

Effectiveness of Integrated Skills Approach in Improving English Language Proficiency in Community Schools in Lamjung

Binod Neupane

Abstract

Article History:

Submitted 10 Jan 2024

Reviewed 19 May 2024

Accepted 30 July 2024

Corresponding Author:

Binod Neupane

Email:

nbinod2017@gmail.com

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/eltp.v9i1-2.68722>

Copyright information:

Copyright 2024 Author/s and Department of English Education, FoE, P.N. Campus

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- Non Commercial 4.0 International License



Publisher

Department of English Education
Faculty of Education, P. N. Campus,
Tribhuvan University, Nepal
Email: enged@pncampus.edu.np
URL: www.pncampus.edu.np

Various approaches and methods have been practised to facilitate learners in learning English as a second or foreign language in Nepal. The contemporary approaches to EFL/EFL have replaced the traditional language pedagogy focused on segregating language skills and implemented an integrated approach to language teaching. These pedagogical paradigms underline learning English interconnecting language skills and forms within authentic contexts. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the integrated approach in improving secondary-level students' English language proficiency in rural community schools in Lamjung district. Following a quasi-experimental research design guided by the post-positivist paradigm, I experimented with the effectiveness of the integrated approach with secondary-level students studying in Ninth Grade at a community school. The purposively selected students were divided into the experimental group and the control group, having 20 students in each group. After the intervention for a month, the average mean scores achieved by the students in the pre-test and the post-test were analysed statistically.

The findings showed the effectiveness of the integrated approach in improving secondary-level students' English language proficiency in community schools in Nepal. The experimental group performed better in all language skills than the control group. Similarly, students were satisfied with learning English through the integrated approach. The findings can have implications for reshaping the ELT pedagogy following the integrated skills approach at the secondary level.

Keywords: Communicative competence, control group, discrete approach, experimental group, integrated approach, quasi-experimental design

Introduction

There is always controversy regarding the appropriate approach and method of teaching English

as a second or foreign language (EFL/EFL). From the Grammar Translation (GT) method to post-method pedagogy, English language teaching (ELT) experts and theorists have different perspectives. For example, the Direct method came as a reaction to the GT method in the early 20th century, and the communicative approach in the 1970s replaced the structured-based Audio-lingual method which was popular from the 1950s to 1960s (Richards & Rogers, 2014). Similarly, Chomsky's theory of language learning was a paradigm shift in language teaching as it attacked behaviourism and focused on linguistic competence which had a significant impact on language teaching and learning (Richards & Rogers, 2009). Furthermore, emphasis was given to communicative competence with an ability to communicate effectively and efficiently in a real-life situation in the 1970s with the development of the communicative language teaching method (Larsen-Freeman, 2009). Gradually, a pedagogical school of thought has been developed in ESL/EFL which focuses on the integration of various language skills and forms within a meaningful context and authentic task in the 1980s and 1990s (Ellis, et al., 2019). In other words, instead of teaching English focusing on a particular approach or method discretely, the integration of content and language with meaningful tasks, and the integration of various methods and techniques appropriate in the EFL classrooms has drawn the attention of ELT practitioners and teachers in EFL situations (Pardede, 2020).

English language teaching pedagogy, especially ESL/EFL, is dominated by two differing perspectives, namely a product-oriented perspective and a process-oriented perspective (Smith, 1996). Product-oriented perspective emphasises the product of language learning which focuses on the mastery and accurate use of discrete items including vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. For example, structure-based approaches such as the audio-lingual method and cognitive code method follow this perspective (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The followers of this perspective believe that language learning follows parts to whole, and learning language skills and forms discretely enables them to get mastery over one skill at a time and gradually they develop linguistic competence over the SL/FL. On the other hand, the process-oriented view emphasises the learning process itself, not the final product and focuses on the communicative purposes, not merely the mastery of grammatical structures and rules (Khosiyono, 2021). For example, several methods such as task-based learning, content-based learning, and content and language integrated language learning follow this approach with a focus on learning communicative skills in real-life situations integrating with content and meaningful tasks. Similarly, the integrated approach to language teaching which has theoretical linkage with CLT, task-based and content-based learning also follows process-oriented language teaching (Khosiyono, 2021).

The emergence of the integrated approach in SL/FL learning reflects a shift away from segregated skills instruction towards a more holistic and interconnected integrated approach (Oxford, 2001). The 19th and 20th centuries (up to the end of the 1970s) of SL/FL teaching was dominated by the traditional structure-based methods including GT methods, the Direct method, the Audio-lingual method, Total Physical Response, and the Natural Approach. The structure-based approaches view language learning as a system of learning language elements and rules to combine these elements into a larger unit discretely (Jing, 2006). As a result, students may be good in language skills and forms but fail to communicate in English due to more emphasis on discrete language skills (Pardede, 2015).

With the rise of CLT in the 1970s, the use of the discrete skills approached was criticised by Widdowson (1978) who accentuated the use of language focusing on the specific socio-cultural

contexts where learners get ample opportunities for language use. Other linguists including Corder (1978) and Stren (1993) also supported this idea and suggested learning four language skills interactively. Furthermore, Richards and Schmidt (2002) argued that “integrated approach is the teaching of the language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, in conjunction with each other, as when a lesson involves activities that relate listening and speaking to reading and writing” (p. 262). Thus, the integrative language skills approach leads to the learning of various language skills and forms together. For instance, a good listening skill may support speaking well, and reading skills may support developing writing and speaking skills (Brown, 2001).

The integrated approach aims to develop a more holistic and interconnected understanding of language, rather than treating each skill in isolation. In an integrated language teaching approach, teachers design lessons and activities that require learners to use multiple language skills simultaneously. For example, students may read a text, discuss it with classmates, write a summary, and then present their understanding orally. Similarly, when a teacher gives directions orally in English about a reading text, students understand the given assignment using their listening ability. Then, students might discuss what they understand in their readings, thus they use speaking and listening skills along with some associated skills including pronunciation, grammar, and social usage. Furthermore, to activate their writing skills, students might be asked to analyse reading in written form. This is a concrete example of teaching English through an integrated approach in EFL classrooms. This approach can help learners develop more well-rounded language proficiency and the ability to use language for a wide range of purposes (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). It can be particularly effective in language classrooms because it mirrors the real-world use of language, where reading, writing, listening, and speaking are often intertwined in complex and interactive ways. Furthermore, it promotes a more holistic and practical approach to language learning to enable learners to better use the language in real-life situations (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

The supporters of the integrated skills approach in ELT (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2009; Richards & Rogers, 2014; Ellis et al., 2019; Pardede, 2020) argue that teaching language skills and forms piece by piece in a fragmented way can create a wide gap between classroom learning and learning language in the real-life world. Therefore, they believe that while learning language skills simultaneously in the integrated form, one skill can reinforce another as in the natural process of first language acquisition. In Nepal, English is taught and learned as a foreign language and the goal of teaching English at secondary level is to develop communicative competence of the learners. To enable the learners to communicate in English effectively and appropriately, various methods and approaches have been recommended to follow in EFL classrooms. However, Nepali ELT has been dominated by structure-based methods including GT methods and ALM for a long. Despite the efforts of teachers, curriculum designers and policymakers, some studies (Azis, 2023; Khosiyono, 2021; Simpson, 2011) show that many students have low proficiency in the English language. Similarly, my observation as an English language teacher and teacher educator for two decades and the crossroad conversation with teachers on various occasions reflect that students in rural community schools have low English proficiency in English communicative skills and the discrete skills approach is still in use in their EFL classrooms. Several studies (Jednaszewski, 2022; Khosiyono, 2021; Pardede, 2020; Simpson, 2011; Yimwilai, 2015) in global contexts suggested that teaching English through integrating language

skills can improve learners' English language proficiency. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving secondary-level students' English proficiency in community schools. The study had the following research questions:

- i. How does the use of an integrated skills approach improve English language proficiency of the development of communicative competence in ESL/EFL students?
- ii. How is ESL/EFL students' experience of learning English through an integrated skills approach?

Review of Literature

This section presents the constructivist and sociocultural theory of language teaching as the theoretical base for an integrated approach. Similarly, I have reviewed the literature related to the role of the integrated skills approach in ESL/EFL teachers' and students' perceptions and practices, and its effectiveness in improving English language proficiency in various contexts. These reviews support me in finding the gap for this study.

Social Constructivism and Sociocultural Theory of Language Teaching

An integrated approach to language teaching is not a separate approach to language teaching, rather it is the combination of various approaches and methods such as CLT, task-based language teaching (TBLT), content-based language teaching (TBLT), holistic language learning, project-based learning, and sociocultural perspectives (Richards & Rogers, 2014). The sociocultural perspective may emphasise the importance of social interaction and cultural context in language learning. Learners can develop proficiency in language skills by interacting with the environment in various social contexts rather than simply memorising the structural patterns through drills and grammar-based methods. Vygotsky (1978) argued that social interaction has a key role in children's development which can lead to the internalisation of new knowledge (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). The concept of sociocultural theory is a theoretical underpinning in several studies on second language acquisition (SLA) (Swain, 2000). By using a metaphor, the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) in the theory of learning and development, Vygotsky (1989) viewed that teachers should provide students with an appropriate learning environment and help them understand potential development. Thus, ESL teachers can have an important role in the holistic development of the language of their students in their classrooms through integrated language skills and content instruction.

Highlighting the role of sociocultural perspective and interaction in SL teaching through collaborative dialogue, Swain (2000) suggested that learning collaboratively with emphasis on content and language improves learners' language proficiency. Similarly, Van Lier (2000) proposed an "ecological approach" (p. 245) and said that language and the learners are contextualized with the supportive learning environment, to integrate a variety of standpoints on SLA. Furthermore, cognitive processes and social processes are interconnected in language learning (Lantolf, 2005). According to Vygotsky, learners co-construct knowledge through interaction and dialogue between the people and the culture in which they live (Pathan et al, 2018).

Following the theoretical underpinning of social constructivism and sociocultural theories, ESL/EFL teachers engage students in learning the English language connecting with various social contexts through interaction and dialogue. Unlike the traditional grammar-based approach, students learn language skills together while performing various tasks collaboratively. Thus, by emphasising social interaction in real-life situations focusing on language skills, learners can improve content

knowledge and language proficiency together.

Review of the Previous Studies

Studies in various contexts found that students improved communicative competence along with linguistic and socio-cultural competence while being taught English through an integrated approach in classrooms. For example, in an experimental study, Mekheimer (2011) found that the integrated holistic approach had a positive effect on learners' proficiency in all language skills at Saudi University. Similarly, the qualitative data of the same study also revealed the effectiveness and appropriateness of the integrated approach in improving EFL skills and recommended to use the integrative pedagogy as one of the effective pedagogies in developing all language skills in multilingual contexts. Similarly, Pardede (2015) argued that the integrated-skills approach is a shift from traditional segregated language skills which emphasizes the integration of language skills to develop learners' communicative competence in natural communication. Earlier, Tajzad and Namaghi (2014) observed that despite acceptable proficiency in grammar and vocabulary, many Iranian EFL students had low proficiency in communication skills in English due to the domination of the segregation skills approach in their classrooms. In a mixed method, Martinez Zapata (2019) reported that the integrated skill approach improved the EFL learners' communicative competence. In the same study, he also assessed the learners' perception towards their communicative performance after applying the integrated approach through a survey and found their positive perception of implementing it.

In a survey in Norway, Mahan and Norheim (2021) revealed that content and language-integrated learning (CILL) motivated learners by engaging them in a multilingual classroom environment, and they improved their English. However, some of the content teachers faced challenges in its effective implementation as it required a high level of content and language proficiency in teachers. Similarly, Mahan (2022) reported that the use of various scaffolding strategies under CILL improved content as well as English language proficiency by connecting language with various content areas including science, social science, and geography. However, some studies (Somers & Llinares, 2018) claimed that CLIL places less focus on the content and more emphasis on language perspective.

Regarding teachers' practices of implementing the integrated approach and segregated approaches, Hidayati and Sofyan (2018) reported that 80% of teachers teach English language skills separately in Indonesia. However, the majority of them supported the integrated skills approach. In a different context, Gautam (2019) compared learners' performance in English after implementing integrated and segregated approaches and found that the integrated approach improved their communicative competence and made them able to use language appropriately compared to the segregated approach. Similarly, Ouided and Belouahem (2022) found that the systematic integration of macro skills and micro-skills helped learners improve their speaking abilities. They further suggested that various techniques including role play integrate the four language skills and promote collaborative learning. Although several studies highlighted the effectiveness of the integrated approach, Khosiyono (2021) suggested not to ignore the discrete approach because discrete learning is the basis for the effective implementation of integrated learning.

Studies in various contexts showed that the integrated skills approach had a positive impact on learning English communication skills by motivating learners in child-centred activities including role play, simulation, project-based learning, pair work, and group work. For example, Ekheimer

and Alsosari (2013) reported that EFL students developed their communication skills including oral and written skills after they engaged in peer discussion, video recording, and task-based activities such as role-play, reading and writing journals. In a different context, Beatrice (2014) observed that students engaged in classroom interaction and discussion for meaningful communication when facilitated through integrated language skills and content instruction in EFL classrooms in Kenya. Similarly, Akhmadjanovna et al. (2019) explored that EFL students developed multiple skills at a time and got opportunities for practising authentic language and natural interaction in real-life situations. Furthermore, EFL integrated skills classrooms enhanced the 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills along with English language proficiency (Pardede, 2020). Besides language skills, the integrated skills approach contributed to developing pedagogies supporting the writing process. For example, Jednaszewski (2022) suggested integrating process writing to improve writing skills in EFL classrooms. Azis (2023) reported that students developed linguistic fluency and communicative competence in integrated language skills classrooms.

The English language teaching policy in Nepal has been shifted from traditional grammar-based instruction to a skill-based approach (Acharya, 2024) with a focus on integrated skills instruction for developing proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Curriculum Development Centre, 2020). To improve the learners' English language proficiency in the government-funded schools in Nepal, Adhikari (2010) suggested adopting effective instructional techniques in ESL/EFL classrooms to avoid hindrance to developing language skills instead of following any recommended teaching method or technique. In a similar context, Bhandari (2020) reported that ESL/EFL teachers were motivated towards implementing TBLT in developing skills in ESL/EFL classrooms which integrates various tasks with language skills.

The above literature in global and local contexts reflects the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving learners' English language proficiency. However, many ESL/EFL teachers in Nepal are reluctant to implement an integrated skills approach instead of using segregated skills instruction in their ESL/EFL classrooms. Similarly, studies focusing on teaching English through the integrated approach may be a less researched area in rural Nepal. Thus, this study has bridged this gap of pedagogical dilemma among secondary-level English teachers by investigating the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in ESL/EFL classrooms in Nepali community schools.

Methodology

This section presents the research design employed in this study, the sampling procedure, various tools used to collect the data and the way how I analysed the data.

The study aims to examine the effectiveness of an integrated skills approach in improving secondary-level students' English proficiency. To find out the effectiveness of this pedagogy, I employed a quasi-experimental design as suggested by Ariel et al., (2022) under the post-positivist research paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A pre-test and post-test were administered to the control group, but the treatment was not given to it.

I selected all the 9th graders studying at Janasewa Secondary School (pseudo name) located in Lamjung district purposefully for the study. The 40 students studying at Grade 9 in the academic year 2023-2024 were selected. After obtaining consent from the school, the subject teacher, and the students, I divided them into two groups. To ensure the students' equal level of language ability in each group,

I took the support from the subject teachers. There were 20 students in each group: the experimental group and the control group, who were selected purposively maintaining the equal learning ability of the students. Most of the students were from a homogenous socio-linguistic background.

The language proficiency test based on the Grade Nine English textbook was the main instrument used in this study. I conducted pre-tests for both groups to measure their proficiency in four language skills. The score was recorded and analysed systematically using SPSS 25. As per the research purpose, I taught the experimental group following the integrated skills approach for a month. I prepared a lesson package consisting of the strategies to implement for the experiment groups. For example, the following lesson plan was used to teach describing a place integrating four language skills:

Warm-up: Show pictures or video clips of a place with its surrounding scenes and ask the students to share their thoughts about it.

Reading: Students read the given passage in which the teachers as a facilitator encourage them to read for main ideas, details and descriptive language.

Writing: Concerning the reading passage, assign students writing prompts such as "Describe the place using sensory details (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste).

Listening: Play a recorded device describing a place and ask the students to listen for specific details and take notes.

Speaking: Ask the students to describe their favourite part of the place with their partner. Provide feedback and encourage them to have a discussion.

Integrated activity: Ask them to write a short paragraph describing the place they like most, read it aloud to the partner, listen to their partner's description, and then discuss similarities and differences.

After implementing the integrated skills approach for a month, I conducted the post-test for both groups. The scores of each group in the pre-test and post-test were analysed statistically using SPSS. The students' performance in each skill was evaluated and analysed following the standard evaluation rubric recommended by Cambridge English (2011). The duration of the experiment period was from 1st December 2023 to 29th December 2023. Furthermore, following Huang (2015), I provided the student satisfaction questionnaire in the 5-point Likert Scale to the experiment group at the end of the treatment to survey their satisfaction with the integrated skills approach in the ESL/EFL classroom.

I used statistical data analysis tools such as mean, standard deviation and a paired t-test to analyse the results from the pre-test and post-test of the experimental and control groups. Similarly, the responses of the experiment group in the 5-point Likert Scale were analysed with a weighted mean.

Results

This section presents the analytical results of both groups achieved in the pre-test and post-test. The score difference between the pre-test and post-test has been statistically analysed using a paired sample test. Similarly, the respondents' satisfaction survey was analysed using a Likert scale to explore the participants' perceptions of teaching English through the integrated skill approach.

Table 1*Gender of the Respondents*

	Pre-test		Post-test		Percentage	Cumulative Percent
	Experimental	Control	Experimental	Control		
Male	10	10	10	10	50.00	50.00
Female	10	10	10	10	50.00	100.00
Total	20	20	20	20	100.00	

Table 1 shows the equal distribution of the participants in terms of gender. Both groups consisted of an equal number of participants. The total number of the students was 40.

Effectiveness of Integrated Skills Approach in Improving English Proficiency

I analysed the results obtained by the participants in the pre-test and post-test in four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 2 shows the equal proficiency of both groups in the pre-test in all language skills whereas the proficiency of the experimental groups is better than the control groups in the post-test. This proves the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving the proficiency of ESL/EFL students.

Table 2*Language Skill-wise Comparison*

Tests	Groups	Language Skills	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Pre-test	Control	Listening	20	4.52	0.52
Post-test		Listening	20	4.77	0.40
Pre-test	Experimental	Listening	20	4.47	0.46
Post-test		Listening	20	6.51	0.38
Pre-test	Control	Speaking	20	4.77	0.78
Post-test		Speaking	20	5.14	0.74
Pre-test	Experimental	Speaking	20	4.80	0.66
Post-test		Speaking	20	6.52	0.36
Pre-test	Control	Reading	20	4.80	0.70
Post-test		Reading	20	5.15	0.48
Pre-test	Experimental	Reading	20	4.70	0.46
Post-test		Reading	20	6.30	0.48
Pre-test	Control	Writing	20	4.44	0.69
Post-test		Writing	20	4.94	0.50
Pre-test	Experimental	Writing	20	4.40	0.60
Post-test		Writing	20	6.12	0.69

I employed a paired sample t-test to examine the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving the English language proficiency of secondary-level students. Table 3 shows the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving English language proficiency as there is a mean difference between the experimental and control groups

Table 3*Paired Samples Test on English Score*

Test variables and statistics	Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	S E Mean	95% CI of the Difference		t	df	
				Lower	Upper			
Experimental- Control Group	4.815	2.795	0.625	3.507	6.123	7.704	19	.000

Hypotheses

H_0 : There is no mean difference between the experimental and control groups in improving the English proficiency of secondary-level students.

H_1 : There is a mean difference between the experimental and control groups in improving the English proficiency of secondary-level students.

The paired samples t-test results in table 3 show a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. On average, the experimental group scored 4.815 points higher than the control group on the test variables. The standard deviation of these differences was 2.795, suggesting some variability. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 3.507 to 6.123, indicating that we can be confident that the true difference falls within this range. The t-value of 7.704 with 19 degrees of freedom and a p-value of .000 suggests that this difference is statistically significant, indicating that the experimental and control groups are likely to have different outcomes on the tested variables.

Students' Satisfaction with Teaching English Through the Integrated Skills Approach

To measure students' satisfaction with teaching English through the integrated skills approach, a 5-point Likert scale was used. The collected points stated different information such as 5 being strongly satisfied, 4 means satisfied, 3 being neutral, 2 being dissatisfied, and 1 being strongly satisfied. The students' responses are well presented in Table 4.

Table 4 illustrates the satisfaction with teaching English through the integrated skills approach. It shows that most of the students were satisfied with teaching English through the integrated skills approach with the weighted mean for the independent variable ranging from 3.65 to 4.30. The weighted mean for the statements 'I engage in learning English in various activities', 'Learning through an integrated approach developed confidence in learning English', 'I enjoyed learning English through the integrated skills approach', and 'learning through an integrated skills approach' the statement indicate the students' high-level satisfaction with teaching English through the integrated skills approach in secondary level at community schools.

Table 4*Students' Satisfaction with Teaching English Through the Integrated Skills Approach*

Item	Statements	Ratings					Total Responses	Weighted value	Weighted mean
		SA	A	N	D	SD			
1	The integrated skills approach helped me enjoy learning English.	4	12	3	1	0	20	79	3.95
2	I engaged in learning English in various activities.	8	10	2	0	0	20	86	4.30
3	The integrated skills approach gave me more opportunities to practice all language skills.	4	8	5	3	0	20	73	3.65
4	Learning through an integrated approach developed confidence in learning English.	8	6	4	2	0	20	80	4.00
5	Now, I do not hesitate to speak and take part in various activities in my class.	5	8	4	3	0	20	75	3.75
6	Learning through the integrated approach remained effective compared to the segregated skills approach.	6	8	4	2	0	20	78	3.90
7	The integrated approach developed all language skills along with vocabulary and grammar.	6	8	4	2	0	20	78	3.90
8	I believe an integrated skills approach develops the communication skills of the learners.	4	12	3	1	0	20	79	3.95
9	I enjoyed learning English through the integrated skills approach.	8	10	2	0	0	20	86	4.30
10	I enjoyed engaging in activities connected to real-life situations in classrooms.	4	8	5	3	0	20	73	3.65
11	I have improved my English after learning through an integrated skills approach.	8	6	4	2	0	20	80	4.00
12	I got more time for interaction among pairs and in groups.	4	12	3	1	0	20	79	3.95

Discussion

The result shows that the experimental group performed better in all four language skills in the post-test compared to the control group. However, there was no significant difference between the performance of both groups in the pre-test. This concludes that the integrated skills had a positive impact in improving the secondary-level students' English proficiency in the community schools in rural Nepal. This finding is paralleled with Akhmadjanovna et al. (2019) who explored that EFL students developed proficiency in all language skills at a time after treating them through the integrated skills instructions as they got opportunities for practising authentic language and natural interaction in real-life situations. In the same line, Ouided and Belouahem (2022) revealed that the systematic integration of macro skills and micro enhanced learners' communication skills. However, Khosiyono (2021) argued not to ignore the discrete approach because discrete learning is the basis for the effective implementation of integrated learning. Thus, provided a favourable learning environment, learners can significantly improve their language skills in SL/FL classrooms.

The experimental group was treated with various integrated skills activities including role play, dramatisation, project-based learning, group work and pair work where students got a chance to interact with each other. In other words, focus on collaborative learning fostered their communication skills which improved their English language proficiency. This is similar to the findings of Albino (2017) and Muhsin and Muhsin (2015) who reported that EFL students improved their communication skills including fluency and accuracy after treating them with various task-based activities. In other words, implementing learner-centred activities in ESL/EFL classrooms enhances learners' communicative competence.

The result of a paired t-test reflects the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving secondary-level students' English proficiency as the students improved their language significantly after the intervention. The study also found that EFL students enhanced their interpersonal communication skills, collaborative learning and creativity after implementing the integrated skills approach. For example, Pardede (2020) investigated that EFL integrated skills classroom not only develops English language proficiency but also cultivates their 4Cs (communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking) which are the major 21st-century skills. Similarly, Azis (2023) revealed that students improved linguistic fluency along with communicative competence in integrated language skills classrooms. Thus, the integrated skills approach has become instrumental in improving the 21st-century skills of learners.

Regarding the students' satisfaction survey, most of them enjoyed learning English through the integrated skills approach because it developed their confidence in learning and engaged them in practising English in real-life situations. Moreover, students had adequate time for discussion and interaction in groups and pairs as it fostered student-centred learning. These findings align with Mahan (2022) who explained that the use of a variety of scaffolding strategies under an integrated approach, especially language and content-integrated learning improved content as well as English language proficiency by connecting language with various content areas including science, social science, and geography. However, there may be challenges to implementing this approach effectively in many schools. For example, Akmal et al (2020) and Warman and Mardiyah (2019) pointed out some challenges including students having poor English vocabulary and communicative skills and the lack

of availability of teachers with high pedagogical knowledge and strategies in EFL contexts. It proves that an appropriate learning environment, needful teachers' support and a good balance between teacher talking time and student talking time can improve learners' English language proficiency.

Conclusion

Although several approaches have come and gone in EFL, no approach may be perfect in all contexts because most of them are situational. I assumed that teaching English by integrating various language skills simultaneously could give better outcomes than treating a single skill at a time. Similarly, the integration of some approaches might enhance SL/FL proficiency, instead of focusing on just one. Based on the results of both the pre-test and the post-test, and the respondents' remarks on the Likert Scale, it has been proved that teaching through the integrated skills approach brought better results in all language skills of the secondary level students in community schools in rural Nepal. In other words, the study proved the effectiveness of the integrated skills approach in improving secondary-level students' English proficiency. Thus, the study can imply the use of the integrated skills approach in EFL contexts. Furthermore, English language teachers, educators, curriculum designers and planners can apply these findings to reshape the ELT pedagogy following an integrated approach at the secondary level.

The findings of the study show that the integrated skills approach improved learners' English language proficiency along with communication skills, holistic learning experiences and cognitive development. Thus, by implementing the integrated skills approach, teachers can create a dynamic and more real-life learning environment that better prepares students for real-world communication. Similarly, it can bring a pedagogical shift in ELT policy from a traditional structured-based approach to skills integrated approach. Likewise, this approach can enhance not only language skills but also critical thinking skills, collaborative learning and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, implementing integrated language skills in SL/FL classrooms empowers teachers and learners to be proficient in the English language.

Acknowledgment

This paper is based on my PhD Seminar Paper under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Bal Mukunda Bhandari. I extend my sincere gratitude for his inspiration, encouragement and support to develop the seminar paper and this manuscript.

References

- Acharya, R. (2024). English language education and assessment policy In Nepal. *English Language Education*.
- Albino, G. (2017). Improving speaking fluency in a task-based language teaching approach: The case of EFL learners at PUNIV-Cazenga. *SAGE Open*, 7(2), 1-11.
- Ariel, B., Bland, M., & Sutherland, A. (2022). *Experimental designs*. Sage.
- Azis, M. A. (2023). Assessing the impact of integrated skill teaching on EFL learners' motivation and engagement. *Tomorrow's Education Journal*, 1(2), 11-18. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=ASSESSING+THE+
- Adhikari, B. R. (2010). Teaching speaking in the Nepalese context: Problems and ways of overcoming them. *Journal of NELTA*, 15(1-2), 1-9.
- Beatrice, M.N. (2014). integrated approach in teaching English language: The practice in Kenya.

International Journal of Education and Research, 2(4), 253-264.

- Bhandari, L.P. (2020). Teaching writing through task-based instruction: Exploring English teachers' experiences. *International Journal of Language and Literacy*, 2(4). <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v2i4.466>
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles. An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed). Pearson Education.
- Corder, S. P. (1978). Language-learner language. In J. C. Richards (Ed.), *Understanding second and foreign language learning* (pp. 71-92). Newbury House.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Ellis, R., Skehan, P., Li, S., Shintani, N., & Lambert, C. (2019). *Task-based language teaching: Theory and practice* (Cambridge Applied Linguistics). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108643689>
- Ekheimer, M.A. & Alsosari, H.S. (2013). Evaluating an integrated EFL teaching methodology in Saudi universities: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4(6), 1264-1276. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.4.6.1264-1276>
- Gautam, P. (2019). Integrated and segregated teaching of language skills: An exploration. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 1(1-2), 100-107.
- Huang, D. (2015). A Study on the application of task-based language teaching method in a comprehensive English class in China. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 7(1), 118-127. <http://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0701.13>
- Hidayati, I. N., & Sofyan, D. (2018). Integration or segregation? (Teachers' perception on the use of whole language method). *Journal of English Language Studies*, 3(2), 203-217.
- Jednaszewski, P. (2022). Integrated writing pedagogy in ELF classroom. *Fides, Ratio et Patria. Studia Toruńskie*, 1(1), 273-289. <https://doi.org/10.56583/frp.2261>
- Jing, W.U. (2006). Integrating skills for teaching EFL-Activity design for the communicative classroom. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 3(12).
- Khosiyono, B. H. C. (2021). Discrete and integrated approach and the implications on language teaching learning management. *Journal of English Studies*, 4(1), 19-29. <https://doi.org/10.24176/pro.v4i1.5755>
- Lantolf, J. P. (2011). The sociocultural approach to second language acquisition: Sociocultural theory, second language acquisition, and artificial L2 development. In *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp. 24-47). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444809990048>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2009). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Mahan, K. R., & Norheim, H. (2021). 'Something new and different': student perceptions of content and language integrated learning. *ELT Journal*, 75(1), 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ctaa057>
- Mahan, K. R. (2022) The comprehending teacher: scaffolding in content and language integrated learning

- (CLIL), *The Language Learning Journal*, 50 (1), 74-88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736>.
- Martínez Zapata, T. E. (2019). *The integrated skills approach and the communicative competence in EFL students* (Master's thesis, Universidad Técnica de Ambato. Dirección de Posgrado).
- Mekheimer, M. (2011). Effectiveness of an integrated, holistic pedagogy of EFL skills in college students. *The Educational Research Journal*, 25(100), 41-74.
- Muhsin, M., & Muhsin, M. A. (2015). Using task-based approach in improving the students' speaking accuracy and fluency. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 4(3), 181-190.
- Ouided, A. R. A. B., & Belouahem, R. (2022). Integrated-skills and segregated-skills approach in the teaching of speaking for EFL learners. *Human Sciences Journal*, 33(4), 61-79.
- Pardede, P. (2015). EFL theory and practice: Voice of EED UKI. In *Proceeding of EED Collegiate Forum* (Vol. 2018).
- Pardede, P. (2020). Integrating the 4Cs into EFL integrated skills learning. *Journal of English Teaching*, <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v6i1.190>
- Pathan H, Memon R.A., Memon S, Khoso A.R., Bux, I. (2018). A critical review of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory in second language acquisition. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(4):232. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v8n4p232>
- Piaget, J. (1971). The theory of stages in cognitive development.
- Richards, J.C. & Rogers, T.S. (2009). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J.C. and Schmidt, R. (2002). Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics (3rd Ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Simpson, J. (2011). *Integrating project-based learning in an English language tourism classroom in a Thai university*. [Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University].
- Smith, D. B. (1996). Teacher decision making in the adult ESL classroom. In Freeman, D.A. & Richards, J.C. (Eds). *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching*. (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Somers, T. and A. Llinares. 2018. 'Students' motivation for content and language integrated learning and the role of programme intensity'. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050>.
- Stern, H. H. (1992). Issues and options in language teaching. Oxford University Press.
- Swain, M. (2000). The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Tajzad, M. & Namaghi, S. A. O. (2014). Exploring EFL learners' perceptions of integrated skills approach: A grounded theory. *English Language Teaching*, 7(11), 92-98.
- Van Lier, L. (2000). From input to affordance: Social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 245-259). Oxford University Press
- Vygotsky LS. 1978. *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.

- Vygotsky, L., & Cole, M. (2018). Lev Vygotsky: Learning and social constructivism. *Learning theories for early years practice*, 66, 58.
- Warman, J.S. & Mardiyah, F. (2019). The implementation and effectiveness of integrated approaches in improving English basic skills for beginners. *JEELL* 6(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.32682/jeell.v6i1.1036>
- Widdowson, H.G. (1978). *Teaching language as communication*. Oxford University Press.
- Yimwilai, S. (2015). An integrated approach to teaching literature in an EFL classroom. *English Language Teaching*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n2p14>

Mr. Binod Neupane is a PhD Scholar in English Education at Tribhuvan University. He passed MPhil in Education from Nepal Open University. He has been teaching English at schools and universities for two decades. He has published about a dozen research articles in various national and international peer-reviewed indexed journals and led the editorial boards of peer-reviewed journals. His fields of specialization are language policy and integrated approach.