

Brooding over Integration of Skills in ELT Lessons: Reasons and Remedies

Firos Kalarikkal^{1*}, Dr. Mandvi Singh²

¹ Lecturer, University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Oman

¹ Research Scholar, Bansathali University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

² Associate Professor, Department of English & Modern European Language

Email: firveng@gmail.com

Abstract - Integration of skills approach has been gained the momentum in English language teaching since the 1980s. Growing demand for communicative competence of the graduate in the job market gave an impetus for the call for integrated skill approach. Effective integration of skill can bring better results in achieving learning outcome of the courses delivered in ELT/ESL/EFL settings too. Many scholars spoke about the effectiveness integration of skills. According to Jing (2006), integrated method is widely discussed and recognized as the best mean for the development of communicative competence. This pertains the ever-widening need of a learner to be involved in a process meeting real life challenges of using a foreign language. He substantiates his argument by saying that multiple skills are used for communication in day- to-day life. To achieve this objective, integration of language skills will be most reliable instructional method to take learners to the higher levels of communicative ability in the language. The motto 'English for life' is not achieved though there are many English language courses which are tailor made for this. There are many factors that contributed to this issue. Therefore, a careful study about the issue will be timely and worth conducting to shed light to the cardinal issues that prevail in the sector. This paper is based on the study conducted among the lecturers and students of Preparatory Studies Program (PSP), a foundation study program for the undergraduate, at English language Centre of the Ibra branch of University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS)-Oman. The paper propounds remedies on the vital challenges.

Keywords - ELT, integration of skills, communicative competence etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The ultimate target of language learning has been a single point and that is communicative competency of the language. Though this is the envisaged aim of each and every language lesson, many a time is not achieved. Educators face many challenges to bring better results in ELT lessons both in face to face classes and online classes. The main reason for this adverse situation is said to be the reluctance to get a paradigm shift to integrated skill approach from the traditional segregated skill method of teaching. In some occasion, teachers adopt the former, but result still remain unchanged! However, the tendency to adopt integrated skill approach is more in picture since early 1980s. According to Jing (2006), integrated method is widely discussed and recognized as the best mean for the development of communicative competence. This pertains the ever-widening need of a learner to be involved in a process meeting real life challenges of using a foreign language. He substantiates his argument by saying that multiple

skills are used for communication in day- to-day life. Standing with this point of view, Nunn (2006) also opined that the holistic approach for integrating skills in language lessons has gained prominence in the ELT world. Another scholarly opinion is that of Davies and Pearse (2000). They emphasized the importance of integrated skills approach by saying that that "Real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom." To achieve this objective, integration of language skills will be most reliable instructional method to take learners to the higher levels of communicative ability in the language.

Communicative English courses are there in the world of ELT. However, getting a paradigm shift from the traditional mode of segregate skill approach of language teaching seems to be herculean task for educators and learners. This reluctance impedes the envisaged results of the English language courses which are designed to meet the needs of modern

world. There are many factors that contributed to this issue. Klimova (2014) rightly observed that teachers might have been influenced by the notion that teaching language skills separately would make the learners an 'accurate' user of language. This wrong notion needs to be corrected. The shortcomings need to be checked and solutions should be put forth. Therefore, this study looked into the pertaining issues in connection with proper integration of skills in ELT lessons and came up with relevant findings and recommendations. The responses collected from the stake holders – students and teachers- pave the way to have reliable conclusions on which the ELT community can get some insights to reduce the depth of the failures. This study predominantly examined the attitude of learners and teachers towards having integrated skills in English lessons. It also checked their habit and experience on the practice of including multi skills in day-to-day lessons.

The current study was done based on two key points: the reasons and remedies for the glitches for having successful integration in ELT lessons. It is assumed that there must be reasons which belong to the stake holder's study habit to affect integration of skills in lessons. In order to find solutions, the research formalized a questionnaire to examine the state mind of the students and teachers.

This study had the following research questions:

1. Why integrated skill approach is felt hard to apply in ELT/ESL settings especially when the lesson is given online?
2. What are the impeding factors to have successful integration of skills in English lessons?
3. How can educators ensure better application of integrated skill approach in their lessons?
4. What are the ways by which educators motivate students and get them engaged in multi skill tasks of the lessons?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration of skill in English language teaching is considered to be the solution for the lack of language competency for everyday life of individuals. This paramount aim, in many instances, is not achieved due to several factors. Many studies have taken place in this area and findings were put forth to have better application of skill integration in ELT lessons. However, educators perplex when it comes for integration of skill approach in online lessons. This literature review aims to explore the factors that hinder the implementation of integrated skills teaching, as well as the benefits and attitudes towards this approach.

One observation related to the success of integration of skill practice in ELT online lesson is to do with the motivation of the students. Teachers, as Irdalisa et al. (2021) opined, need to develop more sense of curiosity in the minds of students so that they will more

positive minded to engage in class room activities and get a kind of self- satisfaction. This will help them to be relieved from the boredom and contribute to the achievement of the learning objectives of the lesson. This can be substantiated when we examine various studies that claimed the usefulness of integration of skills in supporting both learners and teachers in EFL scenario. Mitrofanova & Chemezov (2011) stated that both learners' and educators' attitude towards having integration of skill in ELT lessons greatly progressed and the practice is highly welcomed by the stake holders. This leads to better achievement in all the language skills. Akram & Malik, (2010) also said that having integration of skills is supportive for both students and teachers. For example, writing task can be preceded by the reading.

Studies have shown varied types of obstacles to have successful integration in ELT online lessons. One of the most prominent impediments is students' factors such as low motivation, attitudes, and language proficiency. Tahriri, & Tous, (2015) pointed out that students with low motivation, poor language skill, and negative attitudes towards their teachers and peers may impede integrated language skills teaching. However, being constant on practicing integration skills can take these students into the main stream of the class day by day. Therefore, teachers should not skip having integrated skills practice in their day to day teaching activities.

Educators need to bring variety of learning activities, to give a sense of natural usage of the language among the learners. Students should not feel that the lesson is fabricated. Dawid (2004), is of this opinion. He stated that this approach increases students' skill to express themselves and use the language more naturally, taking them to achieve learning outcomes.

On the contrary, some scholars believe that integration of skill in lessons can be impeded with teachers' factors also. As research conducted by Taylor W. Acee, et al (2010) stated that boredom (motivation) occurs because of the level of ease and difficulty of tasks allowed by individuals. In addition, there are obstacles during the learning process, some changes occur to students which ultimately affect their learning motivation.

Shai (2016) is of the opinion that teachers' lack of expertise and lack of knowledge on how to implement successful integration of skill may result in dismay. These sort of teachers may tactically stand away from implementing it or reluctantly do. Either of these will end in the failure of integration of skill in their lessons. Some teachers' belief should be corrected as they think combining two skills at a time is impossible pedagogically. These set of teachers are worried about the time management in the lesson and they fear integration of skills approach is time –consuming and assessment of it can be a hurdle.

One of the resort to ensure integration of skill in ELT lesson is project-based learning. It is an innovative learning method that stresses contextual learning through intricate activities. Project Based Learning (PBL) allows students to broaden their knowledge and learning skills so that learning becomes more meaningful and learning activities become more interesting. Salmon (2004) also asserted that synchronous online learning is similar to face to face traditional classroom, which the participants can access, interact with others and collaborate in real-time using the internet in different places.

There many strategies and techniques were put forth by the scholars to implement integration of skills in ELT/EFL contexts. According to McDonough & Show (2003), the most effective way is to intervening a pattern that progress from a receptive skill to a productive skill. In this way a listening activity can lead into speaking and a reading activity can lead into a writing task. Whatever the method the teachers adopt, sequencing activities to make language practice during the lesson should be ensured. In the above mentioned model of sequencing – receptive to productive- the learner is provided with a much enjoyable authentic text, a video, or a listening tape script to read, watch or listen. After they do this activity, the students can be prompted to take notes and later they develop these notes into a full-fledged spoken account or writing piece.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework of the study includes a few variables. They are namely students' engagement in online ELT lessons, suitability of integration of skills, technology assistance in integrating skills. There are also some other variables that the researcher wished to explore more on this study. The researcher mainly wanted to see how effective is the integration of skills practice in online ELT lessons.

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the input from the main stake holders of the topic – teacher. The paper is based on the study conducted among the lecturers at Preparatory Studies Program (PSP), a foundation study program for the undergraduate, at English language Centre of the Ibra branch of University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS)-Oman. The study mainly concentrated elements that make the tutors and students unenthusiastic to have lesson with integrated skill approach.

Sample

A pre-research interview was conducted among the cross section of the population of this study to find out the basic tendency of the stake holders of the course offered at the university towards employing integration of skill approach in the lesson provided. This revealed how frequent the integrated skill lesson is conducted

and how the students accepted it. Total 120 persons from teaching and student community were approached for their responses on the researching topic. In order to facilitate the smooth running of this interviews and to avail the true information, a set of 10 interview questions was prepared to ask.

Procedures

Once the interviews and survey were done and the responses collected, this data was screened well and questionnaire for the surveys for the actual data was formed accordingly. As this is the main data for this study, it traced the areas like classroom management, assessment strategies and methods, selection of learning materials etc. Therefore, this was to be collected from much larger group of respondents. Among these respondents, teachers and students from all the four levels of the preparatory studies program were included. Since these respondents were given anonymous status on their response, true and reliable feedback was ensured. Thus, this study truly represented the sentiments of the stake holders and thereby, this study enjoys the credibility and reliability. It contains the glitches that teachers face for having successful integration of skills in their lessons. It also revealed the reasons for learners' thought on lessons with integrated skills.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected was carefully analyzed with the help of PSPP. Analysis offered new insights and recommendations to address the pertinent issues for getting successful integration in the lessons. This brought the forms of challenges for both in face to face and online lessons of English language teaching and learning. As a result, the study recommended certain steps to foster integration of skills in the ELT lessons. More recommendations were for more online lessons as the number of stake holders, teachers and learners, were more who worry about the integration of skills in Online lessons. The study also covered the effectiveness of the strategies to incorporate Content Based Language Teaching (CBLT), Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to assure successful integration of skills in lessons.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that there is mixed feeling among both teachers and students towards having integration of skills in ELT lessons especially when it come s to online learning. The table below illustrates the data more vividly.

For the question asking whether Online ELT lessons is very interesting or not, the response from the teachers and students is disappointing. Bothe stakeholders believe that integration is skills in ELT

online lesson can be challenging. Hence, lack of interest is there in them. Students showed less excitement in online lessons and there are many reasons for that including the lack of facilities to enable them to attend the lessons without fail.

The most striking note with the response seen was teacher's attitude towards having integration of skills practice in their classes. As they think it is a real challenge for them to implement it in every class, this study proposes in-service training for the ELT practitioners on successful integration of skills. It also to be noted that most of the teachers prefer to have face to face class to implement integration of skills practice in their lessons. It cements the fact that there should intensive training session for the educators to enable them to feel free to the practice of integrating skill in lessons.

Time constraints can act a constant hindrance for teachers to have successful integration of skill. Based on the responses received from the part of teachers, this study recommends much light teaching load and less number of learning objectives to be covered in each lesson. These steps will facilitate teachers to concentrate on their lessons well and prepare them for a successful lesson in which integration of skill practice sessions get ample time during the lesson. When the lesson is online, technological glitches also can cause in delay of delivery of the lesson content. Considering this fact also, less teaching load can be beneficial as far as integration of skill practice is concerned.

Student to student peer interaction is an integral part of integration of skill practice. Therefore, teachers need to make sure there are enough room for this. This study affirms that lack of ample knowledge and acquaintance with the features that many learning management systems provide caused shortfall. Properties like breakout rooms on MS teams and zoom applications are very little known to the educators or they are reluctant to use them in their lessons. The facilities on LMSs even enable the teacher to administer pair /group work during online sessions as efficiently as in face to face lessons.

Dealing tactically with the issue of weak motivation level among the students to participate in class activities, teachers need to tailor make each and every lesson carefully to appeal the learners group that they teach. Task-based teaching style is suggested by this study as many student respondents conveyed their concerns over the boredom that they feel during the lessons. This is a serious issue that the educators need to look at and to diversify their delivery of the lessons. If task-based approach is employed, students get more engaged in the lesson and they get ample opportunity to practice the content and targeted language within the time frame that the teacher set. And this is how teachers can make sure the desired learning objectives are achieved.

Institutional support is vital to ease the practice. Teachers need to be given autonomy to choose authentic or tailor made material that thinks suitable to achieve the Los. And it is mandatory for the institution to provide infrastructures to the faculty members to equip them with technology in demand.

CONCLUSION

The paramount aim of any ELT lesson is to get the learner to be competitive to use the language skills without any bar. This only will enable them to march ahead in any social settings and atmospheres viz., educational, business, professional settings. Getting a successful lesson with integration of skill in not a herculean task. It is true that the challenges are more when it comes to online lessons. However, with proper training and keeping updated with the technological advancement can boost the caliber of the teacher. In line with the literature review that mentions the factors that impede the successful practice of integration skill includes lack of teachers' efficiency. With proper channelization of the resources, teachers can turn into champions of very demanding practice of ELT world – Integration of skill!

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Corresponding Author

Firos Kalarikkal*

Lecturer, University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Oman

Research Scholar, Bansathali University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India