

# An investigation into teaching writing practices via integrated skills approach

## A case of Banking Academy

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**Abstract:** This study intends to investigate the benefits and challenges associated with teaching writing practices that employ the integrated skills approach for English-majored students at Banking Academy. The purpose of the study is also to offer solutions to the difficulties EFL instructors face when teaching writing skills. A qualitative methodology with the assistance of two instruments, namely the writing of diaries and semi-structured interviews, was employed in the study. The findings revealed that this method could arouse students' motivation and enhance their writing performance; nevertheless, some aspects, including learners' lower level of proficiency, class size and time restriction, might have a negative influence on teaching practices. Some solutions to the constraints impeding the adoption of the integrated skills approach when teaching writing skills were offered.

**Keywords:** Teaching writing and integrated skills approach

### 1. Introduction

The usage of English as a primary medium for the global dissemination of information and knowledge in various areas drives learners to master communicative English. Hinkel (2010) highlighted the great importance of English communicative competence in the real world. Given that it aims to teach language as a means of communication to fulfill the purpose for which it was originally intended, which can be both motivating and realistic, integrative language skills instruction appears to be the most effective method for achieving these goals (Tsung-Yuan & Oxford, 2002). Great potential and effectiveness of the integrative skills approach have been clarified by quite a few researchers. According to Hinkel (2010), employing integrated language skills teaching approaches aims at leading students to become more accurate and fluent communicators across sociocultural contexts. However, many teachers still apply the segregated skills teaching by presenting one skill separately from the others. The segregation of language skills is also found in courses designed in many EFL curriculums. In detail, these courses only focus on skills one by one, which means speaking isolated from listening or writing separated from reading. The primary reason for the skills separation lies in considerably simpler teaching methods based on the syllabus focusing one skill. Other explanation can be the teachers'

conventional perception towards teaching practices. They may have been influenced by the idea that teaching language skills separately would allow learners to have greater exposure to the language and then make the learners "accurate" users of language (Klimova, 2014, p. 88).

Despite its widespread use of teaching integrated skills in different contexts, there have never been any studies conducting on this topic at Banking Academy (BA). Therefore, further study is urgently needed to investigate the impacts of using the integrated skills method in EFL writing instruction in BA. In order to teach EFL learners both productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (reading and listening) skills along with their subskills, the current research examines the writing teaching practices in an English language institute that uses the integrated skills approach.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Integrated skills approach

The integrated skills approach is defined as a method of teaching of the four main language skills namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing and their sub-skills. This approach emerged from communicative language approaches as a reaction to more traditional approaches in the field of ELT (Hinkel, 2010).

#### 2.2. The benefits of teaching integrated skills

The notion of teaching integrated skills has

been investigated in various settings. Al-Dosari (2016), for instance, looked at the effects of teaching utilizing the integrated skills method against the segregated skills approach. Her research assessed how satisfied students were with the integrated skills instruction and examined whether students' opinions of the segregated skills instruction altered over the study. The study's conclusions supported integrated skills instruction since the majority of participants said it gave them lots of chances for real-world communication in the classroom, while only a small percentage believed language skills should be taught separately.

Current research has shown that skill integration benefits students as well as teachers because it encourages teachers to employ various learning activities, supports learners with natural language competence, enhances students' capacity for self-expression and successfully improves learning outcomes (Akram & Malik, 2010). In line with it, such teaching practice can be a hinderance on account that it cannot lead to optimal learning process and outcome and help learners get a comprehensive language development (Mekheimer, M., 2011). Sharing the same idea, Al-Dosari (2016) claimed that separated skills teaching might facilitate learners in developing their knowledge of the language, but it does not allow them to apply it in real-world communication. What is more, he enumerated some benefits of teaching integrated skills. Firstly, learning at all competency levels is made more relevant and purposeful by the integration of language skills. Secondly, it creates diversity in the classroom activities, allowing instructors to enhance learning.

### ***2.3. Teaching writing through the integrated skills approach***

The integration of writing and other language skills, such as reading, listening, and speaking can eventually enable learners to use communicative language. For example, linking reading and writing may create opportunities for listening and speaking at the same time. Nevertheless, Hinkel (2010) also pointed out that the integrated skills teaching might be demanding for both instructors and learners. Hence, it is essential to keep in mind that not all learners will achieve high level of language competence in writing, as first language interference may result in producing unacceptable forms. Mezrigui (2016) further explained that more efficient outcomes will be achieved in writing exercises if skill integration is practiced consistently.

As Mezrigui (2016) stated, some teachers often complain about the shortage of time in EFL classes utilised with the integrated skills approach. According to him, teachers do not have sufficient time to complete all class activities, which, thus, causes some tasks to be assigned as homework.

### **3. Research aims & research questions**

This research was conducted with an aim to investigating teaching writing practices via integrated skills approach for majored freshmen at BA. Therefore, this study research aims at responding the two following research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of integrated skills approach facilitate teaching writing practice

2. What are challenges of teaching writing practices via integrated skills approach?

3. What are possible solutions to the challenges of teaching writing practices via integrated skills approach?

### **4. Methodology**

The study was conducted in an EFL classroom at Banking Academy with students at intermediate level. This English language course was taught to students using textbooks that encompass all language skills. Thus, writing lessons were delivered via the integrated skills approach. Ten teachers from Faculty of Foreign Languages, Banking Academy participated in the research. A qualitative methodology with the assistance of two instruments, namely the writing of diaries and semi-structured interviews, was employed in the study. Data collected from these instruments were analysed based on certain themes.

### **5. Results & Discussion**

The results of the study revealed different views in terms of the benefits and obstacles of teaching writing through the integrated skills approach and some solutions to deal with the encountered challenges.

#### ***5.1. The benefits of employing integrated skills approach in writing lessons***

This emerging theme indicates how teaching writing through the integrated skills approach has an effective role when it comes to the output stage in the language classroom. As stated by the teachers who participated in the research, this approach helps the students improve their writing because of the vocabulary, grammar and knowledge they gain from other activities. More importantly, the input they grab from reading, listening and speaking is actually valuable for their students to make their

own compositions more natural, vivid and realistic. This finding goes in line with the study conducted by Al-Dosari (2016) who explored that their students' writing significantly improved when reading and writing skills were integrated. This shows how important it is for skill integration to support students' writing development in an EFL context. It is because of the fact that the integrated skills method gives students comprehensive input. Added to this, most interviewees pointed out that the classroom atmosphere becomes much more lively and motivating by dint of a number of activities employed in integrated skills approach.

### **5.2. Difficulties of teaching Writing through the Integrated Skills Approach**

The first challenge the participants encountered when teaching writing through the integrated skills approach presented by the first participant was the matter of time. Most of them were worried about lacking time to employ other skills to teach writing. As a result, they tended to be confused if gathering all the skill activities and practice them with writing. In addition, students' maximum focus seemed to be only during the first half of the lesson. Therefore, writing introduced and practiced after other skills may not get their full attention. In some cases, the students would be too confused and impatient to wait for their writing compositions to be corrected.

Secondly, the level of the students' proficiency seems to constitute the challenge as reported by the teachers. Students might not have the imagination; the critical thinking skills to be able to come up with reasons and examples. Their vocabulary was limited and they learned the vocabulary for the sake of passing exams. They would reverse back to basic language instead of using new vocabulary that they learned. And when it comes to writing, as well, some tended to write as they spoke, or Google translated it in their head, so it came out in the wrong word order.

Last but not least, all of participants agreed that classes with a high number of students could be an obstacle to teaching writing. It was hard to both teach writing skill via various skill activities and give feedback to all students.

### **5.3. Solutions to obstacles of teaching writing**

The results offer potential remedies for the issues raised by the study's participants. Time seems to have a negative impact on teaching writing skill, as previously mentioned, particularly during the feedback and correction phase. This is similar to

Mekheimer, M. (2011) finding that it takes a lot of effort and time to correct grammar mistakes and give feedback to students in big classrooms. It was noted that several students sent their drafts by email for revision because of the large number of students. While it may seem like a good idea, some students often asked for assistance from others when writing their drafts, which might not accurately represent their writing ability. Therefore, it is vital that teachers should be trained with effective time management since the integrated skills approach requires more time than teaching with a segregated skills approach.

Regarding the students' proficiency levels, it was discovered that the use of first language can benefit weaker students. Added to this, introducing the form or vocabulary might help them to confidently compose the writing task.

As for the big-size classes, it is vital that the institute policymakers should reduce students' number in classes so that teachers and students can get more fruitful results.

## **6. Conclusion**

Overall, the results show how effective and crucial it is to teach EFL writing using the integrated skills approach in order to give students comprehensible input. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this approach in an EFL classroom can be influenced by the students' vocabulary deficiencies and proficiency level. It is also demonstrated how teaching EFL writing is adversely affected by the number of pupils and time restrictions. This finding is consistent with earlier research that found that two factors influencing integrated skills-based instruction are large classes and time constraints. As a result, educational institutions may decide to decrease the number of students in language courses and increase the amount of time dedicated to teaching writing skill.

## **References**

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