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An Application of Skills Integration in Language Teaching

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Abstract

Skills are the building blocks of language learning process. They are effective elements of teaching and learning process. Nowadays a striking debate has arisen shortly on the discrimination of teaching language skills cooperatively. Teaching language is a comprehensive and complex process so in order to make this process effective and simple, skills integration is an advisable way of teaching language. It is a well-known fact that four language skills are rarely used alone in everyday life. Integrating language skills helps language learners to develop their ability in using two or more of the four skills within real context and also in their real life. All the language skills are vital in teaching and learning process and combination of the language skills has positive effects on student success. Reviewing the relevant literature in the field, this study aims to suggest a lesson model to teach language by integrating language skills cooperatively. In order to apply the technique, reading, listening, writing and speaking skills are integrated cooperatively in a chosen topic of "Maldives Island".

Keywords: Integrated approaches, integrated skills, skills' integration, a lesson model, language teaching

1. Introduction

In past decades, one or two of the four traditional skills were given prominence in EFL classes where one or two skills were dominant over the others. Oxford (2001) describes this approach as segregated-skill approach saying that such segregation is reflected in traditional EFL/ESL programs that offer classes more focused on segregated language skills. Yet, segregated-skill

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

9

10 : 9 September 2010

Selma Deneme, Ph. D. and Selen Ada, M.A. Student

An Application of Skills Integration in Language Teaching

approach was found to be contradictory to the natural way of acquiring a language and there has been a movement to integrated approaches that encourage the teaching of all four skills within the general framework. In real life, language skills are rarely used in isolation; it is a rare situation where the four skills occur alone. Teaching skills in isolation leads to distinction between classroom and real life language use. "Often one skill will reinforce another; we learn to speak, for example, in part by modelling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read" (Brown,2001).

In natural language learning, skills integration is inevitable and in the language classroom skills need to be practised in integration. "In the actual language use, one skill is rarely used in isolation...Numerous communicative situations in real life involve integrating two or more skills..." (Cunningsworth,1984: 46). Skills integration is commonly used in everyday life. For instance; a person reads a letter and replies it by writing after reading, and may possibly talk about it after writing it. Two or more language skills are generally integrated in everyday language use. Language skills in the classroom should also be integrated in language teaching process as it is in real life. In order to provide 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 to better communication. It also brings variety into the classroom. Teachers enrich classroom instructions by integrating language skills cooperatively (Murphy, 1991). By integrating the skills, students learn to operate the language and they can easily transfer the acquired knowledge to the other areas (River, 1981). Practising of all four skills promotes language learning and affects the L2 knowledge of learners positively (Peregoy and Boyle 1997). When the language skills are integrated in language teaching, language learning comes closer to the way we do in real life (Almarza Sanchez, 2000). 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 most important that the teacher not compartmentalize the learning (...)

The effective way of integrating the language skills is another point that needs clarifying. According to Oxford (2001), there are some steps to be taken while integrating the language skills:

-“Learn more about the various ways to integrate the language skills in the classroom”

-“Reflect on their current approach and evaluate to which the skills are integrated”.

-“Choose instructional materials, textbook, and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking, writing as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary so on.

-“Even if a given course is labelled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate task”.

-“Teach language learning strategies and emphasise that given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills (pp.5-6)”.

Having reviewed the integrated skills approach in terms of nature and its benefits, we will focus on a lesson model applying theory into practice. With the suggested model, the activities and the ways to integrate the four language skills- reading, listening, speaking and writing- will be presented via effective and motivating activities and materials.

2. Methodology

2.1 Purpose of the study

The study aims to review the relevant literature in the field, and to suggest a lesson model to teach language by integrating the language skills cooperatively. In order to apply the technique, reading, listening, writing and speaking skills are integrated throughout the study in a chosen topic.

2.2 Classroom Applications

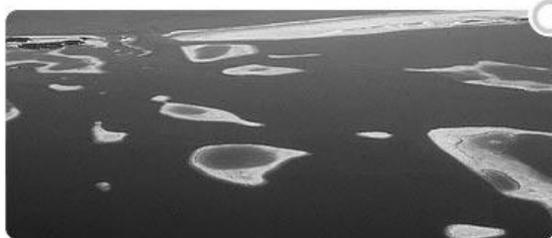
The researchers prepared some activities to integrate the language skills and they conducted the activities during the lesson hours. The plan of the lesson is presented in Appendix A. In order to conduct these activities, the researchers compiled a passage about Maldives Island. In activity 1, the students read the passage and got information about the island. They learned the general information about the geography and the history of the island. Using this newly learnt information, the students asked some questions about the passage. So reading skill was integrated with speaking skill. In activity 2, students watched a video about Maldives Island and they took some notes while watching the video, by doing so listening skill was integrated with writing skill. Then, in the third activity, the researchers asked students to prepare an advertisement about Maldives Islands, the students prepared an advertisement integrating reading with writing. As the last activity of the lesson, students read the passage about Maldives Island and searched some extra information about the island. Using this information, students wrote a dialog which was called “A Travel to Maldives Island”. Then the students carried out a role-play activity sharing the roles in the dialog. So writing skill was integrated with speaking skill.

The students read the passage about “Maldives Island”

Reading Text: Maldives Island



Maldives, officially the Republic of Maldives, is an island country consisting of a group of atolls stretching south of India's Lakshadweep islands between Minicoy Island and the Chagos Archipelago, and about seven hundred kilometres (435 mi) south-west of Sri Lanka in the Laccadive Sea of Indian Ocean. The twenty-six atolls of Maldives encompass a territory featuring 1,192 islets, of which two hundred islands are inhabited.



The original inhabitants were Buddhist, probably since Ashoka's period, in the 3rd century BC. Islam was introduced in 1153. The Maldives then came under the influence of the Portuguese (1558) and the Dutch (1654) seaborne empires. In 1887 it became a British protectorate. In 1965, the Maldives obtained independence from Britain (originally under the name "Maldivian Islands"), and in 1968 the Sultanate was replaced by a Republic. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maldives>)

A proud history and rich culture evolved from the first settlers who were from various parts of the world travelling the seas in ancient times. The Maldives has been a melting pot of different cultures as people from different parts of the world came here and settled down. Some of the local music and dance for instance resemble African influences, with hand beating of drums and songs in a language that is not known to any but certainly represents that of East African countries. As one would expect there is a great South Asian influence in some of the music and dancing and especially in the traditional food of the Maldivians. However many of the South Asian customs especially with regard to women - for instance the Sub Continent's tradition of secluding women from public view - are not tenets of life here. In fact women play a major role in society - not surprising considering the fact men spend the whole day out at sea fishing. Many of the traditions are strongly related to the seas and the fact that life is dependent on the seas around us.

Dhivehi is the language spoken in all parts of the Maldives. English is widely spoken by Maldivians and visitors can easily make themselves understood getting around the capital

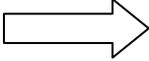
island. In the resorts, a variety of languages are spoken by the staff including English, German, French, Italian and Japanese.

Maldives <http://www.visitmaldives.com/Maldives/fast-facts.php>

Activity 1

Students read the passage about Maldivian Island and using the information they gathered, they asked some questions to one another about the passage of Maldivian Island, so reading skill was integrated with speaking skill.

Using the newly-introduced information in the passage, the students asked some questions to one another. Reading skill was integrated with speaking skill.

Reading skill  Speaking skill

Some of the questions asked by the students during the lesson:

1)Where is Maldivian island?

Student :.....

2)Which culture influences some of the Maldives' local dance and music?

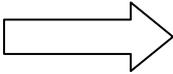
Student:.....

3)Which language is spoken over Maldives?

Student:.....

Activity 2

Students watched the advertisement about Maldivian Island. While they were watching it, they took some notes in order to get some information about the island, so listening skill was integrated with writing skill.

Listening skill  Writing skill

The advertisement about Maldivian Island:



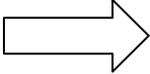


The photographs are taken from Maldives, Indian Ocean <http://www.checkmycity.com>

Students watched the advertisement called “Dream Maldives think Kuoni” and took notes while watching.

Activity 3

Using the information learned from the passage about Maldivian Island, the students prepared advertisements about Maldivian Island and shared these advertisements with the other students in the class, by doing so reading skill was integrated with writing skill.

Reading skill  Writing skill

A sample advertisement prepared by the students:

MALDIVE ISLAND



Come on an exciting holiday to Southwest of Sri Lanka, on the equator. See wonderful holiday places.



Dates : Ideal throughout the year but may be Rainy from May to September.

Let's Have Fun!

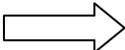
Weather: Sunny and Hot throughout the year except from May to September

You must bring light clothes.
You must have T-shirt, shorts and beach wear.
Don't forget to bring your camera in order to take the photo of beauty.
You must be at the airport at 8:00 on Monday morning.
The plane leaves at exactly 11:00.
Don't be late.
Bring your passport.

The photos are taken from Maldives. <http://www.visitmaldives.com/Maldives/fast-facts.php>

Activity 4

Students read the passage about Maldivian Island and searched some extra information about the island. Using this information, students wrote a dialog entitled "A Travel to Maldivian Island". Then the students shared the roles in the dialog and they carried out a role playing activity, which integrated writing skill with speaking skill.

Writing skill  Speaking skill

A dialog written by a group of students:

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10 : 9 September 2010

Selma Deneme, Ph. D. and Selen Ada, M.A. Student

An Application of Skills Integration in Language Teaching

A Travel to Maldiv Island

Ayşe: Let's go to Maldiv Island for our honeymoon dear. It is one of the best places for honeymoon.

Ahmet: That may be good. Where is Maldiv Island?

Ayşe: It is on the equator.

Ahmet: How can we go there?

Ayşe: Two airport companies are flying to Maldives. It takes 8 hours to fly there and no visa is needed.

Ahmet: Ok. Let's book our flights then.

In the Maldiv Island

Ayşe: At last we're in Maldiv Island. Let's plan our sightseeing.

Ahmet: There are so many things to see. I don't know where to begin.

Ayşe: Let's start with visiting sunken ship which is called "Victory". In order to see the ship, we can do scuba diving. So we can also see grey shagreen, see turtles, scorpion fish in addition to the sunken ship.

Ahmet: That is an amazing adventure.

Ayşe: Then the second day we can have an exotic island tour. Do you know that Maldiv Island is a republic which consists of 1.200 groups of atolls.

Ahmet: Really. I am getting impatient to see these atolls.

Ayşe: And we can visit the capital island of Male. In order to get there we must take a floatplane or a powerboat.

Ahmet: Ok. It is really exciting to go there by floatplane.

Ayşe: I think that'll be good enough for our holiday.

Ahmet: Yes, sure dear.

3. Conclusions & Recommendations

In this study, we suggested a lesson model integrating the language skills. With the help of the prepared lesson model, the teachers and the researchers came together and integrated the language skills-reading, listening, writing and speaking- in a chosen topic of "Maldiv Island". Applying the suggested model, we found that integration of language skills during the lesson affected the students' learning positively. They were highly motivated and student interaction was satisfactory. We achieved a smooth transition among the skills with suitable activities, which motivated the students very well and brought fun to the class. As the language skills were integrated with one another during the lesson, permanent and enjoyable learning was maintained. Due to the learning of the targeted topic, the students integrated the four language skills and used them in their lives.

We suggest language teachers integrate the language skills in their lessons as much as they can so that their students can better understand the school subjects and achieve permanent learning. By integrating the four skills in the language classrooms, we make classes more

challenging, motivating and meaningful for the learners of English as a second language. The lesson and activities presented in this paper may guide those who want to integrate the language skills in their classes providing them with a good model and some effective activities.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

LESSON	English
CLASS	8/A
SIZE	25 students
DATE	25.05.2009
AGE	14-15
LEVEL	Intermediate

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

17

10 : 9 September 2010

Selma Deneme, Ph. D. and Selen Ada, M.A. Student

An Application of Skills Integration in Language Teaching

SUBJECT	Maldiv Island
DURATION	2 lesson hours
APPROACH	Communicative approach
MATERIALS	The passage about Maldiv Island, advertisements
TECHNIQUE	Integration of language skills
ASSUMPTION	The students have already comprehended the necessary language to carry out the task

OBJECTIVES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overall Objectives : ■ General comprehension of the subject. ■ Activating the background knowledge of the students. ■ Learning new words ■ Developing reading skills. ■ Developing listening skills ■ Developing writing skills. ■ Developing speaking skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Behavioural Objectives : <li style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>At the end of the lesson the students will be able to</i> ■ understand the passage about Maldiv Island and ask questions about the passage (reading& speaking interaction) ■ learn new words and the information about Maldiv Island. ■ learn to prepare an advertisement using the information that is gathered from reading passages about Maldiv Island. (Reading & Writing interaction) ■ learn to write a dialog and act it out in the class. (Writing & Speaking interaction)

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