed the students to look into the book and listen carefully. The voice of the teacher was clear and the pronunciation was almost correct but sometimes incorrect also. Some of the students were not looking in the book.

3. Do the students listen while the teacher reads the lesson?

In two lessons some students listened to the lesson carefully, also looked in the book. In the third lesson, some students listened to the lesson carefully but didn't look into the book. In the fourth lesson, only a few listened to the lesson carefully. Hence the listening skill of students was very less involved.

4. Does the teacher ask questions?

In the first lesson, the teacher asked satisfactory questions but in the rest of the three lessons, the teacher asked very few questions to the students which did not cover every line of the lesson, and thus the ability to listen understand the question is very less inculcated in the students.

5. Do the students understand the question and able to answer it?

Very few students able to answer because many students were not paying attention, having as a consequence undisciplined behavior throughout the lesson. This troublesome behavior made the other students lose focus and produce a mess in the classroom. Another problem observed was the

explanation given was not interesting for students, also not related to students' daily life experiences. As a consequence, the speaking skill of students was not involved.

6. Does the teacher use English to explain the lesson?

In some lessons, English was used to explain contents and given instructions although they were immediately translated into Urdu, which does not allow the students to think and get their perception of what was said. Maybe it happened because according to what was observed, the students do not have a level to understand everything at the first time or a lesson that the completely given in English however if they are not exposed to the language, they may not acquire it.

7. Do the students ask questions in English?

The students speak Urdu during the time of the lessons observed. They used English for reading their answers from the textbook (which is not considered as their self prepared answers) – and their pronunciation was not appropriate.

8. Does the teacher relate the students' previous knowledge with the new contents?

The activities and contents from lesson to lesson were equally related, which gave the teacher the chance to check knowledge from previous sessions. The two lessons in which the negative answer to this question can be explained by the fact that students seem to have some gaps of knowledge and that the topic of the textbook lesson they were studying was unknown for the students. There is a clear sequence from lesson to lesson, considering the previous topics and contents known by the students.

9. Does the teacher provide a worksheet related to the lesson and ask students to complete it?

The students were provided worksheets but not much related to the current lesson. Some students are unable to read the question, if anyhow some tried to read, couldn't understand it if some students understand the question but unable to write the answers. Thus the writing skill of the students being untouched.

10. Does the teacher encourage students to work in a group?

The two lessons in which the students were asked to work in groups to answer a handout that they had to add to a portfolio, and another lesson in which they were encouraged to work in groups as a way to discuss their opinions and exchange ideas. However, most of the lessons were devoted to explaining contents and solving exercises individually.

11. Does the teacher encourage the students in practicing language skills?

The explanations given were not related to the daily life experience of the students; hence, they do not feel involved with them. Since English was not used all the time, the students do not feel that learning English is important. The four lessons observed – the development of the lesson was not attractive and involving and students did not feel motivated to practice English on their own since, throughout the lesson, the teacher didn't provide the opportunity to use the skills of the English language.

12. Does the teacher integrate the four skills?

Even though the teacher tried to use the four skills of the English language during the lessons observed, many times they were worked separately. In the first lesson, in which the four skills of the English language were developed, asking the students to listen carefully, look into the textbook, and provide examples of their own. However, the remaining three lessons were mostly receptive, because of the explanation of lessons and when students were asked to solve exercises, were not asked many questions and were not encouraged to answer in English.

10. Conclusion:

The main purpose of this investigation was to identify the integration of the four skills of the English language and observe if it affects positively the students' performance during a lesson, in this case, of students of standard IX of two different secondary schools of Urdu medium.

According to what was examined, it can be said that the Integration of the four skills of the English language influences the students' performance. However, it is not only a matter of integrating the four skills of the English language but how to integrate them in a lesson, to make the students to be involved in a real communicative situation. Moreover, other relevant aspects within a class can make the lesson more or less effective in terms of language learning, which depends primarily on the teacher, as in what they do to motivate students to be interested in the

third language, the classroom environment that is basically how the teacher in the third language, the use of the voice (volume, accent, etc.) the use of mother tongue (Urdu) and how much teacher use English language in an English lesson, among others and how much the teacher can develop an interest in classroom activities and make students excited in learning English.

These variables were taken into account when observing two different classes in their lessons in different schools but at the same level. On one hand, there was a class in which the four skills of the English language were integrated during the four lessons observed. Another observed behavior was the habit of relating topics with students' experiences and asking them about their opinions and feelings concerning the topics studied. How the new contents were exposed and the materials provided were both attractive and involving. The methods and techniques were successful to reach the goal of getting students to learn English interestingly.

The contrast with Productive skills is practically the same. Asking opinions, relating topics, encouraging students to use English as much as possible to communicate what they think is basic for reaching English proficiency. This was more clearly observed in one sample. Students were asked to provide examples of their own and express opinions; they were also encouraged to use English for asking questions.

In contrast to this, was the other class observed. Since English was not used during the whole period, students did not use it for asking questions or for giving answers. Even though they were asked to provide examples of their own, the proficiency observed was poor because they were not exposed to constant English-speaking lessons.

All of the features noticed during the lessons in both samples were essential in the final analysis of the investigation. Therefore, taking into account the results of the observation, it can be suitably proclaimed that the integration of the four skills of the English language influences the students' performance concerning English as a third language.

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