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Integration of Language Learning Skills in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: Effective and efficient communication is direly required to compete in this ever-changing modern world. The importance of English as a key foreign language is unquestionable which emphasizes learning it so well as to be its competent user. Teaching English as a second language (SL) is a very challenging task but a language teacher (LT) can make it a success and enjoyable with the help of introducing different activities in the class and by the integration of the four Language Learning Skills (LLSs), i.e. Listening skill, Reading Skill, Writing Skill and Speaking Skill. Ironically the teachers of English language have been concentrating on just one language skill, i.e. "Writing Skill". The paper argues that any language can't be taught in isolation; we must integrate the four LLSs to produce proficient users of that language.

Keywords: Integrating Four Language Learning Skills, English Language Teaching, Second Language Acquisition, English as a Second Language

Introduction

Teachers have been studying the ways of enabling learners to use English freely, effectively, and as far as possible accurately, in realistic communication, which has become not only the major goal of all English language teaching (ELT), but also the students' main concern when they make their efforts to study English (Jing, 2006). Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) has been a great challenge for LTs but the challenge is more testing when the teacher is a Non-native Speaker (NNS). There are certain characteristics of LTs, which enable them to teach ESL effectively. ESL teachers need to be both *proficient users* and *skilled analysts* of English language; so the teacher must possess the ability to speak and write English as a competent user and he must be blessed with the knowledge of English from an analytical perspective: its phonology, grammar, syntax, lexical properties, generic structures, pragmatic realizations and literacy (Ellis, 2006; Wright & Bolitho, 1997).

Communication, by definition, requires the integration of the main language skills; in integrated-skill instruction, learners are exposed to authentic language and are involved in activities that are meaningful and interesting, this stresses the adoption of a content-based and task-oriented instruction (Shen, 2003). The four "macro skills" (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are all an integral part of typical language proficiency and use. They can also work together in LA, and the phrase "integrated skills" is commonly used to describe curricula that develop the skills in parallel fashion (Xue-Ping, 1997). For various reasons, traditional English language teacher tends to teach the four language skills separately, and materials and activities designed usually focus on one specific skill and others are ignored (Jing, 2006). It really is absurd to try to teach one language skill to LLs, i.e., all the skills must be integrated to make LLs use it effectively.

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Jing (2006) has referred to many situations in which more than one language skills are used to communicate in our daily life. Moreover, he posited that integration leads the focus on realistic language and can be helpful towards students' all-round development of communicative competence in English language.

The realization of the integration of these skills is increasing. During the last ten years, there has been a general shift in SL education away from teaching language in isolation toward integrating language and content instruction (Enright & McCloskey, 1988; Jing, 2006). Real success in English teaching and learning is achieved when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom (Davies & Pearse, 2000; Jing, 2006).

Purpose of the study

This paper brings into light the problems regarding ELT. Some suggestions to resolve these problems would benefit the well being of the nation and contribute to the economic growth. Integration of the four skills can develop communicative competence by focusing on the real life situation which is the main purpose behind teaching and learning any language.

Communicative language teaching

The goal of communicative language teaching is to develop students' communicative competence, which includes both the knowledge about the language and the knowledge about how to use the language appropriately in communicative situations (Jing, 2006). The aim of a LT should be teaching the language in a way as it is used in the real world to enable the students use the foreign language in practical context. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the current scenario of ELT practices. In this situation it can be suggested to adopt integrated language teaching to decrease the gap between teaching the language skills in isolation and real life language use.

In the real life we simultaneously use more than one language skills for communication. Integration of the four skills emphasizes the focus on realistic language and can help the LTs develop communicative competence amongst the learners of English. The integration helps a teacher add up more variety into the lesson because the range of activities will be wider. Successful integrative approach helps a LT make the lessons dynamic, involve the learners in diverse activities and interactions. This makes students actively participates in class activities. A vivid and effective communicative class is supposed to be involving the integration of the four language skills, in which the teacher needs to establish a positive atmosphere, plan appropriate activities, encourage learners and deal with problems sensitively (Davies & Pearse, 2000; Jing, 2006).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Perspective

Now the English LTs recognize the need to base their teaching on a program where language learning takes place, both inside and outside the classroom. The field of both first and SLA research expanded rapidly in the 1970s and, not content to look only at sentence-level

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grammatical structures; researchers have focused in the 1980s, on the functions and features of discourse (Savignon, 2001).

What singles English out as a natural language is the fact that it is essentially the first choice in the communication between different non-native speakers (Crystal, 2003; Sifakis, 2004). Learning of SL must enable the students to use this language in work or life when necessary. It's the responsibility of an English LT to theoretically teach the language in a way that can be practically used in the real world. Ironically it's not so in the present day SL teaching practices.

LT came into its own as a profession in the last century, central to this phenomenon was the emergence of the concept of "methods" of language teaching (Rodgers, 2001)**.** There are three reasons common to the emergence of all ESP (English for Specific Purposes): the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner (Gatehouse, 2001; Hutchison & Waters, 1987). Pattison (1987) identified two sets of teaching having opposing goals:

Set 1	**Set 2**
Accuracy	Fluency
Knowledge about language	Skill in using language
Academic achievement	Social and personal development
Cognitive aims	Affective aims

A LT has to make a combination of these two sets to enable his students use language confidently. The English LTs have to ensure the minimal use of learner's first language as using the target language ensures that LA is going on. "Learning will be effective providing that there is extensive exposure to the target language and plenty of opportunities for the learner to use it" (Brumfit, 1980).

SL learners, already communicate in a first language. Learners are already familiar with the functions of language and have developed strategies to meet these functions in a variety of contexts, both familiar and new (Savignon, 2001). By looking at this scenario the researchers can get a better understanding of the learning strategies of different learners and of the ways in which classroom environments can be organized to facilitate language learning. In recent years, the development of theoretical insights into the nature of language and language behavior has been assisted by direct investigation of the language learning process itself.

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Why Integration?

LTs have been searching for the ways to enable the learners to use English efficiently, effectively. Integrated skills use coincides the way we communicate in real life, and integrating the skills can bring plenty of benefits to English teaching, it is a worthwhile experiment in a communicative classroom despite its higher demanding for teachers (Jing, 2006). Even if it were possible to develop one or two skills effectively in the absence of the other language skills at the beginning stages, this does not ensure adequate preparation for real international communication, in which not only language skills but also communicative skills are employed simultaneously; non-integration also contradicts the integrated way that people use foreign language skills in normal circumstances, and clashes with the direction in which experts in foreign language teaching have been moving in recent years (Shen, 2003). Teaching SL in isolation disintegrates language from other aspects of human development while an integrated SL teaching aims at keeping these components of development together helping the learner to be proficient in the usage of that language.

Teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) has been called as a tapestry by Oxford (2001). She further elaborates that this tapestry is woven with the help of so many strands including: 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). One of the most crucial of these strands consists of the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Rebecca L. Oxford, 2001). If the LT weaves this tapestry skillfully by using integrated-skill approach it leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication.

Integrating the four skills emphasizes the focus on realistic language and can, therefore, lead to the students' all-round development of communicative competence in English (Jing, 2006). Nunan (1989) believes skills integration to be an important feature of language learning, which appeals to interaction, task continuity, real world focus, language and learning focus and task outcomes. (Schurr et al., 1995) established that the language use is holistic in the real world, this demands from the LT to provide learners with an environment where they can immerse in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

(Mohan, 1986) stresses the need for skill integration in language learning since each language skill is not used separately in real life communication. The successful classrooms must present the real world holism, it means exercising one or two language faculties is not enough we need to provide ample opportunities for enhancing all facets of language; this refers to using cooperative learning activities as one of the best ways to accomplish this (Arslan, 2008). The LT can use activities such as simulated conversations in pairs and small groups, storytelling, picture description, reproducing any incident.

When a LT uses the integrated-skill approach he exposes ELLs to the real life language and provides them with opportunities to interact naturally in the language. This helps them achieve a true picture of the richness and intricacy of the English language when it's used for communication. This also develops interest for English language and they look at it not just as a key to pass an examination but as a tool to interact with people. The integrated-skill approach

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allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time (Rebecca L. Oxford, 2001). With careful reflection and planning, LTs can integrate the language skills. For this they must learn about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom that can accelerate learning process. The LTs should research the extent to which these skills can be exploited. They should be encouraged to select instructional materials, audio-visual aids that promote the integration of four language learning skills. The teachers may begin with one skill and later on integrate the other language skills through proper activities. The LT should contrive and exploit such LT strategies that are helpful in enhancing the ELLs' performance in learning language skills. Moreover, the ELLs must actively participate in the activities so that the learning process may go on. The environment conducive for learning will also be helpful to LT in making language leaning a success.

There is much to be learnt about the nature of language and language development. LTs have to help the researchers in defining researchable questions regarding the integration of the language learning skills. LTs must interpret the findings of the researchers so that these can be adopted in the classroom material and practice and a methodology be evolved that will be helpful to the LTs and ELLs. The cooperation of all concerned will produce skillful user of any language.

Problems in ELT and their solutions

To understand the problems of ELLs we must keep in mind how individuals learn languages, how and why they undertake and succeed in language study (Ehrman et al. 2003). Most studies in SLA context tend to take a learner-centered view (Bada & Genç, 2008). The target language competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers is reported to be insufficient in many countries e.g. (Berry, 1990; Guntermann, 1992; Murdoch, 1994; Sadtono, 1995; Sesek, 2007).

SLA is concerned with the cognitive and social factors that lead to success or failure in learning a SL (Bada & Genç, 2008). English Language Teaching (ELT) really tests the teaching skills of any language teacher. English Language Learners (ELLs) come from different culture, knowledge, level of interest, level of absorption and requirements. The teacher has to cater to the needs of every individual learner through need assessment, as no method is considered suitable to all settings. The problems faced and reported from all over the world are numerous. In the case of English, the LT's mastery of the target language is also related to cultural, economic and political issues, and is thus frequently discussed in the literature dealing with the status of native versus non-native teachers (Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, E. Lee, & C. Lee, 1999).

Many teachers in the United States are faced with the challenge of teaching children to read and write in English when the students have a heritage language that is not English and they are not yet proficient in English (Piller & Skillings, 2005); same is the case in developing countries like Pakistan and India. Through the integration the students are given opportunities to engage in activities to improve their speaking such as pair work or group activity, this makes them less afraid of speaking in front of listeners; listening to news, documentary and dialogues improves their pronunciation too. The 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.

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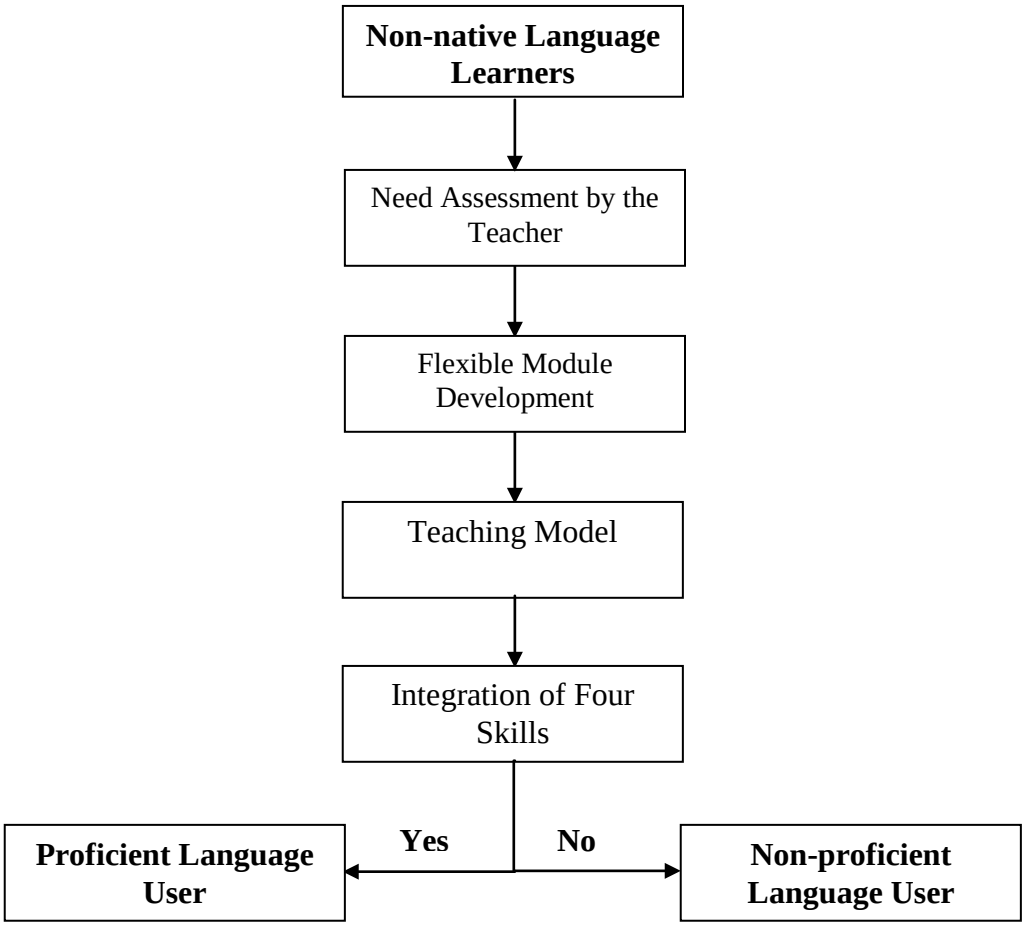
The integration is also very demanding of teachers (Jing, 2006), much time and effort is demanded on the part of the teacher, he has to keep in mind the varied needs and capabilities of the learners keeping their attention, motivation and participation alive.

Indeed, the problems encountered in the process of SLA could be attributed to the characteristics of first language acquisition FLA (Bada & Genç, 2008). SLA research has shown that adult learners of the SL use their prior knowledge of language to become effective user of the SL. Using integrative approach in a communicative classroom requires a teacher to make more effort in choosing materials and designing activities in comparison with the traditional English teaching (Jing, 2006). This leads us to the need of a teaching model that would help the teachers make the learners proficient and effective users of English Language.

ISP (Integration of (four) Skills for Proficiency) Model



Why language is so important? This question may haunt us , so the answer is that we require a medium to communicate with each other and further more for any organization, to become unsurpassable by the competitors, it has to accept and respect the linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences found amongst its workers. It means language is the key to social, economic,

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political, and cultural development and success of any country. Globalization and ever increasing information technologies have enhanced the demand for English all over the world. English, the pre-eminent language, is used as a library language, as the medium of science, technology and international trade, and as a contact language between nations and parts of nations (Talebinezhad & Aliakbari, 2001).

Discussion and Conclusion

A vivid and effective communicative class is supposed to be the integration of the four language skills training, in which the teacher needs to establish a positive atmosphere, plan appropriate activities, encourage learners and deal with problems sensitively (Davies & Pearse, 2000; Jing, 2006). The classroom teachers should know more about effective strategies for teaching ELLs. When a LT teaches a language by introducing alluring and interesting class activities encompassing the four skills it enhances the focus on realistic communication, motivating and encouraging the students learn the language and be more involved eagerly in classroom activities.

There is a dire need for the research that should examine the teaching practices of teachers providing instruction in English in countries, like Pakistan, where English is the official language, but not the first language of the ELLs. Although the current study is an attempt to fill in this gap yet future research can explore different facets of the problem. Moreover, the model proposed by the study has not been empirically tested. Any future research can test this model after collecting data.

The integration is also demanding much of the time and patience of teachers. They have to look for or even design themselves suitable materials for the class room activities, catering to the variety of the needs of their ELLs getting and retaining their students' attention along with enthusiastic participation. The integrative approach can help a LT create such a relaxed environment in the class that SLA becomes enjoyable. It is the responsibility of the teacher to device need based activities that would integrate all the four skills to develop proficiency amongst the learners. The limited time and large class size negatively affects the integrative teaching; however, the LTs can overcome these problems with their experiences. Moreover, such hurdles should not discourage the LTs from integrating the four skills as it renders very fruitful result.

We can't ignore the importance of English as an international language. The constant flow of language alludes to the reality that the research in the field of SLA is expected to continue. ELLs must experience rich and well-integrated opportunities to participate in listening, speaking, reading, and writing through well-planned activities by the English LTs. For better results English LTs must be empowered as practitioners and theory builders to cater to the needs of the diverse ELLs. A holistic, interactive, and learner-oriented conception of ELT is possible with a sustainable evolution of the policies and practice of language pedagogy in the larger cultural context. The challenges the LT has to take must not prevent him from integrating the skills because it can bring valuable results, in future, to both teachers and the learners.

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