

Improving students' language skills through based on new integrated approaches in modern language teaching

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Annotation. This article provides new integrated approaches to improve students' language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing and proper implementation of it in the teaching process. In addition, the advantages of integrated language teaching and effective methods for its use in all types of English classes are discussed. The work also presents the role and importance of integrated approach to provide effective language classes. Moreover, integrating the skills allows you to build in more variety into the lesson because the range of activities will be wider. Students can have the opportunity to practice not only listening, but also speaking, reading and writing at the same time. Integrating the four language skills enhances the focus on realistic communication, which is essential in developing students' competence in English.

Keywords: integrated skills, listening, communicative competence, reading, writing, speaking, input, output, motivation, multi-layered, classroom, inner circle, primary language, second language, learner and teacher.

Introduction. Nowadays learning foreign languages is one of the most consequential issues which require proper attention to tackle, especially in our country. After the proclamation of Independence, to reinforce the youth's knowledge and education, a number of actions has been done. Notably, several areas of knowledge are determined every year in Uzbekistan, the development of which is given priority attention. In 2021 physics and foreign languages have become such areas. Teaching in foreign languages is conducted in 25 higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. Over the past 3 years, the number of applicants who have received a language certificate at the international level has increased tenfold. The education system is consistently developing to bring up educated and qualified individuals, and train specialists who keep pace with progress. The material and technical base of universities has been strengthened. Training of specialists in 64 new specialties has begun within the framework of joint educational programs with foreign countries.

Literature Review. In the last few decades, the proportion of native and non-native speakers has altered, but the way this has happened, and its implications, need to be explored further.

In 1985 Kachru described the world of English in terms of three circles. In the inner circle, he put countries such as Britain, the USA, Australia, etc. where English is the primary language. The outer circle contained countries where English had become an official or widely-used second language. These included India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc. Finally, the expanding circle represented

those countries where English was learned as a foreign language - countries such as Poland, Japan, Mexico, Hungary, etc. We have already seen how Kachru's numbers have been dramatically surpassed. But something else has happened, too. It was once assumed that there was some kind of inbuilt superiority for inner circle speakers [1; p.17]. They spoke 'better' English, and there were more of them. Among other things, this situation 'bred an extremely enervating inferiority complex among many a non-native speaker learner/teacher' [2; p.114].

As a result of English being spoken more as a second language around the world, a consensus has emerged that instead of talking about inner, outer, and expanding circle Englishes, we need to recognize "World Englishes" [3; p.159] or "Global English" [4, p.106]. World English belongs to everyone who speaks it, but it is nobody's mother tongue. Nobody owns English anymore, in other words – or perhaps we could say that we all, "native" and "non-native" speakers alike, own it together in a kind of international shareholders' democracy since whatever English we speak – Indian English, British English or Malaysian English – we have, or should have, equal rights as English Lasers. This does not mean, of course, that there are no "haves" and "have-nots" in World Englishes (as there are in any language where conflicting interests and ideologies are constantly at play. But it does mean, suddenly, that native speakers may actually be at a disadvantage, especially if we compare less educated native speakers with highly competent and literate second-language English users. The speaker of World English is, perhaps, capable of dealing with a wider range of English varieties than someone stuck with native-speaker attitudes and competence; indeed, as Rajagopalan suggests, anyone who can't deal with a Punjabi or Greek accent (or, as Canagarajah suggests, with an outsourced call center operative in Delhi or Kuala Lumpur speaking their own special English variety) is "communicatively deficient" [5; p. 115]. The emergence of global English has caused Kachru to propose a new circle diagram where language affiliation (and ethnicity) is less important than a speaker's proficiency. He still wishes to make a distinction between the inner core and everyone else, but outside that inner core, the main difference is between high and low-proficiency users [6; p.118].

Analysis and Result. Teaching a foreign language can be a challenging but rewarding job that opens up entirely new paths of communication to students. It's beneficial for teachers to have knowledge of the many different language learning techniques including ESL teaching methods so they can be flexible in their instruction methods, adapting them when needed.

Teachers tend to talk about the way we use language in terms of four skills - reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These are often divided into two types. Receptive skill is a term used for reading and listening, skills where meaning is extracted from the discourse. Productive skill is the term for speaking and writing skills, where students actually have to produce language themselves.

There is some concern about separating skills in this way, especially since they are seldom separated in real life. We might also want to question a once commonly-held view that receptive skills are somehow passive, whereas production skills are in some way more active. It is certainly the case that when we speak or write we are producing language and no one would argue with the idea that language activation takes place when we are doing this. But reading and listening also demand considerable language activation on the part of the reader or listener. We cannot access meaning unless our brains are fully engaged with the texts we are interacting with. In other words, we have to think to understand, using any or all of our language knowledge to get meaning from what we are seeing or hearing. But in any case, whether we are reading or speaking we often mix what we are doing with other skills, as we shall see below.

It makes little sense to talk about skills in isolation since, as Eli Hinkel points out, “in meaningful communication, people employ incremental language skills not in isolation, but in tandem” [7, p.113]. When we are engaged in conversation, we are bound to listen as well as speak because otherwise, we could not interact with the person we are speaking to (although some people, of course, are better listeners than others). Lecturers frequently rely on notes they have written previously, and people listening to lectures often write notes of their own. Even reading, generally thought of as a private activity, often provokes conversation and comment. Writing, too, is rarely done in isolation. Much of today's communication is electronic (via emails and text messages, for example). We read what people send to us and then reply fairly instantly. And even when we are writing on our own, we generally read through what we have written before we send it off. Sometimes, of course, this is not the case when dealing with emails and text messages, but writers and texters often regret sending their messages in haste. Clearly, therefore, if skill use is multi-layered in this way, it would make no sense to teach each skill in isolation. We will, therefore, look at how input and output are connected in the classroom, how skills can be integrated, and how skill and language work are connected.

Receptive skills and productive skills feed off each other in a number of ways. What we say or write is heavily influenced by what we hear and see. Our most important information about language comes from this input. Thus, the more we see and listen to comprehensible input, the more English we acquire, notice, or learn. This input takes many forms: teachers provide massive language input, as does audio material in the classroom and the variety of reading texts that students are exposed to. Students may read extensively or listen to podcasts. They may interact with other English speakers both inside and outside the classroom. But students get other input, too, especially in relation to their own output. When a student produces a piece of language and sees how it turns out, that information

is fed back into the acquisition process. Output - and the student's response to their own output - becomes input. Such input or feedback can take various forms. Some of it comes from ourselves, whether or not we are language learners. We modify what we write or say as we go along, based on how effectively we think we are communicating. Feedback also comes from the people we are communicating with. In face-to-face spoken interaction, our listeners tell us in a number of ways whether we are managing to get our message across. On the telephone, listeners can question us and/or show through their intonation, tone of voice or lack of response that they have not understood us. Teachers can, of course, provide feedback, too, not just when a student finishes a piece of work, but also during the writing process, for example, or when, acting as prompters or as a resource, they offer ongoing support. Figure 1 shows the dynamic relationship between input and output:

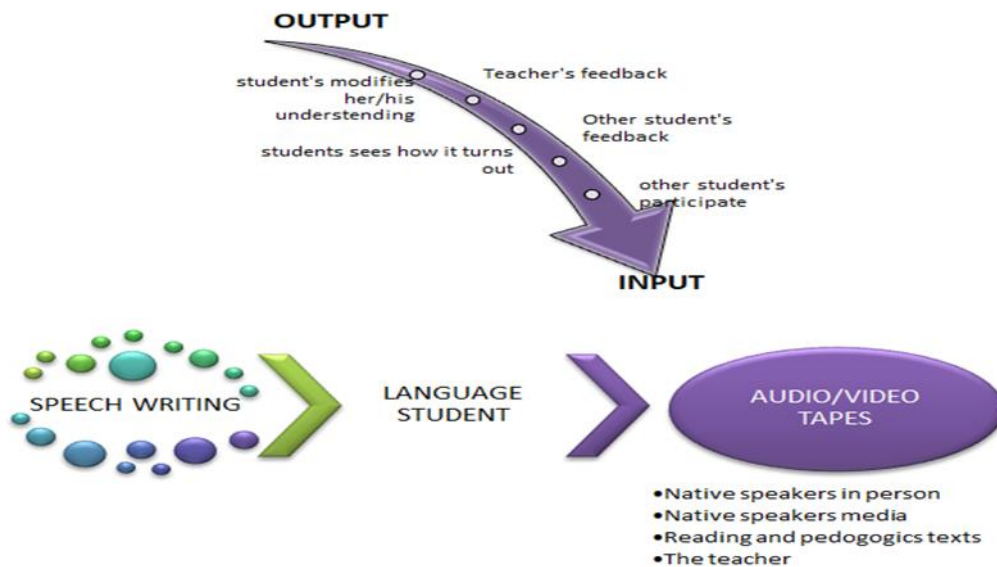


Fig. 1: The circle of input and output

In order to replicate the natural processes of skill-mixing which we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and also because we want to provide maximum learning opportunities for the different students in our classes, it makes sense to integrate different skills.

Speaking as preparation and stimulus: we often ask students to discuss a topic as a way of activating their schemata or engaging them in a topic that they are going to read or hear about. Speaking sessions allow students to investigate their thoughts and feelings about a topic. Frequently, too, speaking is part of a longer planning sequence.

Texts as models: especially where students are working with genre-focused tasks, written and spoken texts are a vital way of providing models for them to follow. One of the best ways of having

students write certain kinds of reports, for example, is to show them some actual reports and help them to analyze their structure and style; when getting students to give spoken directions, they will benefit from hearing other people doing it first. Productive work should not always be imitative, of course. But students are greatly helped by being exposed to examples of writing and speaking which show certain conventions for them to draw upon.

Texts as preparation and stimulus: much language production work grows out of texts that students see or hear. A controversial reading passage may be the springboard for discussion or for a written riposte in letter form. Listening to a recording in which a speaker tells a dramatic story may provide the necessary stimulus for students to tell their own stories, or it is the basis for a written account of the narrative. In this way, we often use written and spoken texts to stimulate our students into some other kind of work [8; p.14].

Integrated tasks: frequently we ask students to listen to something (a recorded telephone conversation, for example) and take a message or notes. We might ask them to prepare a spoken summary of something they have read or read the information on the Internet as preparation for a role-play or some other longer piece of work. Almost any speaking activity is bound to involve listening, of course, but sometimes when students are involved in some kind of cooperative writing they will be speaking, listening, writing, and reading almost simultaneously. Indeed, Task-based learning, or even just working on some single task, is almost predicated on the idea of skill integration, since it is usually impossible to complete a task successfully in one skill area without involving some other skill, too. Skill integration is a major factor in lesson planning. Weaving threads of different skills and topics is a major art of teachers who plan for a sequence of lessons. Skill integration also happens when students are involved in project work, which may well involve researching (through reading or listening), speaking (e.g. in discussions or when giving a presentation) and writing (e.g. submitting a report).

A typical procedure for getting students to read a written text or listen to a recording involves both Type 1 and Type 2 tasks. Type 1 tasks are those where we get students to read or listen for some general understanding, rather than asking them to pick out details or get involved in a refined search of the text. Type 2 tasks, on the other hand, are those where we get students to look at the text in considerably more detail, maybe for specific information or for language points. Moving from the general to the specific by starting with Type 1 tasks and going on to Type 2 tasks works because it allows students to get a feel for what they are seeing or hearing before they have to attack the text in detail, which is the more difficult thing to do. The procedure for teaching receptive skills generally starts with a lead-in. This is where we engage students with the topic of the reading and we try to

activate their schema (plural schemata), a term which was best described by Guy Cook as 'our pre-existent knowledge of the world' This is the knowledge that allows many British, Australian, West Indian, Pakistani and Indian people (for example) to make sense of headlines like England in six-wicket collapse (a reference to the game of cricket), whereas many Canadians would instantly understand what it means to be sent to the penalty box and why being sent there might give another team a power play (both terms come from ice hockey, Canada's national sport). All of us, at whatever age, but especially from late childhood onwards, have this pre-existent knowledge that we bring with us to all encounters with topics and events. The job of the receptive skills teacher, therefore, is to provoke students to get in touch with that knowledge or schema. They can then predict what a text is likely to be about, and what they are going to see or hear. We can provoke this kind of prediction by giving them various clues, such as pictures, headlines, or book jacket descriptions. We can give them a few words or phrases from the text and ask them to predict what these might indicate about its content. We can encourage a general discussion of the topic or ask students to make their own questions about what they are going to read about. Whatever alternative we choose, the point is that prediction is vitally important if we want students to engage fully with the text. Once students are ready to read, we set some kind of a comprehension task so that they will read or listen in a general way-trying to extract a mostly general understanding of what, superficially, the audio or written text is all about. The students read or listen to the text and then the teacher directs feedback. Here we may suggest that students go through the answers in pairs or small groups. This is partly so that they get more opportunities to work together, and partly so that when we go through the answers with the class, individual students do not get exposed as having failed in a task. Sometimes the teacher directs a text-related task immediately after this Type 1 task has been completed. A text-related task is any kind of follow-up activity and might be either a response to the content of the text or a focus on aspects of language in the text [9, p.360]. However, we will usually get the students to look at the text again for a Type 2 task in which they are required to examine it in more detail. The comprehension cycle is repeated and then the teacher involves the students in text-related tasks (of course, it is possible that students might be involved in more than one Type 2 task cycle).

A key factor in the success of productive-skill tasks is the way teachers organize them and how they respond to the student's work. Here we set down a basic methodological model for the teaching of productive skills. In the lead-in stage, we engage students with the topic. Perhaps we ask them what they know about a certain subject (e.g., we ask them what experience they have of tourism if we are going to have a tourism debate, or we might if we are going to role-play checking in at an airport, get them to think about the kind of conversation that usually takes place when people check-

in. When we set the task, we explain exactly what students are going to do [10; p. 225]. At this stage, we may need to demonstrate the activity in some way. For example, if we want students to work in pairs, we can show the class how the activity works by being one of the public pair ourselves so that everyone sees the procedure in action. We may get students to repeat the task instructions back to us (either in English or in their L1, depending on which is appropriate). We will also make sure that students are given all the information they need to complete the tasks (e.g. role cards, etc. for a role-play). Once the students have started, we will monitor the task [11; p. 230]. This may mean going around the class, listening to students working, and helping them where they are having difficulties. With writing tasks, we may become actively involved in the writing process as we respond to the student's work and point them in new directions. When the activity has finished, we give task feedback. This is where we may help students to see how well they have done. As we said, we will respond to the content of the task and not just to the language the students used. We will show positive aspects of what they have achieved and not concentrate solely on their failings. Finally, we may move on from the task with a task-related follow-up [12; p. 24].

Teachers, on the other hand, seem to be divided into two groups. Those that think about technique, and those that think about content. Let me try to represent this visually. The relationship between technique and content is like points on a graph. On the X axis, we have technique represented by this blue line, and on the Y axis, we have content, represented by the red line. Now, let me ask you a question. University teachers, are they more interested in content or technique?

Well, in my teaching experience, I would say that many university teachers care a lot about content. Perhaps this is because many perceive themselves as researchers, and writers of books and articles. I remember hearing one educational expert remark that professors think of their bodies as nothing more than transportation for their brains. As a teacher trainer myself, as I do training, I am often surprised at how few university teachers have received any training about technique at all. Isn't it weird that some of our brightest minds in the world have taken hundreds of courses, but never taken any courses, not one, on how to teach? They would fall into the high content, low technique area of the spectrum. At the other end of the spectrum, let's talk about teachers in primary and middle schools. Do they use techniques? In fact, before primary teachers are ever given a chance to teach students, they are often given many courses on how to teach, and make things both interesting and easily understood by students. They use colors, games, and stories. They use their hands and bodies. Bodies are not just transporting for their brains. They are taught techniques that break down information and make it easy for a learner to understand. Techniques, such as group work, flashcards, and color-coded board work. However, the opposite problem can often happen here. While techniques are usually

studied and utilized, sometimes primary and middle school teachers are not given the freedom to choose their own books and materials [13; p. 400].

And thus, they spend most of their time thinking about technique, and not about the content. Another problem in the balance of content and technique is the fun teacher. You know the one. His class is one game after another. You get to laugh a lot, he tells lots of funny stories about his three dogs, but how much have students learned? Do the games provide instruction, as well as, fun? [14, p. 113].

Do the stories teach a key learning point? Or has much of the valuable class time been more social than educational? This is not meant as a criticism of teachers on either end of the spectrum. Certainly, there are university teachers that use fantastic techniques and primary teachers who create amazing content. And a fun teacher can also be an excellent educator. The point is, and what I want you to consider, is who you are. And where you will find the happy balance between both content and technique. As you train yourself, as a language teaching professional, keep in mind the tremendous difference that both content and technique are important in delivering lessons.

One of my favorite images for teaching ESL/EFL is that of a tapestry. The tapestry is woven from many strands such as the characteristics of the teacher (e.g. personality, teaching style, beliefs about language learning, and prior experience), the learner (e.g. personality, learning style, language learning beliefs, and prior experience), the setting (e.g. available resources, institutional values, and cultural background), and the relevant languages (e.g. ESL or EFL, as well as the native language of the learner and that of the teacher). For the instructional loom to produce a large, strong, beautiful, colorful tapestry, the just-mentioned strands must be interwoven in positive ways. For instance, the instructor's teaching style must address the learning style of the learner, the learner must be motivated, and the setting must provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of the language. However, if the strands are not woven together effectively, the instructional loom is likely to produce something small, weak, ragged, pale, and not recognizable as a tapestry at all [15, p. 29]. Besides the four strands mentioned above-teacher, learner, setting, and relevant languages-other important strands exist in the tapestry. In a practical sense, one of the most crucial of these strands consists of the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The strand also includes associated or related skills such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. Optimal ESL communication is present when all the skills are interwoven during instruction. The Idea of Language-as-Skills Literacy-as well as language itself-is sometimes viewed as a set of skills. According to Barton, the skill image is a well-known, school-based metaphor. In this metaphor, "these skills are ordered into a set of stages and then taught in a particular order. Literacy is seen as a

psychological variable that can be measured and assessed. Skills are treated as things that people own or possess; some are transferable, and some are not. Learning to read becomes a technical problem, and the successful reader is a skilled reader. As a school-based definition of literacy, this view is very powerful, and it is one which spills over into the rest of society” [16; pp. 85-87].

Although I adopt some parts of the language-as-skills idea, I reject others. For instance, I agree that it is possible to assess the language skills. However, I do not think that the language-as-skills concept necessarily implies that language skills are divisible into clearly defined stages that should be taught in a particular order. Likewise, I do not think that learning to read (or to use language in general) is merely a technical problem, nor that a skill is something that one "possesses" like a baseball glove or a TV. Instead, I view the main skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and the associated skills (syntax, vocabulary, and so on) as overlapping areas of competence. The "skill strand" of the tapestry leads to optimal ESL communication when the skills are interwoven with each other during instruction. This is known as the integrated-skill approach.

In the segregated-skill approach, the mastery of discrete language skills like reading or speaking is seen as the key to successful learning, and there is typically a separation of language learning from content learning. This situation contradicts the integrated way that people use language skills in normal communication, and it clashes with the direction in which language teaching experts have been moving in recent years.

Skill segregation is reflected in traditional ESL/EFL programs that isolate language skills for instructional purposes. These programs offer classes with titles such as "Intermediate Reading," "Basic Listening Comprehension," "Advanced Writing," "Grammar I and II," "Pronunciation," and so on. Why do ESL/EFL programs offer classes that segregate language skills? For one thing, teachers and administrators might think it is logistically easier to present courses on writing divorced from speaking, or on listening severed from reading. For another thing, they may believe it is instructional impossible to concentrate effectively on more than one skill at a time.

In many instances, an ESL or EFL course is labeled by a single skill, but fortunately, this segregation of language skills might be only partial or might even be illusory. If the teacher is creative, a course bearing a discrete-skill title might actually involve multiple, integrated skills. For instance, in a course on "Intermediate Reading," the teacher probably gives some or all of the directions orally in English, thus causing students to use their listening ability to understand the assignment. In this course students might discuss their readings, thus employing speaking and listening skills and certain associated skills such as pronunciation, syntax, and social usage. Students might be asked to summarize or analyze readings in written form, thus activating their writing skills. In a real sense,

then, some courses that are labeled according to one specific skill might actually reflect an integrated-skill approach after all [17; p. 65].

The two types of integrated-skill ESL/EFL teaching are content-based language instruction and task-based instruction. The first of these emphasizes learning content through language while the second stresses doing tasks that require communicative language use. Both of these benefit from a diverse range of materials, textbooks, and technologies in the ESL or EFL classroom. In content-based instruction, students practice all the language skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion while learning content such as science, mathematics, and social studies. Content-based language instruction is valuable at all levels of proficiency, but the nature of the content might differ by proficiency level. For beginners, the content often involves basic social and interpersonal communication skills, but past the beginning level, the content can become increasingly academic and complex. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach shows how language learning strategies can be integrated into the simultaneous learning of content and language [18; p. 55].

At least three general models of content-based language instruction exist: theme-based, adjunct, and sheltered. The theme-based model integrates language skills into the study of a theme (for example, urban violence, cross-cultural differences in marriage practices, natural wonders of the world, or a broad topic such as "change"). The theme must be very interesting to students and must allow a wide variety of language skills to be practiced, always in the service of communicating about the theme. This is the most useful and widespread form of content-based instruction today, and it is found in many innovative ESL and EFL textbooks. In the adjunct model, language and content courses are taught separately but are carefully coordinated [19; p. 58].

Task-Based Instruction Another mode of skill integration is task-based instruction in which students participate in communicative tasks in ESL or EFL. Tasks are defined as activities that can stand alone as fundamental units and that require comprehending, producing, manipulating, or interacting in authentic language while attention is principally paid to meaning rather than form. The task-based model is beginning to influence the measurement of learning strategies, not just the teaching of ESL and EFL. As the author of the original "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, I am currently leading a research group in developing a "Task-Based SILL". This new questionnaire allows students to assess their own learning strategy use as related to specific language tasks [20, p. 61]. In task-based instruction, basic pair work and group work are often used to increase student interaction and collaboration. For instance, students work together to write and edit a class newspaper, develop a television commercial, enact scenes from a play, or take part in other joint tasks. More structured cooperative learning formats can also be used in task-based instruction. Task-based

instruction is relevant to all levels of language proficiency, but the nature of the tasks varies from one level to the other. Tasks become increasingly complex at higher proficiency levels. For instance, beginners might be asked to introduce each other and share one item of information about each other. More advanced students might do more intricate and demanding tasks such as taking a public opinion poll at school, the university, or a shopping mall. I advocate a combination of task-based and theme-based instruction in which tasks are unified by coherent themes. This combination is becoming a trend in ESL/EFL instruction.

The integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated-skill approach, exposes ESL/EFL learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturalistically in the language. In the integrated-skill approach, learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. Moreover, the approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest or merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. This approach allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time. Integrating language skills also promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms. Finally, the integrated-skill approach (whether found in content-based or task-based language instruction or some hybrid form) can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds [21, p.128].

In order to integrate language skills in ESL/EFL instruction, teachers should consider taking these steps: Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom (e.g., content-based, task-based, or a combination). Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated. Choose instructional materials, textbooks, and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking, and writing as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary, and so on. Even if a given course is labeled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate tasks. Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills.

Moreover, we need to keep in mind some important information about the ideas and beliefs of our classroom while teaching ESL/EFL students. What really comes across when you read the book *Left Back*, which is a history of American educational policy over the last hundred years, is that there has always been a certain amount of tension about what a school was for. The author Diane Ravitch finds that when we look at the American education system, one of the ideas that have grown increasingly popular is the view that school can be a place that solves the problems of society. If there is a problem on the streets with homophobia, healthy eating, or integration, for example, then we try

to solve it with anti-homophobic education, lessons on obesity, or discussion groups on tolerance. However, the more a school focuses on social policy the more they are distracted from what they are really there to do, which is to educate kids. With careful reflection and planning, any teachers can and strengthen the tapestry of language teaching and woven well, learners can use English effectively for communication [22; p. 21].

Conclusion. We often use more than a single language skill when we communicate. The integrated approach helps to build new knowledge and skills on to what students already know and can do. So, if students are able to read a short story, this skill will help them to write their own story. Also, integrating the skills allows you to build in more variety into the lesson because the range of activities will be wider. Instead of just listening, the students can have speaking, reading, and writing practice. This can raise their motivation to learn English. Integrating the four language skills enhances the focus on realistic communication, which is essential in developing students' competence in English. Two ways of integrating skills: simple integration, whereby a receptive language skill serves as a model for a productive language skill, and complex integration, which is a combination of activities involving different skills, linked thematically.

Integrated language learning can be more motivating because the students are using the language for a real purpose, in-stead of, say, just practicing the grammar. Integration requires skillful teaching, but it can bring worthwhile results.

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