PROPOSING AND TESTING AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVE EFL STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILL

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Abstract

An experimental study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using an integrative approach to improve EFL students' communicative skill .This was done by comparing the oral performance of the subjects who were taught grammar, listening, reading and speaking integratively to that of the subjects who were taught the same skills separately.

The subjects of the study comprised 105 female students from the first level in the International Academy for Health Sciences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The subjects were in two specialities: nursing and pharmacy. The nursing group was assigned as the experimental group while the pharmacy group was assigned as the control. They were given an oral pre- test before the start of the study and no significant difference in language proficiency was found between the two groups. The experimental group was taught grammar ,listening ,reading and speaking integratively, while the control group was taught the same skills separately .At the end of the study the two groups were post- tested orally. Both groups were taught and rated by the researcher herself. Results of the study revealed that a statistically significant difference existed ($p<0.05$) between the two groups of the study on the oral post- test in favor of the experimental

group. Based on this study, an integrative teaching of grammar, listening, reading and speaking is proposed as a means to improve EFL students' communicative skill.

Keywords – integrative teaching, communicative skill, grammar, listening, reading.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The primary goal of teaching English as a foreign language in most EFL programs is to increase students' proficiency in the foreign language skills ; reading , writing , and listening in general and in speaking in particular. In addition to being an important skill, speaking is also a great challenge for foreign language learners. The difficulty of learning to speak accurately and fluently is reflected in the number of sub skills that are corporate in the oral production. Another challenge which faces the EFL students is the few opportunities to speak English outside classroom. (Littlewood, 1992). Most learners master the language skills but they cannot communicate fluently and accurately. (Hinkel, 2001). Researchers now agree that there is no solution but reform by changing the way English is taught.(Chang,2000; Elli,2002)A reasonable solution is to propose a more integrated approach which usually follows the principles of the communicative approach.(Fink,2003; Huber., Hutchings & Gale ,2005; Lorents,Morgan,&Tallman,2003; and Canale &Swain. 1980)

There has recently been a general dissatisfaction with the traditional approach of teaching language skills separately. In an age of globalization, there is an increased value on integrated multiskill instructional models with a focus on developing learners `communicative competence. For example, teaching reading can be easily tied to instruction on writing and vocabulary. Pronunciation can be tied to listening, and cultural features of communication (Hinkel,2001; Lazaraton,2001; Kasper&Rover,2009) .Reading is integrated with speaking (Zhang,2009) and vocabulary(Coady&Huckin,1997) .Grammar can be tied to different language skills.

Turuk(1999) tested the hypothesis that teaching reading and writing integratively in L2 classrooms enhances students intellectual processes in writing compared to the teaching of these two skills separately. The subjects of the study consisted of 43 high school students From 60 students in Malaysia. Two classes were randomly selected for the study. The subjects were given writing pre- test. Then the

two classes were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught reading and writing integratively, while the control group was taught the same courses separately. At the end of the study the two groups were post-tested .The findings showed that the integrative teaching of reading and writing enhanced students intellectual processes in writing (t=2.110, df=36, p <0.05). The study recommended integrative teaching of reading and writing in L2 classroom. (Turuk, 1999)

Viwat,et.al.'s pilot study (2003) examined the impact of coordinating classes with a common syllabus on students' English improvement and attitudes toward language learning. Subjects were ESL Japanese college students. They took three English classes per week. The three courses were divided into three language skills (speaking, listening, and reading). Before the beginning of classes, lessons were linked and a common textbook was selected. The study hypothesized that students who were in linked classes with a common grammar-based syllabus would make more progress in their English studies and would have more positive attitudes toward learning English than students who took classes separately. Results supported the hypotheses. However, the study didn't focus on the participants' communicative skill.

Linguists also realized the fact that communicative lessons which neglect grammar cannot develop language accuracy. (Williams, 1995; Schmidt, 1993) Garrett (1986) drew attention to the role of grammar in facilitating communicative ability. (Mitchell and Redmond, 1993) called for the integration of grammar and communication through the use of contextualized activities. (Murphy, 1991) emphasized that focused attention upon a single component of oral communication is insufficient and that speaking, listening, and pronunciation should be integrated. He claims that in the teaching of ESL, speaking, listening, and pronunciation need to be placed within the broader context of oral communication.

Because of the lack of empirical studies to prove the effectiveness of integrating courses on students' spoken language progress , this study tests empirically the validity of integrating grammar, listening, speaking and reading and proposes applying this integrative approach to improve EFL Saudi female students' communicative skill.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of 105 female students of the first level in the International Academy for Health Sciences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The students were assigned to different classes according to their speciality: nursing and pharmacy. There were 55 students in the nursing class and 50 students in the pharmacy class. The nursing group was assigned as experimental while the pharmacy group was assigned as control. They will all go on training in hospitals after they pass the second level. For all students, English was a foreign language. They all have studied English for six years prior to the study. Subjects were given an oral pre –test before the start of the study and no significant differences were found between the two groups.

2.2. Materials

Since the aim of this experimental study was to compare the performance of the subjects who were taught grammar, Reading, listening and speaking integratively to that of subjects who were taught them separately, two types of materials were used: materials for data collection and materials for instruction. The materials for data collection consisted of the oral pre-test and post-test.The two tests were conducted by the researcher .The language laboratory was used to test all subjects at the same time. All subjects were given the same number of pictures and duration of time. One rater (the researcher) listened to the tapes and rated them according to the following five parameters: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehensibility, with five points allocated to each parameter.

2.2.1. Materials for Data Collection:

2.2.1.1. The Oral Pre-test:

This test was used to measure the two groups' proficiency in English and ensure groups' equality with reference to that proficiency. Each subject was given three pictures and was asked to talk about them within ten minutes without any prompting from the researcher. Their speech was tape recorded. They were rated by the researcher herself according to the following five parameters: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehensibility, with five points allocated to each criterion.

2.2.1.2. The Oral Post-test:

This test was given 12 weeks after the completion of the instruction. The goal of that test was to test the long term retention**.** The same procedure in the oral pre-test was followed. The test was also conducted and rated by the researcher.

3. PROCEDURES:

3.1. Instructural Procedure

3.1.1. Control Group

The teaching method used with this class was the audio-lingual approach where grammar, listening, Reading and speaking are taught separately. The instructor met with this class four times a week and each lesson lasted for a period of 100 minutes; that means they received 400 minutes of instruction. The instructor divided these four periods into four different classes: grammar, listening, reading and speaking.

3.1.2. Experimental Group

The experimental group received an integrative instruction where grammar, listening, Reading and speaking are taught integratively. The instructor started the lesson by giving the students a passage to read then the main ideas were to be discussed orally .After a long oral discussion, the students are asked to listen to a recorded conversation on a related topic. The intended grammatical structure would be focused on implicitly. Integrative learning is a learning theory which emphasizes breaking down the walls between courses and making connections between them. It also focuses on looking at the courses as a whole rather than discrete part (Walker, 1996). The instructor met with this class two times a week and each lesson lasted for a period of 200 minutes. During the 400 minutes, the students were taught grammar, listening, reading and speaking integratively.

3.2. Statistical Procedure

The statistical procedures used in the present study were selected because of their appropriateness for the collected data. Means and standard deviations were reported. In addition, the reliability of the oral pre- test and post- test were assessed by using Cronbach Alpha (α).Analysis of variance (ANOVA), two-factor Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (RMANOVA)and t-test statistics were utilized to detect any significant differences between the control and experimental groups . Schēffe's test was used to investigate the source of the observed difference. The significant level was set at $p<0.05$.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Oral Pre-test

Means of subjects' scores on the oral pre-test were calculated. See Table (1)

Table (1): Means of the subjects' scores on the oral pre-test

Sub-parts		Pronoun-ciation	Grammar	Vocabulary	Fluency	Comprehe-nsibility	Totals
Group	C	2.340	2.020	2.940	2.700	3.020	13.020
	E	2.382	1.673	2.236	2.345	2.891	11.527

C=Control group. E=Experimental group

Table (1) indicates that there was a slight difference in performance between the two groups on the oral pre-test. To ensure the statistical significance of the observed difference between the two groups, a Two-factor Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance was employed. This information is given in table (2)

Table (2): Two-factor Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (RMANOVA) for the difference between the subjects' scores on individual items of the oral pre-test.

Source	Df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	P
Group(A)	1	11.672	11.672	3.461	.0657
Subjects w.groups	103	347.338	3.372		
Treatment(B)	4	68.610	17.152	29.450	.0001
AB	4	8.228	2.057	3.532	.0075
B x subjects w.groups	412	239.962	.582		

The difference between the means of the subjects' scores on oral pre-test was not statistically significant (p=.0657). Since the F value was not significant at P<.05, no

further investigation was carried out.

It is obvious from the previous analyses and discussion that the control group and the experimental group are of almost equal level in their proficiency in English as a foreign Language.See table (3)

Table (3) Reliability and validity indices of the subjects' scores on the sub-parts of the oral post-test

Sub-part	Cronbach α	R2
Pronunciation	.9005	.897
Grammar	.8815	.916
Vocabulary	.8642	.780
Fluency	.8929	.985
Comprehensibility	.8136	.735
Total	.9176	.953

Table (3) shows that the oral post-test was of acceptable validity and reliability since R2 and Cronbach α indices were found to be relatively high.

The means of subjects' scores were calculated to investigate whether there was any difference in the performance between the two groups. See Table (4)

Table (4): Means of the subjects `scores on the oral post-test

Sub-parts		Pronoun-ciation	Grammar	Vocabulary	Fluency	Comprehe-nsibility	Totals
Group	C	1.860	3.060	1.640	1.940	2.580	11.080
	E	3.618	4.236	3.964	3.855	4.036	19.709

C=Control group. E=Experimental group

Table (4) indicates that the means of the experimental group`s subjects were higher than those of the control group's subjects. The highest difference was found in the fluency sub-part with the mean of 3.855 for the experimental group compared to the

mean of 1.940 for the control group. An independent-sample t-test was used to investigate the statistical significance of the difference between the two groups' total means. The t-value obtained was-11.380, and the difference was statistically significant at p=.0001, in favor of the experimental group.   To examine the statistical significance of the difference on the sub-parts level,   a two-factor Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance was employed. See Table (5)

Table (5): Two-factor Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (RMANOVA) for the difference between the subjects' scores on individual items of the oral post-test.

Source	Df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	P
Group(A)	1	390.035	390.035	129.507	.0001
Subjectes w.groups	103	310.205	3.012		
Treatment(B)	4	6.316	15.079	29.478	.0001
AB	4	20.129	5.032	9.837	.0001
B x subjects w.groups	412	210.755	.512		

As the table displays, the differences in performance between the two groups on the sub-parts of the oral post-test were statistically significant at p=.0001, in favor of the experimental group. The next step was to examine the source of that significant difference by using Scheffe post-hoc comparison test, See Table (6)

Table (6) Schēffe post-hoc comparison statistic for the difference between the subjects' means on the sub-parts of the oral post-test

Sub-part	Control group		Experimental group		Schēffe F

	SD	SE	SD	SE	
Pronunciation	1.161	.164	1.009	.136	68.915*
Grammar	1.077	.152	.719	.097	44.049*
Vocabulary	1.083	.153	.922	.124	140.798*
Fluency	1.077	.152	.891	.120	99.222*
Comprehensibility	1.126	.159	.961	.130	51.037*

*Significant at $p < .05$. SE=Standard Error

Table (6) demonstrates that all sub-parts of the oral post-test were source of the statistically significant difference at($p <.05$), in favor of the experimental group. The highest source of significance was found in fluency (F=140.798), then pronunciation (F=99.222), followed by comprehensibility (F=68.915), grammar (F=51.037) and vocabulary (F=44.049)

5. RESULTS

Research evidence revealed that a statistically significant difference existed ($p < 0.05$) between the two groups of the study in favor of the experimental group which was taught grammar, listening, reading and speaking integratively .The findings of the study support other studies   reported in the literature , such as Hinkel,2001; Lazaraton,2001; Kasper&Rover,2009; Zhang,2009 ; Coady&Huckin,1997 ; Viwat, Duppenthaler, Nishi &Podziewski, 2003;Turuk,1999 and Mitchell and Redmond,1993,which revealed that new method which integrated language skills is more effective than the traditional method that gave the same skills separately.
A possible reason for the experimental group's improvement in communication is the integrated approach of teaching which was not available to those in the control group. The most important advantage of the integrative approach is that it gave the students more time to communicate in English although they have been taught with no difference in duration of instruction time (400 minutes for each group). Another advantage of this approach is that the students were exposed to an instructional

method which exposed learners to conversational input and helped them to improve their own output. Based on these results, an integrative teaching approach is proposed to improve EFL students' communicative skill.

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